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# From Insurgency to Stability

Volume II: Insights from  
Selected Case Studies

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Prepared for the Office of the Secretary of Defense

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## Preface

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This monograph is the second of two volumes that examine how insurgencies transition from a high level of violence to a more stable situation. It examines a number of case studies to determine the key factors necessary for a successful transition. The monograph should be of interest to the U.S. Department of Defense, other agencies of the U.S. government, as well as government and nongovernmental organizations in other countries that are concerned with insurgency and counterinsurgency.

This research was sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Defense Research Institute, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense Intelligence Community.

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## Summary

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The Office of the Secretary of Defense asked RAND to examine how conflicts transition from intensive counterinsurgency (where the level of violence might be very high) toward stability. The ultimate goal of the research was to identify good—and bad—practices that the United States military in particular, and the U.S. government in general, can implement in the insurgencies that it faces today as well as in possible future interventions.

The research was divided into two phases. The first phase, which took place from March to September 2009, examined a series of case studies of past and ongoing insurgencies to identify the key policy decisions, techniques, and technologies that helped facilitate the transition to a more stable situation. This document is the result of that research. After the second phase of the research had been completed, it was decided that the case studies contained in this document would be presented as Volume II.

The other phase of the research, *From Insurgency to Stability*, Volume I: *Key Capabilities and Practices*, MG-1111/1, OSD, is an examination of the U.S. capabilities required to successfully transition an insurgency toward stability. That portion of the research focused on the Department of Defense but included insights on other elements of the U.S. government that are also involved in the transition process.

## The Transition from Counterinsurgency to Stability

Insurgencies tend to last a considerable amount of time. The post–World War II average has been roughly 12 years; some insurgencies last much longer than that.<sup>1</sup> The counterinsurgency (COIN) effort may have been conducted exclusively by the threatened nation, or that country may have received various levels of assistance from third-party nations such as the United States. For the indigenous government, the COIN campaign can end in success, which involves a transition to complete peace or some less intensive, perhaps police-led, stability operation. Ideally, the transition away from COIN will result in a stable, lasting peace. If the government does not achieve a clear-cut win against the insurgents, the transition could include some type of accommodation with the insurgents, for example, a political compromise to allow more autonomy to a particular region or ethnic or religious group.

If, on the other hand, the government fails to defeat the insurgents, there will not be a transition period. In that case, the insurgents will have achieved all or a major portion of their goals. There are also cases where the government threatened by an insurgency initially thought it had reached the transition phase, only to see the situation worsen. Instead of moving forward toward a more stable situation (the goal of transition) the government was forced to revert to COIN. Such “false transitions” are often the result of a government’s incorrectly assessing the strength of the insurgents or reverting to bad internal policies that cause the insurgency to reignite.

There is no universally accepted criterion for how, when, and under what circumstances an insurgency can be said to have entered a transition phase toward stability. For purposes of this document, we define a COIN transition as having started when the following are taking place:

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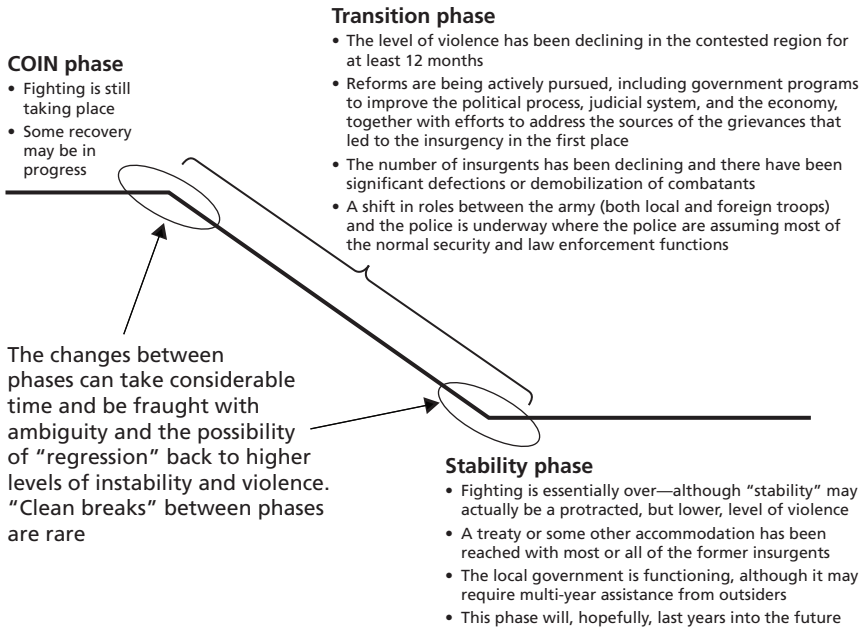
<sup>1</sup> David C. Gompert, John Gordon, Adam Grissom, David R. Frelinger, Seth G. Jones, Martin C. Libicki, Edward O’Connell, Brooke Stearns Lawson, and Robert E. Hunter, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency, Final Report*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-595/2-OSD, 2008, pp. 373–396; Ben Connable and Martin Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-965-MCIA, 2010, pp. 27–29.

- The level of violence has been declining in the contested region for at least 12 to 24 months. The number of insurgents and insurgent attacks has been declining and there have been significant defections or demobilization of combatants.
- Reforms are being pursued. These include government programs to improve the political process, establish an impartial and credible judicial system, reduce corruption, invigorate the economy, address religious or cultural discrimination, or remove other sources of dissatisfaction that resulted in part of the population siding with the insurgents.
- The population interacts with and supports the security forces and government representatives and assistance workers.
- The police forces of the government combating the insurgency are taking over responsibility for internal security from indigenous (and any foreign) military forces.

How the indicators listed above are assessed or measured can be difficult. In many ways, each insurgency is unique, even if the underlying motivation of the insurgents may be based on a universalistic ideology such as Communism or Islamism. The aim of post-COIN operations is to ensure that these conditions are followed by lasting peace and stability rather than a relapse into violence. The COIN transition can be said to be complete when the insurgency has been reduced to a level at which the state is able to provide security to the population and perform its basic functions. Figure S.1 depicts the concept of COIN transition.

During the transition from COIN, which tends to have a large military-security component, to less violent stability operations, a change normally occurs in the nature of support provided by third-party nations. In this transition period, there will probably be significant changes in the relationship between various U.S. government agencies that have been assisting the threatened nation. For example, the role of the Defense Department will probably decline while that of other agencies, such as the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will increase.

**Figure S.1**  
**Moving from COIN Toward Stability**



For each of the cases included in this study, we review the cause and key players in the insurgency. We emphasize what the threatened government (often referred to as “the incumbent” because that term is frequently used in COIN literature) did right—or wrong—to bring the insurgency to an end and its actions in transitioning from COIN to a more stable situation. As will be seen, in some of the cases we examined the transition process was successful; in others, it was not.

## The Case Studies

In selecting the cases, RAND decided to include situations where the United States was (or still is) deeply involved, as well as insurgencies where there was little or no American participation. Some of the cases are large insurgencies; others are small. Most are still under way to one

extent or another, while in some cases the insurgency has been resolved and a successful transition has taken place. As mentioned above, we purposely did not choose “success stories” only, since we felt that important lessons could be learned from insurgencies where the COIN transition has not yet been successful. Below, we list the cases included in the study. They are presented in generally chronological order, from oldest to newest in terms of when they started.

**The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines.** This is a long-running (since the 1940s) effort to suppress the New People’s Army that has seen several “false transitions”: The Philippine government thought the insurgents were defeated, but policy errors and other factors led to a reignition of the insurgency. There has been some American involvement in the Philippines in the form of assistance to the Philippine government. Today, despite some serious challenges, the Philippine government is probably better positioned to transition from COIN to stability than at any point in the past 30 years.

**Colombia from the 1960s to 2009.** In one of the longest-lasting insurgencies in the world, it appeared at times that the Colombian government would be defeated by the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Today, however, the Colombian government is clearly in the transition phase in many parts of the country that were controlled by the FARC until a few years ago. As with the Philippines, the United States has provided support and assistance to the local government.

**El Salvador from 1980 to 1992.** This was a relatively small insurgency that has ended. Again, the United States provided assistance to the local government. Although the formal insurgency is over, the mismanagement of the “end game” (i.e., the transition phase) resulted in a major spike in lawlessness in El Salvador; there are important lessons to be learned from this case.

**Mali from 1990 to 2007.** This former French colony was threatened by an insurgency in the northern part of the country by a portion of an ethnic minority. Despite a few false starts, this insurgency is also now generally in a transition phase. This is a case with little American involvement.

**Iraq's Anbar Province from 2005 to 2008.** This is a large insurgency with considerable American involvement. Between 2006 and 2008, the difficult and dangerous situation in Anbar Province clearly transitioned from COIN to a more stable situation.

**Afghanistan from 2001 to the present.** At the time of this writing, a major insurgency is still under way in Afghanistan, and it has not reached the transition stage. This case was included because of Afghanistan's great importance to the United States. Important lessons can be learned from this case because the United States initially thought it was going directly from a successful regime-toppling invasion to stability, only to see a serious insurgency develop that has not yet transitioned toward stability.

## Conclusions from the Case Studies

Volume I of the project focused primarily on identifying capability gaps and possible policy changes on the part of the United States. This volume provides insights from the case studies that helped guide the determination of what capabilities are required to ensure a successful transition from COIN to stability. It should be noted that although there are some similarities in the cases, there are also important differences. It is therefore difficult to assess whether a "more military" or more "economic/political" approach was the most significant reason why a particular insurgency started to transition toward stability. It is, however, safe to say that in each case we examined there was a need for an approach that balanced security needs with making important reforms in other areas. Important, overarching insights from this phase of the work include the following:

1. *Successfully transitioning from COIN to relative stability requires an interagency approach.* Counterinsurgency requires security measures to protect the population and maintain pressure on the insurgents as well as simultaneous efforts to reform political, economic, and other sources of real or perceived grievance that the insurgents are capitalizing on. Only by addressing

both problems will the legitimacy of the local government be enhanced in the eyes of its people. Almost by definition, this requires an interagency approach. COIN is not exclusively the responsibility of security forces (police, military, and intelligence). An explicit effort to coordinate the security and civil aspects of COIN, starting at a very high level of government, is a strong indicator that there will be a successful transition toward stability. Important insights on interagency approaches were derived from the Philippine and Colombian case studies, both of which we describe in detail in this volume.

2. *It is important to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants in the insurgency, including what issues are driving a portion of the population into the hands of the insurgents.* Unless and until this is accomplished, moving toward a successful transition period is virtually impossible. Only when those involved in the counterinsurgent effort (the local government as well as that of any external participants such as the United States) become well versed in the issues that the insurgency is attempting to exploit, the key personalities that are involved, and the grievances and needs of the local population, will meaningful efforts at reform become possible. The longer the process of learning the nature of the insurgency takes, the greater the risk that support for the insurgents will increase, possibly to unmanageable levels.
3. *There is a clear need to manage the demobilization of the various militia groups, which may number many thousands of armed men.* Militia groups (either pro-insurgent or pro-government) almost always arise during an insurgency. Successful transitions include explicit efforts to “find a home” for former militia members by integrating some of them into the police and/or military of the country or providing job opportunities for them. If this is not managed properly, the insurgency could either restart (a fear in Anbar Province today) or the presence of large numbers of unemployed, armed, former militia members could lead to a rise in criminal violence (as in El Salvador).
4. *Gaining some degree of cooperation from nearby nations to end or minimize support for the insurgents is essential.* Most studies



of insurgencies acknowledge the key role of nearby countries. Combating the insurgency is a much more difficult proposition when insurgent groups can obtain sanctuary and support from neighboring countries. Therefore, the cooperation of nearby states is essential. In some cases, this could be as simple as their neutrality (including denial of sanctuary for the insurgents); in other cases, overt assistance from nearby nations might be required, such as helping to monitor border areas, sharing the burden of dealing with refugees, or providing economic assistance to the neighbor that is in the process of transitioning from an insurgency toward stability.

5. *There must be sufficient resources and time for meaningful transition efforts.* Even when an insurgency enters the transition phase, it could still be years before the country reaches a sustainable degree of stability. During this possibly years-long transition phase, there will be a need to continue to address the issues that contributed to the insurgency in the first place. Economic and political reforms, job creation, and reforming the security forces, for example, are resource- and time-consuming undertakings. If sufficient resources to complete the key goals of the transition phase are not available, the insurgency could restart, albeit in a somewhat modified form. To a large extent, this is the problem the Philippine government has faced since the 1940s. Periodically, the communist insurgents have apparently been “defeated,” but inadequate follow-through in the transition phase allowed dissatisfaction among elements of the population to reemerge and thus reinvigorate the insurgency.

## **Insights and Implications for U.S. Policy in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Beyond**

The issues raised above can apply to the host nation, other countries (such as the United States or the United Kingdom) that are attempting to assist the host nation’s transition effort, or both. There are,

however, some insights derived from the cases that are of particular importance to “external participants” such as the United States. Ideally, a counterinsurgency effort—and the post-COIN transition period—should be overwhelmingly in the control of the host nation that is threatened by the insurgency. Although other countries can offer important help, ultimately it is the effectiveness and legitimacy of their own governments that will cause the local population either to side with that government or with the insurgents. In situations where the host nation’s government and its security forces are so weak that considerable direct involvement by foreign forces is needed, the goal should be to strengthen the COIN capacity of the host nation as rapidly as possible and pass most of the effort to them as soon as they are capable of performing adequately.

That said, some issues apply primarily to the “outside” parties, such as the United States. Several of them are highlighted below.

### **Providing Intelligence Support to the Host Nation**

In several of the cases, intelligence support to the host nation was a key capability provided by outside, external powers. In the broadest terms, modes of intelligence collection fall into two categories. Technical collection includes the interception of electronic communications, telemetry from missile tests, and the electromagnetic emanations from military equipment, such as radar transmitters (known collectively as signals intelligence, or SIGINT), and the gathering of photographic imagery. Human intelligence collection (HUMINT) is in essence the use of agents by an intelligence organization to collect information. As demonstrated in the cases of El Salvador, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia the United States provided important technical intelligence to the host nation government and its security forces, intelligence that often gave them significant advantages over the insurgents. This can, of course, help improve the security situation, thus facilitating the transition from COIN to a more stable, less violent situation.

In general terms, HUMINT should be an area where the host nation’s security forces have the advantage over foreign forces, at least in theory. After all, the incumbent’s security forces are operating among their own people, and it seems unlikely that foreign forces would ever

be able to develop the same degree of knowledge and detailed cultural insights as the local forces. That said, it is certainly the case that in many instances the incumbent power badly misreads the nature, scope, and motivations of armed opposition groups. Typically, insurgents (particularly in the early stages of a given conflict) are dismissed as mere “bandits,” “criminals,” or “terrorists.” At a political level, this may make good sense, since labeling the armed opposition as something other than criminal may provide them with a measure of legitimacy.<sup>2</sup> But such labeling is seldom the result of a prudent political calculation. More often, it reflects a profound lack of understanding of the insurgent challenge. Indeed, the emergence of a full-blown insurgency is in part a product of the incumbent’s inability and unwillingness to understand and take appropriate steps to thwart its growth and development.<sup>3</sup> This appears to have been the case in Iraq in 2003–2004, when the incumbent regime (effectively the United States, in this instance) branded the insurgents as mere malcontents and Baathist “dead-enders.”<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically, some of the most threatened regimes are often in a state of self-denial. Acknowledging the full scope of an insurgent challenge would be a tacit (or perhaps even explicit) acknowledgment that the regime in question is facing a profound crisis that it was unable or unwilling to prevent and for which it may be deemed responsible. Such an admission could further erode whatever little standing and legitimacy the incumbent regime possesses.

All of this suggests that threatened “host nations” may not always be the most competent or reliable intelligence partners. The U.S. government is likely to be tempted to rely heavily on intelligence provided by the so-called “liaison services” of threatened regimes. Politically,

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this point, see Philip Deery, “The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948–52,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2003, pp. 231–247.

<sup>3</sup> For more on thwarting “proto-insurgencies,” see Daniel Byman, *Understanding Proto-Insurgencies*, *RAND Counterinsurgency Study–Paper 3*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-178-OSD, 2007, particularly pp. 21–30.

<sup>4</sup> See for example remarks delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Veterans of Foreign Wars, San Antonio, Tex., Monday, August 25, 2003.

such reliance can help reinforce the notion that the threatened government is a full counterinsurgency partner; in economic terms, depending on the host nation for intelligence on the insurgency is likely to be far cheaper than mounting “unilateral” U.S. collection operations. But for the reasons suggested above, such dependency can have potentially dangerous consequences for U.S. policy. Of course, the United States can ill afford to ignore intelligence provided by a supported government. However, such intelligence (as with any intelligence provided by another government) must be evaluated and considered along with other sources of information, including U.S. sources.

### **Managing Militias and Government Forces Toward the End Game**

American policymakers need to be alert to the challenges surrounding the use of militia forces. Self-defense units “clearly need support, or else the guerrillas will overwhelm them one village at a time,” as Anthony James Jones concludes.<sup>5</sup> But in many instances, host nations underequip, undertrain, and underpay—and fail to protect—auxiliary forces such as militia groups. The incumbent government is often reluctant to provide modern arms to villagers, fearing that such weapons will “bleed out” and find their way into insurgent hands. Conventional military forces typically view self-defense militia forces with disdain and as a distraction from the “real business” of fighting guerrillas. Conventional forces also tend to regard militias as potential “little soldiers” and as low-cost light infantry who should be deployed to fight insurgents rather than guard villages.<sup>6</sup> Recognizing their potential utility as a counterinsurgency instrument, insurgents will typically make major efforts to infiltrate and otherwise disrupt auxiliary units. Insurgents are often successful in this regard, and this success serves to reinforce suspicions that surrogate forces are unreliable.

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony James Jones, *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> William Rosenau, “Low-Cost Trigger Pullers”: *The Politics of Policing in the Context of Contemporary “State Building” and Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, WR-620-USCA, October 2008, pp. 9–13.

In addition to understanding how self-defense forces can be neglected and misused by the host nation, U.S. policymakers need to ask three questions before beginning any program of support to militias and home guards: (1) How will these forces contribute to broader political and military objectives? (2) How will they be organized, trained, equipped, and resourced, and by whom? (3) As the insurgency starts to transition toward stability, what is the “end game” plan for militia groups (i.e. will they be integrated into the host nation’s police and military, will they be “paid off” with money or jobs, etc). The answers to these questions are not usually self-evident early in an insurgency. Local conditions, culture, resources, and the nature of the insurgency should play a major part in determining the roles, missions, and functions of the auxiliaries. These factors should also shape the program for raising, training, and sustaining these forces. Additionally, U.S. policymakers need to consider how such forces might upset local power balances in ways that undercut wider counterinsurgency objectives. For example, “[i]n states whose societies are divided by ethnic, racial, tribal or confessional strife, the use of surrogates from one particular group . . . can exacerbate internal tensions and encourage civil war,” as Hughes and Tripodi have observed.<sup>7</sup> Iraq and Afghanistan clearly fit these criteria, so any program of support to auxiliary forces in those countries should be carefully crafted to avoid aggravating communal tensions and grievances.

Finally, the issue of the role of government forces after the conflict requires careful consideration, ideally during early stages of transition planning and execution. As cases such as El Salvador demonstrate, the failure to properly plan and implement disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of government forces (including local self-defense units) can undercut the prospects for long-term peace and security. Given the prominent role played by auxiliaries in many counterinsurgency campaigns, it is essential that these forces be included in any comprehensive program of DDR.

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<sup>7</sup> Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi, “Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2009, p. 25.

**Providing the Resources and Management Structure for What Might Be a Protracted Transition Phase**

It was noted in all of the cases that had either successfully transitioned from COIN to stability (El Salvador) or were apparently well along in that process (Colombia, Iraq, the Philippines) that the transition period lasted years. The local government's resources might be greatly strained following a multiyear COIN effort. For the transition period to be truly successful, economic, political, and other reforms will usually need to be carried through to completion. A considerable portion of these resources may have to come from the external power(s) that are assisting the incumbent government during the COIN phase.

Not only is the sheer level of resources an issue, the management of their delivery is also critical for the external power. As COIN transitions toward stability, there will probably be a change in the roles and responsibility between, for example, the Department of Defense and the Department of State. This highlights the reality that other agencies of the U.S. government, which will probably assume a leading role from the Department of Defense (DoD) as the insurgency transitions toward stability, must have sufficient financial resources and enough personnel (either on staff as government employees and/or contractors) to accommodate what might be a multiyear effort to complete the transition process.



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## Abbreviations

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ADC	May 23, 2006 Democratic Alliance for Change
AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghanistan National Security Forces
AOG	all of government
APPF	Afghan Public Protection Force
AQI	al Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQP	Arabian Peninsula
ARENA	Alianza Republicana Nacionalista
ARLA	Azawad Liberation Revolutionary Army
ATNM	Niger-Mali Tuareg Alliance
AUC	United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia
BBFI	Bantay Bayan Foundation Incorporated
BDS	Barangay Defense System
CAFGU	Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit

CARHRIHL	Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law
CCAI	Center for Coordinated Integrated Action
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program
CF	coalition forces
CHCD	clear, hold, consolidate, develop
CIDENAL	Colombian Higher War College National Security Course
CIVAC	Civic Actions in Insurgency Affected Areas
CMO	civilian military operation
CODEM	ESAF training and doctrine command
COIN	counterinsurgency
COPAZ	National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace
CPP	Communist Party of the Philippines
CVO	Civilian Volunteer Organization
DDR	disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
ELN	National Liberation Army
ENCAPS	engineering civic action programs
EPIC	Economic and Political Intelligence Cell
ESAF	armed forces of El Salvador
EU	European Union
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FFT	Fact Finding Team

FIAA	Arab Islamic Front of Azawad
FMLN	Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
FPLA	Popular Liberation Front of Azawad
FTO	foreign terrorist organization
FY	fiscal year
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
IA	Iraqi Army
IED	improvised explosive device
ILPS	International League of People Solidarity
IMEF	First Marine Expeditionary Force
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISF	Iraqi Security Forces
JPEC	Joint Prosecution and Exploitation Center
KBP	Kalayaan Barangay Projects
LE	law enforcement
LPSA	Local Peace and Security Assembly
MEDCAPS	medical civic action programs
MiTT	Military Transition Team
MNF-W	Multi-National Force–West
MNJ	Niger Movement for Justice
MPA	Popular Movement for Azawad
MPLA	Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

MTA	Military Technical Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDF	National Democratic Front
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NISP	Philippine National Internal Security Plan
NPA	New People's Army
NRP	National Reconstruction Plan
OIE	State Intelligence Office (El Salvador)
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
ONUSAL	UN Observer Mission in El Salvador
OPATT	U.S. Brigade Operational Planning and Assistance Training Teams
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
PAT	Auxiliary Transitory Police
PCS	Communist Party of El Salvador
PCSD	Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security
PHIC	Philippine Human Rights Information Center
PKP	Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas
PN	National Police
PNC	National Civilian Police
PNP	Philippine National Police
POC	Peace and Order Council
PRT	provincial reconstruction team
PSI	Pan-Sahel Initiative

RP	Republic of the Philippines
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
SHA	Strategy of Holistic Approach
SO	stability operations
SOT	Special Operations Team
SYP	Sandata Yunit Proganda
TransCo	National Transmission Corporation
TSCTP	Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership
TSE	Supreme Electoral Tribunal
UNAMA	UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps



# Introduction

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## Background

The Office of the Secretary of Defense asked RAND to examine how conflicts transition from intensive counterinsurgency (where the level of violence might be very high) toward stability. The ultimate goal of the research was to identify good—and bad—practices that the U.S. military, in particular, and the U.S. government, in general, can implement in the insurgencies that it faces today as well as possible future interventions.

The research was divided into two phases. The first phase, from March to September 2009, was a series of case studies of past and still-ongoing insurgencies to identify key policy decisions, techniques, and possibly technologies that helped facilitate the transition to a more stable situation. This volume is the result of that research.

The second phase of the research concentrated on identifying current capability gaps and possible policy changes within the Department of Defense, and to a lesser extent the broader U.S. government, that should be addressed in order for the United States to be better able to transition an insurgency toward stability. The second phase of the research drew on the insights derived from the initial case studies, together with other RAND research on insurgencies.

After the second phase of the research had been completed, it was decided that the case studies contained in this document would be presented as Volume II, while the insights gained from the second phase would be presented in Volume I. The two volumes are designed to complement each other.



## The Transition from Counterinsurgency to Stability

Insurgencies tend to last a considerable amount of time. The post-World War II average has been roughly 12 years; some insurgencies last much longer than that.<sup>1</sup> The counterinsurgency (COIN) effort may have been conducted exclusively by the threatened nation, or that country may have received various levels of assistance from third-party nations, such as the United States. For the indigenous government, the COIN campaign may end in success, involving a transition to a less intensive, perhaps police-led, operation—resulting, ideally, in a stable, lasting peace. If the government does not achieve a clear-cut win against the insurgents, the transition could include some type of accommodation with the insurgents—for example, a political compromise to allow more autonomy to a particular region or ethnic/religious group.

If, on the other hand, the government fails to defeat the insurgents, there will not be a transition period. In that case, the insurgents will have achieved all or a major portion of their goals. There are also cases in which the government threatened by an insurgency initially thought it had reached the transition phase, only to see the situation worsen. Instead of moving forward toward a more stable situation (the goal of transition), the government is forced to revert to COIN. Such “false transitions” often result when a government incorrectly assesses the strength of the insurgents and/or reverts to bad internal policies, causing the insurgency to reignite.

There is no universally accepted criterion for how, when, and under what circumstances an insurgency can be said to have entered a transition phase toward stability. For purposes of this document, we define a *COIN transition* as having started when the following are taking place:

- The level of violence between the government and the insurgents has been declining in the contested region over the previous 12 to 24 months. The number of insurgents and insurgent attacks

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<sup>1</sup> Gompert et al., *War by Other Means*, pp. 373–396; Ben Connable and Martin Libicki, *How Insurgencies End*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-965-MCIA, 2010, pp. 27–29.

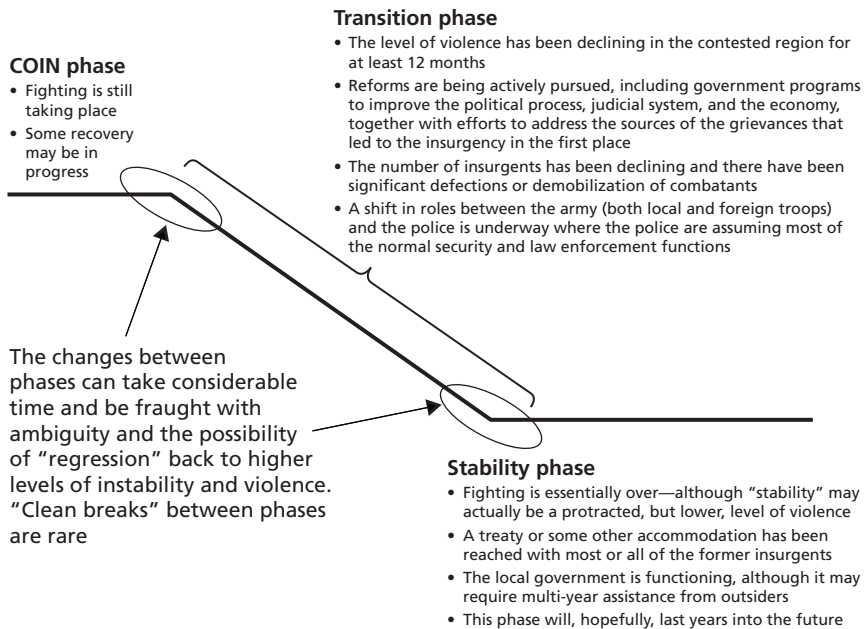
has been declining and there have been significant defections or demobilization of combatants.

- Reforms are being pursued. These include government programs to improve the political process, establish an impartial and credible judicial system, reduce corruption, invigorate the economy, address religious or cultural discrimination, or remove other sources of dissatisfaction that resulted in part of the population siding with the insurgents.
- The population interacts with and supports the security forces and government representatives and assistance workers.
- The police forces of the government combating the insurgency are taking over responsibility for internal security from indigenous (and any foreign) military forces.

How the indicators listed above are assessed or measured can be difficult. In many ways each insurgency is unique, even if the underlying motivation of the insurgents may be based on a universalistic ideology, such as Communism or Islamism. The aim of post-COIN operations is to ensure that these conditions are followed by lasting peace and stability rather than a relapse into violence. The COIN transition can be said to be complete when the insurgency has been reduced to a level where the state is able to provide security to the population and perform its basic functions. Figure 1.1 depicts the concept of COIN transition.

During the transition from COIN, which tends to have a large military-security component, to less violent stability operations, a change normally occurs in the nature of support provided by third-party nations. In this transition period, there will probably be significant changes in the relationship between various U.S. government agencies that have been assisting the threatened nation. For example, during the transition period, the role of the Defense Department will probably decline while that of other agencies, such as the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), will increase.

**Figure 1.1**  
**Moving from COIN Toward Stability**



## The Case Studies

In selecting the cases, RAND decided to include both situations in which the United States was (or still is) deeply involved and insurgencies in which there was little or no American participation. Some of the cases are large insurgencies; others are small. Most are still under way to one extent or another, although in some cases the insurgency has been resolved and a successful transition has taken place. As mentioned above, all the cases are “success stories,” since we felt that important lessons could be learned from insurgencies where the efforts to transition from COIN have not yet been successful. Below, we list the cases included in the study, from the oldest start point to the newest.

**The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines.** This is a long-running (since the 1940s) effort to suppress the New People’s Army that has seen several “false transitions”: The Philippine government

thought the insurgents were defeated, but policy errors and other factors led to a reignition of the insurgency. There has been some American involvement in the Philippines in the form of assistance to the Philippine government. Today, despite some serious challenges, the Philippine government is probably better positioned to transition from COIN to stability than at any point in the past 30 years.

**Colombia from the 1960s to 2009.** In one of the longest-lasting insurgencies in the world, it appeared at times that the Colombian government would be defeated by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Today, however, the Colombian government is clearly in the transition phase in many parts of the country that were controlled by the FARC until a few years ago. As with the Philippines, the United States has provided support and assistance to the local government.

**El Salvador from 1980 to 1992.** This was a relatively small insurgency that has ended. Again, the United States provided assistance to the local government. Although the formal insurgency is over, the mismanagement of the “end game” (i.e., the transition phase) resulted in a major spike in lawlessness in El Salvador; there are important lessons to be learned from this case.

**Mali from 1990 to 2007.** This former French colony was threatened by an insurgency in the northern part of the country by a portion of an ethnic minority. Despite a few false starts, this insurgency is also now generally in a transition phase. This is a case with little American involvement.

**Iraq’s Anbar Province from 2005 to 2008.** This is a large insurgency with considerable American involvement. Between 2006 and 2008, the difficult and dangerous situation in Anbar Province clearly transitioned from COIN to a more stable situation.

**Afghanistan from 2001 to the Present.** At the time of this writing, a major insurgency is still under way in Afghanistan, and it has not reached the transition stage. This case was included because of Afghanistan’s great importance to the United States. Important lessons can be learned from this case because the United States initially thought it was going directly from a successful regime-toppling invasion to stability, only to see a serious insurgency develop that has not yet transitioned toward stability.

It can be seen from this list that the insurgencies vary considerably. Some are large; others small. Some had considerable American involvement; others had none. Most are still under way today. As mentioned previously, we wanted to examine a variety of insurgencies to see what practices, both successful and unsuccessful, governments had used as they tried to transition from COIN to stability.

Although the nature of the cases varied, we developed a common analytical template for examining the insurgencies, to facilitate comparisons among them. The elements of this template were the following:

A. Introduction: Brief history of the conflict leading up to the period of transition.

- What was the nature and scope of the conflict?
- Who were the key domestic, international, and transnational actors?
- Who were the insurgents?
- What external powers (if there was one or more) supported the belligerents?
- What were the key strengths and weaknesses of these strategies?
- What factors brought about the transition?
- How did the incumbent power know it was “winning”?
- Were there previous “false starts”?
- What was the insurgents’ “end game”? How did they recognize they were “losing”?
- Did key external actors understand the changing conflict dynamics? What role did they play?
- What were the key phases?
- What were the central components of the incumbent’s transition process?
- What were the major gaps in the transition capabilities of the incumbent and any outside supporting states?
- Did the role of external actors change in significant ways?
- How did the insurgents manage the transition?
- What followed the transition period? Was there a permanent peace, a lesser form of instability (i.e., widespread criminality

and disorder), or an eventual reemergence of sustained armed opposition?

- How long and to what degree did external actors remain engaged?

B. Strategy (pre-transition)

- What was the nature of the incumbent (the local government threatened by the insurgency)?

C. The transition period

D. Managing the transition

E. Conclusions

- What does this case say about the kinds of capabilities the United States should have to assist nations in the transition process?



# The Philippines

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Map of the Philippines



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

RAND MG1111/2-2.1



This chapter examines the main parameters of the Philippine counter-insurgency against the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA). After briefly describing the background to the conflict, we discuss the strategy pursued by both protagonists and examine the strengths and weaknesses of the approach adopted by the incumbent state. The chapter argues that while some significant gains have been made against the CPP/NPA, Manila has yet to reach a decisive transition point in its campaign against the rebel communist movement, reflecting some key weaknesses in overall Filipino COIN capabilities and policies. These shortfalls can usefully inform U.S. military planners as they seek to refine their own techniques and procedures for waging this type of unconventional war in the contemporary era.

### **Introduction: Background of the Communist Conflict in the Philippines**

Communist insurgent violence in the Republic of the Philippines (RP) dates back to the 1940s when the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) allied with the Hobo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon (the hukbalahaps or Huks) to overthrow the central government in Manila. The Huks, who were led by Louis Taroc, constituted a peasant-based army that had fought with great skill against the Japanese occupation during World War Two. Although the group participated in the independence elections of 1946, it was defeated by the victorious Liberal Party and subsequently retreated to the jungles to act as the vanguard of an anti-western Filipino communist revolution. Full-scale rebellion broke out in February 1950 when the Huks changed their name to Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (People's Liberation Army) and called for the overthrow of the central government in Manila. Pledging to liberate the peasantry from the "tyrannical hold of the landed elite," communist rebels subsequently commenced operations with widespread grassroots support. By the end of 1950, the Huks had grown to a sizable force of 3,000 armed insurgents and had managed to take temporary

control of several provincial capitals in Luzon—both of which gave the impression of imminent revolutionary success.<sup>1</sup>

The communists failed to secure ultimate victory, however. Their appeal among the poor faded as a result of a failure to bring about any meaningful change in land distribution. Moreover, the Secretary for National Defense, Ramon Magsaysay, was able to progressively steer popular support away from the Huks through personal charisma and a skillful public relations campaign that the insurgent leadership could not match. Just as important, he was able to revive the spirits of a demoralized army and, with U.S. backing, significantly enhance the effectiveness of military offensive drives. After Magsaysay was elected president in 1953, he bolstered the general COIN effort with a vigorous agrarian reform agenda that was instrumental in further diminishing the communist appeal. By 1954 what remained of the People's Liberation Army had been reduced to desultory banditry, representing little if any threat to the stability of the Philippine state.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this victory, the government failed to capitalize on the post-Huk peace dividend. Magsaysay's successor, Diosdado Macapagal (in office from 1961 to 1965), did little to extend government benefaction in the rural areas—reflecting a basic problem of programmatic discontinuity that continues to beset the polity to this day—while pervasive corruption continued to extend throughout the country's ruling, military and administrative structures. These conditions bred discontent among the masses and, in so doing, gave succor to a deflated PKP.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> George Rosie, *The Directory of International Terrorism*, Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1986, p. 145; Armed Conflict Events Database, "The Huk Rebellion in the Philippines 1946–1954," December 16, 2000; Leifer, *Dictionary of the Modern Politics of Southeast Asia*, p. 122; Derek McDougall, *Studies in International Relations: The Asian-Pacific, the Superpowers, Australia*, Melbourne: Edward Arnold, 1991, p. 69. See also Manuel Bautista, *The Hukbalahap Movement in the Philippines, 1942–1952*, Los Angeles: University of California, 1952; and Laurence Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection: A Case Study of a Successful Anti-Insurgency Operation in the Philippines, 1946–1955*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, Analysis Branch, 1987.

### Counterinsurgency Under Marcos

The communist insurgency gathered strength after 1972, when President Ferdinand Marcos, barred by the Philippine constitution from seeking a third term, declared martial law. Counterinsurgency under Marcos relied heavily on search-and-destroy operations. Insurgents were able to evade contact with government forces and to choose engagements when conditions were in their favor. These operations often entailed harassment of the local population in an attempt to gain intelligence. In some cases, heavy-handed tactics alienated the population and increased local support for the insurgency.<sup>3</sup> Corruption in the armed forces contributed to a decline in professionalism. Marcos centralized the military, police, and intelligence agencies under the control of his cousin, General Fabian Ver, and placed relatives and cronies at all levels of the government. Senior officers were allowed to run private businesses and extortion rackets. This created the conditions for the growth of the insurgency and the formation of groups of reform-minded junior officers, such as the Reform of the Armed Forces movement.<sup>4</sup>

Calculating that popular sentiment could once again be shifting decisively in their favor, the communists reconstituted their political and military structures. Under the leadership of Jose Maria Sison, the party quickly declared its adherence to the Maoist precept of “people’s war” and announced a new offensive that would be executed through dedicated military and political wings, to be known, respectively, as the New People’s Army (NPA)<sup>5</sup> and the National Democratic Front (NDF). The CPP specifically identified its cause as rooted in liberation theology, seeing its main objective as the creation of a more just and

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<sup>3</sup> Mike Fowler, “Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now,” *Small Wars Journal*, January 18, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Macdonald, “Ethical and Moral Issues in Intelligence Reform: The Philippines,” in Thomas Bruneau and Steven C. Boraz, eds., *Reforming Intelligence: Obstacles to Democratic Control and Effectiveness*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007, p. 306.

<sup>5</sup> The NPA was originally created under the leadership of a former Huk commander, Bernabe Buscayno (aka “Commander Dante”).

humane Philippine society free from what it referred to as the “tyrannical” influence of U.S. imperialism.<sup>6</sup>

The NPA commenced its armed campaign in the rural areas of central and northern Luzon, progressively expanding its operational presence during the early 1970s to Samar, Negros, and Panay in the Visayas and the eastern part of Mindanao in the south.<sup>7</sup> Although Sison and other senior CPP leaders were captured in 1977, the communist resistance continued to draw sustenance from economic stagnation, poor governance, cronyism, corruption, and human rights abuses.<sup>8</sup> Just as important, the rebels benefited positively from Manila’s gradual scaling back of land redistribution, which itself reflected a prevailing (and mistaken) attitude among policymakers that there was no causal connection between peasant unrest, agrarian reform, and political stability. Evidence provided by the Ministry of Agriculture shows that the real income of small farmers declined by nearly 40 percent between 1974 and 1979 and that fewer than a quarter of peasant tenants had acquired land ownership by 1984.<sup>9</sup> The resulting situation fostered a general perception that the Marcos regime was neither interested in protecting and furthering the interests of the average citizen nor willing to abrogate the holdings of large-scale rice and corn production conglomerates.

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<sup>6</sup> “25 Years of the New People’s Army,” *Liberation International*, March/April 1994. See also David Wurfel, “Government Responses to Armed Communism and Secessionist Rebellion in the Philippines,” in Chandran Jeshurun, ed., *Governments and Rebellions in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asia Studies, 1985, pp. 227–228; Thomas Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 85–96; Richard J. Kessler, *Repression and Rebellion in the Philippines*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 83–84; and McDougall, *Studies in International Relations*, pp. 77–79.

<sup>7</sup> David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> The decision to declare marshal law reflected a prevailing concern that the CPP-NPA was receiving material and financial support from Communist China and, therefore, had to be crushed as quickly as possible. See Wurfel, “Government Responses,” p. 299; and Purificacion Quisumbing, *Beijing-Manila Détente: Major Issues*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Law and Foreign Service Institute, 1983, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> Wurfel, “Government Responses,” p. 229.

The growing sense of CPP/NPA confidence culminated in 1985, when the NDF announced a 12-point agenda that gave concrete expression to the communist movement's long-term objectives:

1. To unite the Filipino people to overthrow the tyrannical rule of U.S. imperialism and local reactionaries
2. To wage a people's war to win total, nationwide victory
3. To establish a democratic coalition government and a people's democratic republic
4. To integrate the revolutionary armed forces into a single national revolutionary army
5. To uphold and promote the free exercise of the people's democratic right
6. To terminate all unequal relations with the United States and other foreign entities
7. To complete the process of genuine land reform, raise rural production through cooperation, and modernize production
8. To carry out national industrialization as the leading factor in economic development
9. To guarantee the right to employment, raise the people's living standards, and expand social services
10. To promote a patriotic, scientific and popular culture and ensure free public education
11. To respect and foster the self-determination of the Moro and Cordillera people and all ethnic minorities
12. To adopt and practice a revolutionary, independent, and peace-loving foreign policy.<sup>10</sup>

This platform struck a chord among the Philippines' aggrieved and increasingly disenfranchised rural and urban masses. It also directly correlated with the foreign policy priorities of Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi, who was actively seeking to expand his country's influence across the Asia-Pacific on the back of revolutionary anti-western proxy forces. Benefiting from a groundswell of grass-roots support

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<sup>10</sup> Kessler, *Repression and Rebellion*, 83–84.

and boosted by the financial largesse of Tripoli, the CPP/NPA had reached a peak strength of 22,000 self-proclaimed “Red Fighters” by 1988. With influence in some 20 percent of the country’s barangays (the smallest administrative unit), the communists appeared set to move against the existing levers of state power.<sup>11</sup>

The civilian opposition to Marcos was united and energized by the assassination of Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino at the Manila International Airport as he was returning from exile in the United States in August 1983. The February 1986 presidential election, contested by Ninoy’s widow Corazon (Cory) Aquino, was the catalyst of the “People’s Power Revolution” against Marcos. Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and the head of the Philippine Constabulary, General Fidel Ramos, joined in a military revolt that was instrumental in driving Marcos from power in 1986 and ushering in a period of democratic rule.<sup>12</sup>

### The Post-Marcos Period

After the downfall of the Marcos regime, Corazon Aquino assumed the presidency, with Ramos as chief of staff of the armed forces. Post-1986 counterinsurgency strategy continued offensive operations while incorporating a concept of providing security to the population. Popular support for the communists was further eroded by the Aquino administration’s promise of agrarian reform. However, the Aquino administration, beset by constant coup attempts and the opposition of elite sectors, was not able to make good on much of its reform agenda.<sup>13</sup>

The presidency of Fidel Ramos, who succeeded Aquino in 1992, was a period of unprecedented political stability and economic growth. The Ramos administration repealed the Anti-Subversion Law of 1981, which declared the CPP to be “an organized conspiracy for the purpose of overthrowing the Government of the Philippines,” amnestied military mutineers and rebels, and reached out to the CPP/NPA, offering

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<sup>11</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. See also McDougall, *Studies in International Relations*, p. 79; Kessler, *Repression and Rebellion*, p. 56; Bayani Cruz, “Qadhafi Aids NPA, MNLF,” *Manila Times*, June 16, 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Macdonald, “Ethical and Moral Issues,” p. 308.

<sup>13</sup> Fowler, “Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy.”

it opportunities for genuine political participation.<sup>14</sup> Ramos's successors, Jose Ejercito (Erap) Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, did not live up to the standard of governance that Ramos had set during his term; their inability to deliver competent and honest government or economic growth has contributed to the persistence of insurgency.

The momentum of the CPP/NPA/NDF insurgency suffered as a result of the democratization of Philippine political life and of a major split between those who insisted on the continued relevance of Maoist rural guerrilla war and those who advocated a more explicit reorientation to urban-based activities (violent and nonviolent). The subsequent internal struggle, which pitched longtime CPP Secretary Sison (whom the Cory Aquino government had released from jail in 1986 and who remained an ardent supporter of Maoist principles) against so-called "insurrectionist-line" cadres who believed it was possible to shortcut the process of popular revolution by projecting communist rural influence directly into the cities. Resultant in-fighting and splintering led to a purge of armed cells and the effective collapse of their wider supporting political infrastructure.<sup>15</sup>

The communists have never been able to recover from this period, and they certainly do not represent the threat they did in the 1980s.<sup>16</sup> That said, the NPA remains intact, with an overall armed membership of 4,874 and access to some 5,390 firearms. Moreover, the CPP/NDF continues to operate across the country (including metropolitan Manila), affecting an estimated 1,381 barangays as of the end of 2008.<sup>17</sup> It is this national influence combined with the residual but sizable force quotient that continues to stem from the NPA that accounts

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<sup>14</sup> Fidel V. Ramos, *The Continuing Revolution*, Manila, 2001, pp. 88–89.

<sup>15</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008. Sison and "orthodox" Maoists preferred a strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside, while the opposing faction favored a combination of rural and urban struggle, modeled on the Sandinista campaign in Nicaragua. For further details see Antonio Abaya, "Jose Maria Stalin," *Manila Standard Today*, July 6, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Author interview, Manila, June 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. See also "Current NPA's Strength Down to Lowest Level Since the '80s," *Philippine Star*, June 28, 2009.

for the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP's) current view of the communist insurgency as the number-one internal security threat confronting the Philippine state.<sup>18</sup>

As mentioned previously, the Philippines have been confronted with a communist insurgency since the 1940s. At times, the communists appeared to be getting the upper hand; at others, the government seemed to be on the verge of defeating the insurgency.

Of considerable importance for the longevity of the insurgency are the deep, systemic problems that have contributed to the insurgency and undermined the legitimacy of the government in the eyes of much of the population. These problems include poverty, inequity in wealth distribution, corruption at all levels of government, and sometimes inappropriate, brutal tactics employed by the government's security forces. Without question, the failure to address these issues has helped keep the communist insurgency alive for so long. It is also important to note, however, that recent reforms in the Philippines have gone far toward undermining the case of the communists, as explained below.

## Strategy

### CPP/NPA

In its attempt to accomplish its goals, the communist movement has employed all tactical means at its disposal: military struggle; mass mobilization; political lobbying, including "buying" elected representatives as well as actual participation in elections through its legitimate arm, the NDF; international solidarity work; and pursuit of peace negotiations.

The NPA remains at the forefront of the communist militant agenda. In theory, the group remains under the direct control of the 26-member CPP Central Committee with authority exercised through

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<sup>18</sup> Author interviews, Manila and Zamboanga, January 2008. See also "Philippines: Communists Say Guerrillas Have Not Been Dismantled," *Adnkronos International*, January 8, 2009.



the eight-member Politburo headed by Sison (who is presently exiled in Utrecht, the Netherlands). In practice, however, the armed wing enjoys considerable autonomy due to the fragmented nature of the Philippine archipelago and the considerable difficulty this has engendered in terms of day-to-day communications. The NPA itself is currently organized into 62 guerrilla fronts that are scattered across the country; prior to their abduction by a suspected undercover military unit in 2007, the two main operational chiefs were thought to be Pedro Calubid and Leo Valesco.<sup>19</sup> The group's principal areas of current strength include the traditional areas of Samar in the Visayas and eastern Mindanao as well as parts of the Compostela and Surigao Valleys, Davao Oriental, Davao del Norte, Misamis and Zamboanga del Norte.<sup>20</sup>

The NPA's armed campaign has been primarily based on the Maoist theory of protracted guerrilla warfare. This strategic tactic assumes that, in order to launch a successful people's revolution in the major metropolitan centers of power, it is first necessary to win the active support of the peasantry in the countryside.<sup>21</sup> In line with this precept, most NPA insurgents are organized into armed mobile propaganda units known as Sandata Yunit Proganada (SYP), which reportedly reflect the CPP's focus on ideology and indoctrination as the best means for rebuilding its mass peasant base. Typically, a SYP will use family connections to establish a primary foothold in a targeted barangay. This provides a base from which to, first, assess local socioeconomic conditions and second, create relevant functional civic organizations as vehicles for entrenching "white areas"<sup>22</sup> that receive critical support from activist sections of the population, such as peasants,

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<sup>19</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. See also Glenda Gloria, "War Without End: The Military Is Treading on Dangerous Ground with Its Counterinsurgency Experiments," *Newsbreak*, December 2007/February 2008, p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Author interviews, Manila and Zamboanga, January 2008.

<sup>21</sup> According to Mao, the peasants were the "sea" in which the guerrillas needed to "swim" and without their continuous and active support any revolution would be doomed to failure. For more on Mao's concept of people's war see Michael Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, London: Frank Cass, 2003, Chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> The term *white area* was coined by communist insurgents themselves and is used to refer to a region where government agencies are present but unable to meet the basic needs of the

youths, women, and students. SYPs can also be tasked with killing police and bureaucratic officials deemed to be corrupt, those who are suspected of acting as government spies, and anyone engaged in what is loosely defined as “anti-people activities” (such as criminals and drug traffickers). In addition, they can be used to settle simple blood debts or as the “muscle” to collect revolutionary taxes and other coerced forms of payment (see below).<sup>23</sup>

Operationally, SYPs can be brought together to form guerrilla companies of between 50 and 100 armed cadres who are typically deployed for assassinations, tactical offensives against municipal buildings, and attacks on businesses that have refused extortion demands and on police/military outposts.<sup>24</sup> Some of the assaults perpetrated by these combined units have exhibited a high degree of discipline and tactical sophistication. Between January and May 2008, for instance, communists bombed no less than 23 high-voltage power towers of the government-owned National Transmission Corporation (TransCo), succeeding on a number of occasions to trigger blackouts in Mindanao that lasted for several hours.<sup>25</sup> More recently in March 2009, an NPA team ambushed a local defense patrol base in Malaybay City, killing 17 part-time soldiers; the incident marked one of the AFP’s costliest encounters with the Maoist rebels since 2001.<sup>26</sup>

Beyond guerrilla strikes and propaganda, fundraising constitutes a critical component of the NPA’s operational activities. Money is pro-

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local population or prevent guerrillas from receiving vital logistical and political support from the indigenous community. See Gloria, “War Without End,” p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Author interviews, Manila and Zamboanga, January 2008; Anthony Davis, “NPA Rebels Complicate Manila’s Counterinsurgency Strategy,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, June 2003, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Author interview, Manila, June 2009. See also Davis, “NPA Rebels Complicate Manila’s Counterinsurgency Strategy,” p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> “Transco Towers Bombed, Half of Mindanao in Darkness,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 31, 2008; and John Paul Jubelag, “Insurgents Blast 2 TransCo Towers,” *Philippine Star*, May 31, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Jem Strikar, “NPA Attacks CAFGU Patrol Base in Malaybalay City,” *Mindanao Magazine*, April 1, 2009.

cured mostly from extortion,<sup>27</sup> which typically takes the form of a “revolutionary tax” that businesses are obliged to pay in order to operate in areas under communist control. Sums vary but are usually determined as a set premium of the respective firm’s annual profits. Logging, agricultural, telecommunications, mining, transportation, commercial, quarrying, and construction companies have been especially favored targets, collectively handing over 32 million pesos in 2008.<sup>28</sup> The NPA has additionally extorted wealthy private individuals, demanding that they pay a percentage of their annual earnings to support the communist struggle; in 2008, this particular source yielded an estimated 12.7 million pesos.<sup>29</sup> During elections, pressure has also been exerted on politicians to pay so-called “permit to campaign” fees. In 2004, for example, congressional candidates were forced to contribute up to 500,000 pesos (approximately US \$12,500) for the right to access CPP/NDF strongholds.<sup>30</sup> A largely similar pattern of financial compulsion characterized the 2010 presidential run-off.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of its current military aspirations, much of the NPA’s focus has been directed toward recruiting more members, expanding the number of fronts and combat platoons across the country, intensifying military training, and launching more tactical strikes (including, where necessary, acts of sabotage and terrorism in major metropolitan centers). Although many of these operational facets continue to remain salient, the relative emphasis on violent modalities has been increas-

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<sup>27</sup> In 2008, extortion yielded ps62 million in revenue for the communist insurgency. Additional sources of financing included support from left-wing sympathizers in Europe and the United States (the NPA is known to have received at least some American money channeled through the International League of People Solidarity, or ILPS) as well as remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFWs).

<sup>28</sup> Author interviews, Manila and Zamboanga, January 2008 and June 2009. See also Davis, “NPA Rebels Complicate Manila’s Counterinsurgency Strategy,” pp. 17–18.

<sup>29</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008. See also Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, “Philippines: Reports of Extortion and Kidnapping of Civilians by the New People’s Army (NPA) or Other Armed Groups; State Response to Extortion and Kidnapping; Extent of Recruitment Efforts by the NPA (2003–2006),” October 18, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

ingly sidelined over the past several years by a more concerted focus on political struggle, which now accounts for as much as 90 percent of the communist struggle. In broad terms, the main priorities appear to be participating in elections (through the NDF), solidifying popular support, generating income, and delegitimizing the Philippine state.<sup>32</sup> According to AFP officials, this agenda is being pursued by encouraging public sector groups/individuals to join local branches of left-leaning political parties; organizing mass street protests of the sort that were emphasized as part of the “oust Arroyo” campaign;<sup>33</sup> sensationalizing extrajudicial killings, graft and corruption, and internal security laws as a threat to the people; strengthening the political machinery of the CPP/NDF; de-designating the NPA as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) in the United States and European Union (EU); and mobilizing left-wing supporters and potential funders in America, Europe, Australia, and Hong Kong.<sup>34</sup>

The communists have also been prepared to supplement their political struggle by engaging in peace talks with the Philippine government. This particular tactic was suspended in 2005, however, after the CPP broke off contact with Manila in protest at the NPA’s inclusion on the U.S. and EU lists of proscribed FTOs. Sison, who, as noted, currently lives in self-imposed exile in the Netherlands, has categorically stated that his organization will not resume any form of bilateral interaction with the government until its designation in America and Europe is lifted—a decision that the Arroyo administration has little ability (or, indeed, inclination) to influence.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009.

<sup>33</sup> During the latter stages of the Arroyo administration, there was substantial pressure for the president to step down over revelations of bureaucratic mismanagement and endemic corruption within her government. Attempts to reform the constitution to allow Arroyo to stand for an additional term were especially unpopular and a major source of popular criticism and disenchantment between 2009 and 2010. (Author interviews, June 2009.)

<sup>34</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008. See also Republic of the Philippines, Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process, CPP-NPA-NDF, October 24, 2007. The NPA was designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States in August 2002 and by the European Union in November 2005.

## The Philippine State

Reflecting the military-political nature of the CPP/NPA's current strategy, the AFP has sought to institute a "left hand, right hand" approach to COIN that includes both hard and soft, less combat-intensive, approaches. The dual aim is to neutralize existing NPA guerrilla fronts while simultaneously moving to blunt the underlying political and socioeconomic infrastructure on which the communist insurgency currently relies.<sup>36</sup>

The Philippine National Internal Security Plan (NISP), formulated by the now defunct Cabinet Oversight Committee on Internal Security, lists the country's domestic security priorities in the following order: (1) counterinsurgency, primarily directed against the NPA (referred to as the Local Communist Movement, or LCM); (2) counterseparatism, directed primarily against Islamic Moro groups on Mindanao (collectively referred to as the Southern Philippines Secessionist Group/SPSG); (3) counterterrorism, directed against both local and international organizations (al-Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyya, and the Abu Sayyaf Group); and (4) counter-destabilization, which is primarily aimed at neutralizing efforts to overthrow the government.<sup>37</sup> The insurgent challenge emanating from the CPP/NPA is viewed as the country's number one domestic threat—absorbing roughly 60 percent of the government's resources devoted to internal security<sup>38</sup>—largely because the group operates nationally, has the stated objective of overthrowing the central government, and because the CPP/NDF has penetrated a wide range of civil sector interests and organizations.<sup>39</sup> As one AFP official observed, whereas terrorists and separatists are generally confined to the south of the country and aim only for autonomy or

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<sup>36</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Rommel Banalaoi, "Identity Politics and Philippine National Security in an Age of Terror," unpublished paper provided to author, June 2009, p. 10. An earlier version of the paper, titled "Identity Politics and National Security in the Philippines," can be found in *Pilipinas: A Journal of Philippine Studies*, Vol. 42, March 2005, pp. 25–45.

<sup>38</sup> This is compared to 15 percent devoted to counter-terrorism and counter-separatism and 10 percent to counter-destabilization. See Gloria, "War Without End," p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

secession, the NPA operates across the whole country and sees itself as the main vehicle for implementing people's war through a sustained campaign of sabotage and disruption.<sup>40</sup>

In instituting its COIN strategy against the communist insurgency, Manila has sought to develop a holistic “all of government” (AOG) approach<sup>41</sup> that involves all key stakeholders in the civilian, governing, and security force sectors. The input of these parties is coordinated through Peace and Order Councils (POCs),<sup>42</sup> which operate at the national, regional, provincial, city, and municipal levels and have the following four core functions and responsibilities: (1) to formulate plans and recommend measures that will serve to improve or enhance peace and order; (2) to monitor the implementation of peace and order programs at all levels and audit their performance in terms of COIN programs and activities; (3) to receive, hear, and adjudicate on complaints made against government personnel—either civilian or military; and (4) to make determinations as to when prevailing conditions are suitable for the transfer of security responsibility from the military to civilian authorities and associated paramilitary/self-defense forces (see below).<sup>43</sup>

The POCs are also the main mechanism for the formation of Local Peace and Security Assemblies (LPSAs). These gatherings bring together local government officials, civil society leaders, and military and police officials to discuss the problems of insurgency and to craft

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<sup>40</sup> Author interview, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Manila adopted the terminology of AOG in 2006. Prior to this, the COIN effort was based on the “Strategy of Holistic Approach” (SHA). The concepts behind the two are largely the same, although the AOG places greater emphasis on civilian outreach, development, and general military operations of a nonlethal manner. Banalaoi, “Identity Politics,” p. 17.

<sup>42</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. POCs were originally signed into law by then-President Corazon Aquino through Executive Order Number 320 (1988). The National POC is made up of officials from executive cabinet departments, other executive agencies, the security forces, and the private sector representing academic, civil, religious, youth, labor, legal, business and media organizations; membership on local POCs reflect that of their of national counterparts.

<sup>43</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

action agendas for particular areas. The central government regards the LPSA as a useful mechanism to begin the process of normalization in regions affected by communist guerrillas as well as a means through which to reach out to NPA militants who have indicated an interest in laying down their arms and reintegrating into mainstream society. Five LPSAs were held in 2007, and they apparently have contributed to the government's growing success against the communists since then.<sup>44</sup>

In terms of actual strategy, an enhanced version of the NISP (e-NISP) outlines five offensives and three programs. Together, these efforts are intended to increase confidence in the legitimacy of the Philippine government and undermine the agenda and effectiveness of the communists. The five offensives include

- a military offensive, aimed at degrading the operational capabilities of the NPA
- a legal offensive, aimed at securing convictions of violent militants by educating the AFP on appropriate procedures for securing crime scenes and ensuring the sanctity of forensic evidence
- an economic offensive, focused on cutting the flow of funds to the NPA from sympathizers abroad and upgrading the effectiveness of anti-money laundering operations
- a political offensive, directed at weaning local community organizations away from the CPP/NDF
- a strategic communications/psyops (psychological operations) offensive, aimed at countering CPP/NDF propaganda and promoting the Philippine state as a socially caring polity.

The three programs include

- an amnesty program, which applies only to the NPA and is currently being debated in the Philippine Congress
- a social reintegration program, which focuses on the demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration of “repentant” NPA cadres

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<sup>44</sup> Author interview, Manila, January 2008.

and falls under the responsibility of the Office of the Advisor for the Peace Process

- a human rights program, which is basically directed toward the Philippine National Police (PNP) and AFP and is intended to boost the proficiency of police and army human rights awareness and understanding.<sup>45</sup>

Combined, the five offensives and three programs are aimed at instituting the “left hand, right hand” approach against the LCM. The overall objective is based on the principle of “clear, hold, consolidate, develop” (CHCD), which is designed to neutralize and dismantle the communist political and militant machinery in insurgent “white” areas and gradually normalize these regions to allow a transfer of security from the military—which remains the lead agency in Philippine COIN efforts—to civilian forces.<sup>46</sup> Integral to the Philippine CHCD methodology are Special Operations Teams (SOTs). These units are embedded in each of the divisional commands of the AFP (the specific number varies according to the situation on the ground) and are composed of nine intelligence, civil affairs, and psyops specialists, accompanied by a security detachment of around 20 troops. A SOT will be inserted into an insurgent “hot zone” for up to nine months with the twin goals of sapping active or latent popular support for the communist cause and encouraging the local populace to work with the authorities in dampening militant activities. Before the SOT is dispatched, a thorough survey of the critical needs of the respective community is undertaken and used to inform the content and direction of any socio-economic and/or confidence building measures that are subsequently

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<sup>45</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Banalaoi, “Identity Politics and Philippine National Security in an Age of Terror,” p. 16. Then-President Arroyo explained the “left hand, right hand approach” in the following terms: “How do we address this problem (of) insurgency? Through the right-hand and left-hand approach. (The) right hand is the full force of the law and the left hand is the hand of reconciliation and the hand of giving support to our poorest brothers so that they won’t be encouraged to join the rebels.” Cited in Marichu Villanueva, “Palace Announces RP-CPP Peace Talks Resume in Oslo February 10–13,” *Philippine Star*, February 6, 2004.



instituted.<sup>47</sup> SOTs play a critical role in defining the parameters of and executing the implementation of so-called Kalayaan Freedom Barangay Projects (KBPs), which are designed to win the people's hearts and minds through the construction of schools, houses, and hospitals and the provision of basic services, such as potable water, health care, and electricity (See Table 2.1).<sup>48</sup>

As noted, Manila has also sought to harness the totality of municipal resources in countering urban-based insurgent threats by instituting a "multistakeholder co-ownership" approach to COIN. Perhaps the clearest example of this stratagem was on the island of Bohol. Here POCs were established to bring together local government agencies, church representatives, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), academics, civil society organizations, and the business sector to formulate plans on how best to restore normalcy in rebel-infested areas.<sup>49</sup>

Finally a number of specific pilot schemes have also been developed for particular areas. One notable scheme is the Barangay Defense System (BDS), which was initially set up to cover the remote towns of Nueva Ecija province in Central Luzon. The idea of Colonel Gregory Cayteno, the BDS is composed of local residents who act as key informants for the military. Members are not armed; rather, they are equipped with cell phones that they use to access a dedicated hotline

**Table 2.1**  
**The Kalayan Barangay Program**

Projects	Completed	Ongoing	To Be Started
Water supply	37	19	94
Building schools	89	20	150
Farm-to-market roads	0	2	94
Total	126	41	338

SOURCE: Briefing Paper, J3, AFP, 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. The roots of SOTs go back 20 years and stem from techniques that were first introduced to deal with the Muslim insurgency in Mindanao.

<sup>48</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008. See also Gloria, "War Without End," p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June and September 2009.

whenever they spot a suspected rebel(s) or sense an impending incursion. Apart from acting as a real-time intelligence source for the AFP, the BDS concept is also employed as means of preventing petty crimes (such as cattle rustling) and helping with the protection of livelihood projects for local residents.<sup>50</sup>

### Self-Defense Militias

Self-defense paramilitaries constitute an important component of the AFP's overall COIN effort. These entities are regarded as a relatively cheap and effective means of augmenting the police security presence in areas considered at or approaching a state of normalization.<sup>51</sup> Two main types of militia exist: First are the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGUs), which are fully integrated into the army's chain of command and are subject to all applicable military law, rules, and regulations.<sup>52</sup> CAFGUs are trained by the AFP in the fundamentals of village protection and local community organization and persuasion, have a legal basis in the constitution, and are paid a nominal monthly allowance. There are currently around 60,000 CAFGUs deployed in 13,400 villages—up from 41,979 in 2001. Seventy percent of these units are stationed in Central Mindanao; the remaining 30 percent are scattered across other designated priority areas.<sup>53</sup>

Complementing the CAFGUs are Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs). Members of these groups are unarmed<sup>54</sup> and work with

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<sup>50</sup> Gloria, "War Without End," p. 35.

<sup>51</sup> The annual cost of maintaining a regular soldier (private) in the AFP is around 120,000 pesos, compared to just 33,000 pesos for a paramilitary member.

<sup>52</sup> Rommel Banlaoi, "CAFGU, CVOs and Vigilante Groups in the Philippines," paper prepared for the South-South Network (SSN) Philippine Armed Groups Political Mapping Research Project, 2006, p. 2. It should be noted that because CAFGUs are fully integrated in the military chain of command, the AFP denies that they are either a paramilitary or militia unit.

<sup>53</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. See also Banlaoi, "CAFGU, CVOs and Vigilante Groups in the Philippines," p. 6; and Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, *CAFGU Primer*, Makati City: Headquarters of the Philippine Army, 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Although they are not legally mandated to carry arms, there have been reports of CVOs engaged in skirmishes with NPA and Moro Islamic Liberation Front militants during which

the police in supporting local peace, order and security development projects.<sup>55</sup> They also act as a form of neighborhood watch and periodically engage in intelligence and undercover work for the military and police in their respective localities. Training and education to CVOs is provided by the Bantay Bayan Foundation Incorporated (BBFI), which was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in 1984. According to the BBFI, some 9,018 CVO chapters have been formed nationwide, with a combined strength of 4,509,000. These personnel play a pivotal role in the implementation of the AFP's COIN operation known as Bantay Laya (see below).<sup>56</sup>

### AFP COIN Progress

The stated goal of the AFP was to achieve a strategic victory over the CPP/NPA by the end of 2010—the year that was supposed to mark the termination of President Arroyo's presidency.<sup>57</sup> Orchestrated under “Bantay Laya I and II” (“Guard Freedom” I and II), this objective had as its aim a 75 percent reduction in present CPP-NPA strength, capability, and influence by meeting the following self-imposed annual benchmarks: (1) The collapse of 65 guerrilla fronts; (2) the completion of 500 KBPs (126 had been finished by the end of 2007— see Table 2.1); (3) the implementation of at least four major highway initiatives

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M1 Garand, M-14 and M-16 assault rifles, as well as rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) have been used.

<sup>55</sup> A CVO can be formed by any group of interested and law-abiding citizens (over the age of 18) to promote community self-defense and safety against criminals and other lawless elements.” See *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 40 of the Covenant: The Philippines*, Geneva: United Nations (UN) Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), August 2002, p. 119.

<sup>56</sup> Banlaoi, “CAFGU, CVO and Vigilante Groups in the Philippines,” pp. 6–7.

<sup>57</sup> Under the terms of the Philippine Constitution, an individual can only serve as president for a maximum of two terms. As noted previously, however, Arroyo moved to introduce changes that would allow for a third tenure in office. The issue remains highly contentious and is currently one of the main sources of political uncertainty and tension in the country. Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

on the island of Mindanao;<sup>58</sup> and (4) the systematic intensification of white area cleansing operations to neutralize the CPP-NDF urban command structure.<sup>59</sup>

The AFP has made steady progress toward meeting some of these objectives, chalking up a number of notable successes against the CPP/NPA. By the end of 2007, 13 guerrilla fronts had been totally cleared and consolidated; an additional 17 were in the advanced stages of degradation; 13 key CPP leaders had been either detained or killed; and a further 191 communist members had been arrested and prosecuted for rebellion (representing 34 percent of all intended targets). In 2009, the government declared the NPA's combined strength to be 4,874 cadres organized in 75 fronts—the lowest level since the 1980s.<sup>60</sup>

Arguably more important, a number of formerly “hot” guerrilla zones have not only been normalized but are now in the stages of advanced popular development. A case in point is the island of Bohol in Region VI of the Visayas. A hotbed of communist insurgency in 2000, the AFP had managed to clear out all CPP and NPA influence by 2006. One of the main reasons for this success was the input of Governor Erico Aumentado, who was instrumental in establishing a consultative process that allowed for the effective pairing of civilian and military power to confront and defeat the insurgent threat.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The four planned projects include a circumferential road for Basilan, a triple S-B coastal road for Zamboanga del Norte; three circumferential highways for Cotabato City; and a Lapinig-to-Jipadad road in Sampar.

<sup>59</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>60</sup> “Current NPA's Strength Down to the Lowest Level Since the 1980s,” *Philippine Star*, June 28, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009; “Linking Security Sector Reform and Peace-Building: The Case of Bohol,” unpublished paper provided to author, n.d., p. 2. Some of the resulting mechanisms that appear to have borne particular dividends included the formation/implementation of: (i) Quick Response Teams (QRTs) to address the immediate needs of victims of NPA attacks; (ii) Fact Finding Teams (FFTs) to gather pertinent information on any matter related to provincial internal security; (iii) Civic Actions in Insurgency Affected Areas (CIVAC) aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the local population; and (iv) local Monitoring Mechanism for the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) to ensure the rights of both combatants and noncombatants are fully respected.

To a certain degree, the AFP's successes against the CPP and NPA are due to internal schisms within the rebel ranks that were first triggered by the decision to switch from rural to urban operations (see above). These splits worked to the specific advantage of the military, which was able to exploit internal doctrinal disagreements among the communist leadership to confuse and divide the movement's wider membership.<sup>62</sup> As Lieutenant Colonel Noel Patajo of the Philippine Air Force (PAF) commented: "[T]he AFP gained the upper-hand and a so-called "strategic victory" when [elements] of the CPP-NPA opted for the immediate seizure of power while post-insurgency problems, as secondary preoccupations, were shelved for the time being."<sup>63</sup>

However, just as important in accounting for the armed forces' progress is the holistic COIN approach outlined above. In an attempt to replicate Magsaysay's success against the Huks, a considerable component of this stratagem has focused on nonkinetic, "hearts and minds" initiatives that are directed toward weaning popular support away from the NPA while simultaneously enhancing the military's perceived standing in the local community. Indicative of this approach are the joint U.S.-Philippine *Balikatan* (literally, "shoulder-to-shoulder") exercises, held each year to enhance the AFP's general counterinsurgency and counterterrorism modalities in areas of endemic political violence. The 2008 round of these drills was oriented exclusively to civilian military operations (CMOs) in Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, and Sulu and involved eight medical civic action programs (MEDCAPS) and four engineering civic action programs (ENCAPS).<sup>64</sup> The most recent exercises, which were held April 16–30, 2009, were similarly devoted to CMOs, this time emphasizing relief and assistance efforts in the event of natural disasters and other crises that endanger public health and safety. In addition, AFP personnel conducted comprehensive humani-

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<sup>62</sup> Author interviews, Manila, September 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Noel Patajo, "An Alternative Approach to Counterinsurgency," *Air Force Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, October 2006, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> Author interviews, Zamboanga, January 2008. See also Eric Schmitt, "Gains Seen in Asian Terror Fight," *New York Times*, June 9, 2008. MEDCAPS involved fifteen AFP personnel/project, ENCAPS twenty personnel/project.

tarian assistance projects in Zamboanga, Bico, and Central and Southern Luzon, offering free medical, dental, and veterinarian care as well as building and repairing community infrastructure in areas deemed to be in most need of assistance.<sup>65</sup>

The *Balikatan* exercises have had an important effect on AFP thinking concerning COIN and counterterrorism. In particular, the annual drills have underscored to participating officers that development assistance often goes hand in hand with military operations, especially in terms of the favorable impact that can be elicited on the attitudes of the local population through road-building and other construction work. Opening a dialogue with local stakeholders also appears to have exposed the AFP to an alternative means of at least trying to change local perceptions on the ground.<sup>66</sup>

The “hearts and minds” approach has gained increased currency at the highest levels of the AFP. According to the head of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the southern Philippines, this is now the preferred approach of several commanders deployed to Mindanao.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the military has now created a new, nonlethal division that is specifically dedicated to CMO efforts—the National Development Support Command. The rationale behind the unit is that the best way to defeat a terrorist insurgency is by giving people what the rebels cannot: roads, bridges, businesses, houses, schools, electricity, medical centers, and medicines—in short, better governance.<sup>68</sup>

Besides appreciating the potential utility of CMOs, AFP commanders have become increasingly cognizant that inappropriate involvement of national-level security forces in local disputes can act as a trigger for violence. As one AFP commander explained it: “A party to a land or political dispute could call on associates in the local police or government-sanctioned militias to support him while a [local rebel]

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<sup>65</sup> See “RP, US Announce Balikatan Exercises 2009 in Bicol,” philstar.com, January 8, 2009; Robert Clowney, “Airmen Spread Goodwill During Balikatan 2009,” U.S. Air Force, April 29, 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Author interviews, Zamboanga, January 2008, and Manila, June 2009.

<sup>67</sup> RAND interview, Cotabato City, January 2008.

<sup>68</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and September 2009.

commander might support or lend arms to the other party; very quickly what began as a local dispute escalates into a national-level conflict.”<sup>69</sup> To prevent entanglement in local disputes and their ensuing negative effects, the Philippine security forces have reached out to NGOs to organize and conduct conflict management seminars. These sessions are aimed at helping military personnel understand the local environment to which they are to be deployed and providing techniques and procedures to minimize the danger of their becoming involved in conflict-prone situations.<sup>70</sup> In addition AFP officers have worked closely with development NGOs, participating in programs that are designed to resolve societal divides by including legitimate stakeholders in negotiating and mediation processes. One such course is the Bridging Leadership Fellowship that is funded and run by the Asian Institute of Management .<sup>71</sup>

## Transition?

Notwithstanding these operational successes and the wider conceptual breakthroughs that have been registered in the military’s thinking about COIN over the past two to three years, Manila—by its own admission—continues to confront a significant communist challenge. More specifically, while the government has made undoubted progress in overhauling and refining its overall counterinsurgency strategy, the government has yet to reach a decisive turning point in the campaign against the CPP-NPA. Indeed, the supposed strategic victory over the communist movement by 2010 is now questioned by a number of senior officials, many of whom concede that the timetable should be revised by at least one year and possibly as many two years.<sup>72</sup> This reassessment bears testimony to several important gaps that continue to

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<sup>69</sup> RAND interview, Cotabato City, January 2008.

<sup>70</sup> RAND interview, Cotabato City, January 2008.

<sup>71</sup> For more on this see AIM TeAM Energy Center, “The Bridging Leadership Fellows Program,” n.d.’

<sup>72</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009.

hamper the AFP's capabilities and policies, which have so far prevented a "real" transition from occurring, at least on a national basis.

First, the integrated approach to stabilization that underscores the strategic campaign against the NPA assumes that the army will take and hold a given area and that the civilian agencies will then go in to reestablish an effective state presence. In reality, however, cleared zones are frequently reinfilitrated by militants, largely because civil authorities fail to discharge their responsibilities in a meaningful and decisive manner. This has generated particular consternation on the part of the AFP, which repeatedly charges that inadequate follow-on consolidation by local bureaucrats and administrators merely serves to create governance vacuums that insurgents and terrorists have been quick to capitalize on.<sup>73</sup> In the words of one AFP officer with extensive experience of battling the NPA:

One of the main weaknesses of the government's COIN strategy is the inability to consolidate control over held areas. Typically once a region is cleared, the army will depart and hand over responsibility to local civilian agencies and bureaucrats. In most cases, however, these personnel have been incapable of preventing re-infiltration by Communist operatives. Indeed in a number of cases, guerrillas are known to have tactically withdrawn from base fronts knowing that once they do so the military will leave, effectively leaving them free to re-establish control.<sup>74</sup>

Second, efforts to implement a consistent national security strategy have been impeded by severe policy discontinuities, reflecting the highly adversarial nature of the Philippine political and administrative system. New officials and politicians are seldom willing to endorse and build on the initiatives of their predecessors—even if they are working—because they want to leave their own personal stamp on the office.<sup>75</sup> Compounding matters is a mandatory retirement age of

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<sup>73</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Author interview, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>75</sup> Author interview, Manila, September 2009.



56, which applies to all three branches of the armed forces. This has resulted in an extremely high turnover of personnel in the senior ranks, which has in turn precluded the opportunity to introduce programs and ensure that they are followed through and sustained. This disjuncture has been particularly apparent in the area of social reinsertion for demobilized and/or surrendered NPA cadres. Not only do these schemes remain in a constant state of flux, they also tend to be highly ad hoc in nature. Such inconsistency in terms of content and duration has, not surprisingly, impeded their ability to ensure the long-term rehabilitation of former combatants, many of whom simply return to arms.<sup>76</sup>

Third, although there has been a significant shift in AFP culture toward greater recognition of nonviolent, “effects-based” COIN operations, the overall tempo of security reform continues to be held hostage by a degree of organizational inflexibility. Reflecting this has been a general failure either to integrate peace-building modules into the military curriculum or incorporate and validate metrics into the promotion system that explicitly reward these types of activities.<sup>77</sup>

Fourth (and to a degree the product of the above), while the AFP has certainly been prepared to emphasize hearts and minds efforts in its overall COIN strategy, the relative emphasis on countering the political dimension of the CPP-NPA campaign has been somewhat lacking. In many ways, the army continues to confront the communist insurgency in military terms, even though the bulk of rebel activity (90 percent) is now focused on penetrating and subverting formal state and civic institutions, such as labor unions, the Catholic Church, schools, universities, student bodies, and business cooperatives.<sup>78</sup> This is something that the AFP itself admits. As Colonel Ricardo Visaya, a former battalion commander stationed in Pampanga in Central Luzon, remarked: “We admit there was a problem . . . We [have been] too focused on the armed group, even though we [know] that 70 percent of the enemy’s

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<sup>76</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and September 2009.

<sup>77</sup> Author interview, Cotabato City, January 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009.

effort is [focused] on political struggle and that only 30 percent [is on] military struggle.”<sup>79</sup>

Fifth, the AFP frequently fails to work and communicate effectively with the PNP, especially with regard to preserving forensic evidence. Generally, the military is the first to arrive at an urban guerrilla incident, given their resources and ability to rapidly deploy. Problematically, however, the AFP often fails to coordinate its response with the that of the PNP—resulting in a situation where the lead responsibility for cordoning off a crime scene falls to an organization that is neither trained in law enforcement nor attuned to protocols for collecting information that can be used for judicial purposes (the AFP priority is on garnering tactical and strategic intelligence). The PNP have, as a result, defaulted to relying on witness testimonies when prosecuting alleged offenders, many of which have been thrown out of court for their unreliable nature.<sup>80</sup> Not surprisingly, the conviction rate has not been as high as it might otherwise have been and, until recently, tended to be less than a third of all cases brought forward for prosecution.<sup>81</sup>

Sixth, the Philippine military continues to suffer from varying degrees of politicization, cronyism, and nepotism—both on an individual and institutional level. Within the AFP, people are typically promoted on the basis of who they know and their graduating class at the military academy—not on talent. This has hampered the army’s ability to fully capitalize on organizational reform and prevented the institutionalization of a modern, merit-based system of performance review.<sup>82</sup> Corruption also remains a lingering problem. It has both encouraged

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<sup>79</sup> Colonel Visaya, cited in Gloria, “War Without End,” 35.

<sup>80</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009. Defense teams are often able to dismiss the reliability of witness testimony by arguing that it was given under duress or otherwise extracted under “questionable” circumstances.

<sup>81</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009. Exacerbating the situation is the PNP’s continuing reliance on witness statements in bringing cases against suspects. Because these are often given under questionable circumstances, they are invariably thrown out of court as inadmissible.

<sup>82</sup> Author interviews, Manila, September 2009.

adventurism on the part of junior officers<sup>83</sup> and allowed the military to exert a dangerous degree of influence over the country's political establishment.<sup>84</sup>

Finally, although the AFP has made steadfast progress in its professionalism, human rights transgressions continue to undermine the record of paramilitary forces trained under its auspices. According to the Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PHIC), CAFGU members have been implicated in a broad range of abuses, including salvaging, harassment, forced evacuation, and even reported cases of cannibalism. CVOs have also been linked to various human rights violations, allegedly becoming more violent in tandem with a growing involvement in the illegal drug trade and increased (unsanctioned) access to small arms.<sup>85</sup>

These various shortfalls are reflected in the overall record of the AFP's struggle against the NPA. As noted above, although certain successes have been achieved, the military has yet to reach a decisive transition point in its COIN effort. Complete stabilization remains more the exception than the rule and has been achieved in only a few notable places, such as the island of Bohol. In most cases, the counterinsurgency strategy remains in either a fully offensive or mixed offensive/

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<sup>83</sup> There have been numerous cases involving senior members of the AFP taking bribes from companies with interests to protect and/or simply falsely declaring their assets and outside business holdings. In one notable incident that broke on 2004, an army general was court-martialed for amassing in excess of \$2 million in cash and real estate on a \$600/month salary. See Heda Bayron, "Philippine Military Corruption Trial Starts," newsVOA.com, November 16, 2004.

<sup>84</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008. See also Carlos Conde, "Corruption Troubles Philippine Military," *International Herald Tribune*, May 26, 2005. Corruption has always been part of the AFP culture and was in fact institutionalized during the Marcos era. When the former dictator was removed from power, members of the armed forces became politicized themselves, appropriating the role of "guardians of the constitution" and assuming the self-defined right to intervene against governments that were not deemed to be functioning adequately. Numerous analysts have blamed the weakness of civilian administrations in the Philippines on this messianic mindset in the military.

<sup>85</sup> Banaloi, "CAFGU, CVOs and Vigilante Groups in the Philippines," p. 7. See also Agnes Camacho, Zenaida Marco, P. Puzon, and Yasmin Patrice Ortiga, *Children and Youth in Organized Armed Violence in the Philippines: Contextualisation, Personal Histories and Policy Options*, Quezon City: UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies, 2003.

normalization mode with security responsibilities left squarely in the hands of the AFP, as opposed to civilian authorities.<sup>86</sup>

Moreover, while the NPA's operational capabilities have been blunted, the CPP's ability to infiltrate at the local level has been far from curtailed. Although the number of *barangays* infiltrated by the communists is much less than the 8,059 reported in 1987, the figures have been steadily climbing since 1995 and by 2006 (the latest year for which accurate data are available) amounted to at least 5 percent of the country's total (see Table 2.2). As Gloria commented: "And then a new landscape emerged in 2001: [the AF] was suddenly faced with a guerrilla unit that was emaciated on the battlefield but whose political stock—through its control of leftwing political parties and a popular anti-government stance—has risen to levels never before seen since the height of the anti-Marcos years."<sup>87</sup>

**Table 2.2**  
**Barangays Affected by the CPP**  
**and NPA**

Year	Number of Affected Barangays
1987	8,059
1991	4,841
1995	445
1996	534
1998	772
2000	1,279
2001	1,969
2004	2,510
2005	2,178
2006	2,121

SOURCE: National Intelligence Coordinating Agency, Manila, 2007.

<sup>86</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>87</sup> Gloria, "War Without End," p. 35.

## Conclusion: Lessons for the United States

The Philippine experience highlights a number of notable lessons. On the positive side, it illustrates the worth of balancing hard kinetic COIN approaches with softer “hearts and minds” initiatives that are relevant and respond to the needs of local communities. Not only do such strategies engender greater trust and confidence in the security forces, they also increase the scope for active popular involvement in rebel mitigation efforts.<sup>88</sup> These approaches have a dual effect: First, they deprive insurgents of crucial pools of civil passive support; second, they serve to greatly expand the potential scope of military and police surveillance on the ground. They were certainly a major factor in the defeat of the Huks and, through KBPs, they have generated dividends in several regions with regard to the struggle against the CPP/NPA.

No less significantly, the campaign against the CPP/NPA highlights the importance of involving all key stakeholders in a conflict at the earliest possible stage. Bohol stands as testimony to how effective such an approach can be in fully normalizing a former conflict zone. Indeed, in her 2006 State of the Nation Address, President Arroyo specifically cited the province- and city-based POCs as an exemplary case of innovative peace-building that was understood by everyone from the highest official to the ordinary citizen.<sup>89</sup>

On the negative side, the campaign against the CPP/NPA highlights the problems that can arise when the armed forces leave a nominally cleared area before full consolidation has been attained. As noted, one of the main reasons why many insurgent zones remain in a state of only partial normalization is that there is no effective security presence to prevent rebel reinfiltration once the military has left. Indeed,

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<sup>88</sup> In the words of the Stanley Foundation, “It is this kind of goodwill support—not the provision of “hard” combat equipment and training—that has been especially welcomed by indigenous communities in conflict-ridden regions and, hence, most successful in alienating latent militant sympathies and tendencies.” Cited in International Crisis Group, “The Philippines: Counter-Insurgency vs. Counter-Terrorism in Mindanao,” Asia Briefing No. 152, May 14, 2008, p. 22.

<sup>89</sup> Author interviews, Manila, June 2009; “Linking Security Sector Reform and Peace-Building: The Case of Bohol,” p. 2.

in many cases communist guerrillas are thought to have deliberately withdrawn from base fronts precisely because they know that once they do, the army will depart—giving them ample opportunity to reestablish control at will.<sup>90</sup>

On a wider level, the chapter bears witness to the criticality of programmatic continuity in ensuring the COIN effort. Manila failed to win the peace over the Huks largely because it squandered the progress that had been made in land reform. The current campaign against the CPP/NPA appears to be faltering, at least in part, because the demobilization and social reintegration programs are in a constant state of flux. As one well-informed and well-placed official with the Philippine National Security Council (NSC) lamented: “The Philippines suffers from a critical disease: policy, program and leadership discontinuity. No attempt is made to build on past strengths and achievements. This is not healthy for a young democracy as it causes severe strategic disjunctures, removes critical stock knowledge and essentially forces each new government to start from scratch.”<sup>91</sup>

The Philippine example also shows how corruption, nepotism, and cronyism can impede the development of an effective and professional military fighting force that is able to definitively address the range of internal threats arrayed against it. Although progress has certainly been made in boosting the proficiency of the AFP’s lower and middle ranks as part of a broader process of defense reform and rationalization,<sup>92</sup> in many ways the senior leadership continues to operate as an “old boy network” that is more interested in protecting and advancing the vested interests of its own members. This has stymied the growth of what might otherwise have been a fully flexible and for-

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<sup>90</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008.

<sup>91</sup> Author interview, Manila, September 2009.

<sup>92</sup> Manila’s Department of National Defense is currently looking across doctrine, force structure, training and equipment to redirect financing and mapping in accordance with a multiyear capabilities planning system – a long-range scheme developed with U.S. assistance and divided into six three-year segments. Information presented to the author at an AFP intelligence briefing, Manila, January 2008.

ward-looking organizational culture that is ready, able, and willing to embrace and validate innovative, “out-of-the-box” thinking.<sup>93</sup>

The Philippine case additionally underscores the danger of relying on inadequately trained and controlled local self-defense militias. Although the AFP has made significant progress regarding its own professionalism, CAFGUs and CVOs operating under military auspices continue at times to be implicated in serious human rights abuses and transgressions. This has tarnished the army’s reputation, provided the CPP/NPA with useful recruiting propaganda, and transformed what could potentially constitute a cheap and viable security “force multiplier” into one that risks driving a permanent wedge into the wider population. As the PHIC elaborates, “the CAFGUs are fighting not as part of a nation united against an external aggressor but in a nation divided against itself, where one part of the population is [an] enemy very often broadly defined, thus lending itself to abuse.”<sup>94</sup>

Finally, this chapter illustrates the importance of the political context of COIN. One of the main factors accounting for the NDF’s success in penetrating a wide array of Philippine civic, student, and labor bodies has been Manila’s failure to recognize and respond to an insurgent threat is now predominantly nonmilitary in nature. While the AFP has certainly moved to incorporate a “soft” hearts and minds component in its campaign against the CPP/NPA, far less emphasis has been placed on developing “smart” initiatives aimed at countering and discrediting the movement’s propaganda. To a large extent, this reflects the prevailing view in the government that the root causes of militancy are poverty and underdevelopment rather than ideology. The Philippine case suggests that *both* are pertinent (especially in societies beset by chronic and endemic problems of corruption); thus, they need to be factored equally into overall policy, planning, and decisionmaking.

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<sup>93</sup> Author interviews, Manila, January 2008 and June 2009.

<sup>94</sup> Philippine Human Rights Information Center (PHIC), *The Militarization of the Philippine Society: CAFGUs Against Human Rights*, Quezon City: PHIC, 1993; Banaloi, “CAFGU, CVOs and Vigilante Groups in the Philippines,” p. 5. See also Rene Sarmiento, “The Legality of Vigilante Groups,” paper prepared for the Eight House Annual Convention of the Integrated Bar of the Philippines. Manila: Hilton Hotel, June 7, 1987.

# Counterinsurgency Transition Case Study: Colombia

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Map of Colombia



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

RAND MG1111/2-3.1

## Nature and Scope of the Conflict

The origins of the current Colombian insurgency go back to the period of extreme violence between adherents of the Liberal and Conservative parties in the late 1940s and early 1950s that is known as *La Violencia*, during which an estimated 200,000 persons lost their lives. The Cuban revolution and the beginning of Soviet support for national liberation movements in Latin America encouraged the advocates of revolution-



ary change in Colombia to challenge the government through armed struggle. Colombia's two main guerrilla organizations, the Havana-line National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Moscow-line Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), as well as other smaller groups, were established in the initial wave of Cuban-inspired effort to export the revolution to the Latin American mainland in the 1960s. This history makes the FARC and the ELN two of the oldest guerrilla groups in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The ability of these groups, particularly the FARC, to challenge the central government increased significantly in the 1980s and 1990s, as revenue from the drug trade, kidnapping, and extortion enabled the group to expand its military capabilities and area of operation. The FARC established a presence in two-thirds of the country's territorial jurisdictions,<sup>2</sup> and developed an extensive infrastructure to move drugs, arms, supplies, and personnel across Colombia's permeable borders with Venezuela, Panama, and Ecuador.<sup>3</sup> The ELN had its strongest presence in the oil region of northeastern Colombia, attacking the oil infrastructure and deriving income from extortion of the oil companies. The stature of the ELN has been reduced over the past decade because of military losses to Colombian forces, the FARC, and the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* or AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) and its limited involvement with the drug trade. The ELN no longer represents a significant threat to the Colombian state.

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<sup>1</sup> See Angel Rabasa and Peter Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth: The Synergy of Drugs and Insurgency and Its Implications for Regional Stability*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1339-AF, 2001; Richard Maullin, *Soldiers, Guerrillas, and Politics in Colombia*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-0630-ARPA, 1971; Paul Oquist, *Conflict and Politics in Colombia*, New York: Academic Press, 1980; Rafael Pardo, *La Historia de Las Guerras*, Bogotá, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Known as *municipios* (municipalities or townships). According to a statistical data base on violence in Colombia, by 1995 the FARC presence had spread to 622 of Colombia's 1,050 *municipios*. Camilo Echandía Castillo, *El Conflicto Armado y las Manifestaciones de la Violencia en las Regiones de Colombia*, Bogotá: Presidencia de la República, Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz, 1999, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, pp. 85–91; Alfredo Rangel Suárez, *Colombia, Guerra en el Fin de Siglo*, Bogotá: TM Editores, 1998.

At the same time, so-called paramilitaries, organized under the umbrella of the AUC, established themselves as another force in the Colombian conflict. The AUC came about largely because of the inability of the state to provide security to the population. The paramilitaries mirrored the FARC in that they had links to the drug trade as well as political objectives. The paramilitaries were able to displace the FARC and the ELN from a number of contested areas, and their activities contributed to the overall decay of the state and a condition of generalized violence.<sup>4</sup>

Until the 1980s, the FARC engaged in small-scale attacks on military and police units in remote areas of Colombia. In the late 1990s, the FARC attempted to make a qualitative jump to a higher stage of military operations by engaging and defeating battalion-sized units of the Colombian army (Las Delicias in August 1996 and El Billar in March 1998). However, the sequence of successful large-scale attacks on isolated army units was broken toward the end of the decade when the Colombian military learned to combine air power with land forces to defeat FARC attempts to overwhelm local garrisons. Since then, the Colombians have used air-land synergies to prevent guerrilla concentrations. The ELN has never attained the capabilities to mount large-scale operations. Over the past several years, the organization came under pressure by FARC and paramilitary forces, which drove it from some of its strongholds; it is now concerned largely with survival.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2002, the strategic environment in Colombia has changed significantly as the result of two key developments. One was the successful counterinsurgency campaign of President Álvaro Uribe's government, which significantly weakened the FARC; the other was the demobilization of paramilitary formations. These trends have made possible the shift in Colombian government strategy from counterin-

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<sup>4</sup> Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, pp. 53–60; Rangel Suárez, *Colombia*, pp. 49–50.

<sup>5</sup> Angel Rabasa, Lesley Anne Warner, Peter Chalk, Ivan Khilko, and Paraag Shukla, *Money in the Bank—Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations: RAND Counterinsurgency Study—Paper 4*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-185-OSD, 2007, pp. 63–64.

surgency to the consolidation of state functions in areas recovered from armed nonstate actors.

## International and Transnational Actors

The Colombian conflict has, of course, an important international dimension. The contraction of the Colombian government's authority facilitated the spread of the activities of guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers to neighboring states. The border regions of Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela, and the Putumayo and Caquetá river systems of southern Colombia, which flow into the Amazon, are critical nodes in the Colombian narcotraffickers' and guerrillas' support structure.

The most important international actors are the United States, which has provided critical assistance to the Colombian government; Venezuela; and, to a lesser extent Ecuador, Panama, and Brazil. Cuba has facilitated discussions between the Colombian government and the ELN, and some European countries have extended economic assistance to Colombia. Spain, France and Switzerland have engaged in diplomatic efforts to secure the release of hostages held by the FARC. The FARC has international connections with sympathetic governments and political actors and with other violent groups.<sup>6</sup>

From fiscal year (FY) 2000, when Plan Colombia was inaugurated, to 2008, the United States provided over \$6 billion in support of Plan Colombia, the Colombian government's plan to reduce illicit drug production and reclaim control of areas held by illegal armed groups. Of this amount, nearly \$4.9 billion went to the Colombian military and police.<sup>7</sup> In the stabilization area, USAID's Office of Tran-

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, the FARC reportedly received assistance in bombmaking from IRA specialists. One of the IRA members arrested in Colombia in 2001, Neil Connolly, was the representative in Cuba of the Sinn Fein, IRA's political wing. Connolly was believed to have initiated contact with FARC through the Spanish terrorist group ETA. (Mark Burgess, "Globalizing Terrorism: The FARC-IRA Connection," CDI Terrorism Project, June 5, 2002.)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance," GAO-09-71, October 6, 2008.

sition Initiatives (OTI) plays a critical role in supporting Colombian government agencies involved in the consolidation of the state's presence in areas recovered from illegal nonstate actors.<sup>8</sup>

Venezuela has provided covert assistance to the FARC and its continued involvement may be critical to the FARC's survival. Venezuela's involvement with the FARC is discussed in the section entitled "External Powers Supporting Belligerents." The FARC also uses Ecuador's territory for logistics and support purposes. The FARC maintained logistical support bases in Panama in the 1990s and early 2000s, until the group was displaced from the Panamanian border region by the AUC. The FARC has also moved drugs through Brazil. Brazil, however, has cooperated with Colombia in maintaining border security. Recently, both countries signed an air border control agreement that in principle allows each party to go 50 miles into each other's airspace.<sup>9</sup>

## Strategy (Pre-Transition)

### Colombian Government Strategy

The Colombian government's Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security (PCSD) seeks to reestablish state control over the areas affected by the activities of illegal armed groups and drug traffickers. The policy has five strategic objectives broken down into 28 plans.<sup>10</sup> The core aim of the policy is to generate a virtuous cycle in which increased security produces confidence and stability, which in turn

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<sup>8</sup> USAID/OTI Colombia Field Report, October–December 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Colitt, "Brazil, Colombia Agree on Anti-Drug Border Defense," *Reuters*, March 12, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> The five strategic objectives are: (1) to consolidate territorial control and strengthen the rule of law across the entire national territory; (2) to protect the public and hold on to the strategic initiative against all threats to citizen security; (3) to drastically raise the cost of trafficking drugs in Colombia; (4) to keep the public security forces modern and effective, with a high level of legitimacy based on public confidence and support; and (5) to maintain the downward trend in all crime rates in the country's urban centers. Republic of Colombia, Ministry of National Defense, "PCSD: Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security," 2007, pp. 29–45.

creates an environment favorable to private investment and economic growth. Economic growth generates greater tax revenues, which permit investment in social development programs and meet the population's needs.<sup>11</sup>

To accomplish the goals of the PCSD, the Uribe government intensified the process of expanding and strengthening the Colombian security forces, which increased from 158,000 military and 104,000 police personnel in 2002 to 267,000 military and 137,000 police personnel in 2009, representing an overall increase of almost 50 percent. Largely through U.S. assistance, the Colombian armed forces were provided with enhanced mobility and intelligence capabilities. As a result, the Colombian armed forces have developed the capability to conduct operations in remote areas in a sustained manner and to hold areas previously controlled by the guerrillas. By 2004, the Colombian government was able to meet its goal of establishing a presence in every one of the country's 1,098 municipalities, a critical component of the territorial recovery strategy.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, through a combination of pressure and incentives, the AUC agreed to participate in a process of demobilization that has led to the deactivation of some 32,000 members of its armed formations and their support networks. (The legal framework for the demobilization of paramilitaries is the Peace and Justice Act, which sets eight-year ceilings on the prison terms of individuals found guilty of criminal offenses and provides for rehabilitation programs for the rank-and-file and restitution to victims.)<sup>13</sup> The process has been criticized as too lenient, but proponents of the program point out that a

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<sup>11</sup> "PSCD: Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security," pp. 17–18.

<sup>12</sup> República de Colombia, Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, "Todos los municipios del país tienen Policía," February 13, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Olga Martín-Ortega, "Human Rights, Demobilisation and the Paramilitaries: The Ley de Justicia y Paz in Colombia," paper prepared for the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, San Francisco, March 26–29 2008.

harsher regime would not create incentives for members of paramilitary groups to lay down their arms.<sup>14</sup>

The weakening of the FARC and the demobilization of the AUC generated, in the Colombian government's view, a new strategic scenario that requires a different strategy than the COIN-oriented strategy implemented under the first Uribe administration (2002–2006). As the threat posed by the FARC and other armed groups outside of the state's control receded, new security problems arose, in particular, the emergence of criminal bands linked to narcotraffickers in areas previously influenced by the paramilitaries. The Colombian government's initial goal of territorial control has now given way to what the Colombians call the "social recovery of territory." This refers to the reestablishment of the presence of state institutions through integrated state action in areas recovered from illegal armed actors.<sup>15</sup>

### **Insurgent Strategy**

Since its inception in the 1960s, the FARC has pursued a strategy of "protracted people's war," which was reaffirmed at the group's landmark Seventh Conference in 1982. The strategy, based on Maoist, Vietnamese, and Cuban precepts, involved gradually extending the organization's presence and control in the countryside and eventually isolating the government forces in the major cities. The final stage in the FARC's strategy was to be a move to large-scale offensive operations, culminating in a general uprising.<sup>16</sup> This strategy of territorial control is linked to the FARC's involvement in the cocaine drug trade, which generates

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<sup>14</sup> Proponents of the AUC demobilization program also note that critics do not demand equally harsh treatment of former militants with regard to demobilization of the FARC. This is because some critics consider the FARC to be a "political" group while the AUC is regarded as a purely criminal group. This is, of course, a very questionable distinction.

<sup>15</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>16</sup> The Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) pursued a similar three-stage strategy, culminating in the failed "Final Offensive" of November 1989. After the failure of the offensive, the FMLN concluded that there was no viable alternative to a political settlement.

much of the revenues that fund the organization's operations (the other main sources of funds are extortion and kidnappings).<sup>17</sup>

This strategy achieved its greatest successes in the second half of the 1990s, when the FARC was able to engage and defeat battalion-sized Colombian military forces, as mentioned above. In an interview published in *El Tiempo* on March 2, 1999, FARC leader Manuel Marulanda observed that, as the result of the FARC's military advances, the struggle had reached a new stage in which the Colombian government had been forced to agree to negotiations. Marulanda stated that the FARC would continue the struggle "until victory."<sup>18</sup>

Throughout the administration of Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002), the FARC pursued a dual approach of combining peace negotiations with offensive military operations. The FARC used the negotiations to consolidate and expand the territory under its control or influence and to seek to secure domestic and international legitimacy. The negotiation process also created real strategic and operational advantages for the FARC—particularly the FARC's ability to operate freely in the Switzerland-size "demilitarized zone" conceded by the government in southern Colombia to conduct the talks.<sup>19</sup> In the end, however, the FARC overplayed its hand. Through a combination of dilatory tactics in the negotiations and provocations—most notably the hijacking of an aircraft with Senator Jorge Gechem Turbay onboard in mid-February 2002, the FARC left the Pastrana government with no choice but to declare an end to the negotiations and reoccupy the demilitarized zone.<sup>20</sup>

The FARC also attempted, without success, to leverage a "humanitarian exchange" of hostages that it held to recreate a new "demilita-

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<sup>17</sup> The drug-insurgency link in Colombia has been well established. See the study by Ian Bannon and Paul Collier, eds., *Natural Resources and Violent Conflict: Options and Actions*, The World Bank, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> "Pastrana Desconoce Cómo Marchar Hacia Adelante," *El Tiempo*, Bogotá, March 1, 1999.

<sup>19</sup> See discussion of the history of Colombian peace negotiations in Rabasa and Chalk, *Colombian Labyrinth*, pp. 71–78.

<sup>20</sup> Camilo González Posso, "Negotiations with the FARC," Conciliation Resources, 2004.

alized zone.” In discussions in 2006 and 2007 pursuant to a proposal advanced by the governments of Spain, France, and Switzerland, the FARC demanded the temporary demilitarization of the municipalities of Florida and Pradera in the department of Valle de Cauca in southwestern Colombia for the purpose of exchanging a group of political hostages for approximately 500 imprisoned FARC fighters. However, the two sides did not agree on conditions for the release of the hostages. In August 2007, the Colombian government accepted Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s offer to mediate but terminated Chávez’s mediation three months later, when he ignored the rules set by the Colombian government.<sup>21</sup> The rescue or escape of many high-profile hostages over the past year has deprived the FARC of much of its leverage.<sup>22</sup>

The FARC is increasingly using Venezuela as a sanctuary. According to well-informed Colombian sources, 60 percent of the personnel of the Caribbean Bloc of the FARC are currently stationed in Venezuela. On the Venezuelan side of the border, the FARC maintains permanent camps with field hospitals.<sup>23</sup> Venezuelan sources say that FARC fighters move freely in the Venezuelan states of Barinas and Apure, where there has been a significant increase in kidnappings and other criminal activities.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> IKV Pax Christi, “Kidnapping Is a Booming Business,” July 2008, p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Most prominently, the rescue of former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and 14 others, including three Americans and 11 Colombian policemen and soldiers on July 2, 2008. Betancourt was the FARC’s most valuable hostage.

<sup>23</sup> Discussions with well-informed Colombian sources, Bogotá, March 2009. Arturo Rodríguez Ataya, a pilot captured by Colombian authorities in 2005, worked for the Ríos drug cartel and the FARC, transporting drugs and wounded guerrillas between Colombia and Venezuela. Rodríguez Ataya gave the coordinates of FARC bases in Venezuela and photographs of contacts with Venezuelan National Guard officers who provided arms to the FARC on instructions from Venezuelan military intelligence chief Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios. “Contactos de Chávez y Correa con las Farc no se limitan a los que figuran en computador de Reyes,” *Cambio*, Bogotá, August 9, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Discussions with well-informed Venezuelan sources, Caracas, March 2005; Giovanni Moreno Castro, “El conflicto colombiano: Expansión de sus protagonistas hacia las fronteras,” *Revista Arcanos*, No. 10.



### External Powers Supporting Belligerents

There is compelling evidence that individuals in Chávez's inner circle had been providing support to the FARC—ammunition, safe houses, documentation, and weapons, as well as political support. Until his capture by Colombian agents (or “kidnapping,” according to the Venezuelan authorities, by bounty hunters who stuffed him into the trunk of a car and drove across the border to Colombia) in February 2005, FARC “foreign minister” Rodrigo Granda was living openly in Caracas with Venezuelan identity papers. Several members of the FARC Secretariat are believed to be living in Venezuela, including Ivan Márquez, who is charged of the FARC's relations with Chávez, and Timoleón Jiménez, aka “Timochenko.” In addition, Chávez is believed to have provided thousands of Colombians, including many FARC members, with Venezuelan identity papers.<sup>25</sup>

Documents recovered from the laptops of Raul Reyes, the FARC's second in command, killed in a Colombian raid on his camp on the Ecuadoran side of the border on March 1, 2008, reveal close strategic coordination between Chávez and the FARC. There are references in the captured documents to the “300,” also called the “dossier,” which appears to refer to a \$300 million donation by Chávez to the FARC, and discussion of business deals to be undertaken with the money.<sup>26</sup>

One message from Ivan Márquez found in Reyes's computer files describes the FARC's plan to buy surface-to-air missiles, sniper rifles, and radios in Venezuela. Márquez wrote that the effort was facilitated by General Henry Rangel Silva, the head of DISIP, the Venezuelan intelligence service until July 2009, and Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, a former interior minister who served as Chávez's emissary to the FARC

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<sup>25</sup> Jens Glüsing, “How Hugo Chavez Courted FARC,” *Spiegel Online International*, June 4, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> One of the deals discussed was an oil allotment from Venezuela to the FARC to sell outside the country. Another was the sale of gasoline in Venezuela or Colombia, or setting up a company in Venezuela with the possibility of obtaining government contracts. “A letter from commanders Iván and Ricardo to the Secretariat dated February 8, 2008,” cited in Douglas Farah, “What the FARC Papers Show Us About Latin American Terrorism,” NEFA Foundation, April 1, 2008.

in the negotiations to gain the release of hostages.<sup>27</sup> In July 2009, the Colombian military captured five Swedish Saab AB AT-4 85mm anti-tank weapons, which had been sold to the Venezuelan army, in a FARC camp.<sup>28</sup>

The captured FARC documents also reveal close contacts between the FARC and senior officials in the government of Ecuadoran president Rafael Correa, including a meeting between Reyes and Ecuador's then Internal Security Minister Gustavo Larrea.<sup>29</sup> In a videotape captured by the Colombian army in a FARC camp, Jorge Briceño, aka "Mono Jojoy," the commander of the FARC's Eastern Bloc and the most important FARC field commander, confirmed that the FARC contributed to Correa's electoral campaign.<sup>30</sup> (Mono Jojoy was killed in a strike on his camp by Colombian forces in September 2010.) Documents found in the computer captured from another FARC figure, Gustavo Arbeláez, alias "Santiago" indicate that the Sandinista government of Nicaragua was involved in providing arms and explosives to the FARC.<sup>31</sup>

### Key Strengths and Weaknesses of the Strategies

The FARC is one of the longest-lasting insurgencies in the world. Over a period of 40 years, the FARC and the smaller Marxist guerrilla group ELN have survived efforts by the Colombian military to eradicate them. The FARC's longevity is due to a variety of factors, including stable leadership (the FARC's commander Marulanda led the group

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Romero, "Venezuela Still Aids Colombia Rebels, New Material Shows," *New York Times*, August 3, 2009. The U.S. Treasury froze the assets of Rangel Silva and Rodríguez Chacín, as well as those of a third Chávez associate, Director of Military Intelligence Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, for materially assisting the FARC's narcotics trafficking. U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Supporting the FARC," HP-1132, September 12, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> Maite Rico, "Turbulencias en la región andina," *El País* (Madrid), August 3, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> "A letter from Raul Reyes to Secretariat dated January 18, 2008," cited in Farah, "What the FARC Papers Show Us."

<sup>30</sup> The tape is at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_dCRhwhsvk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_dCRhwhsvk). It was made available by the Colombian government to the Organization of American States and Interpol.

<sup>31</sup> José Adán Silva, "Ejército manipulado," *El Nuevo Diario* (Managua), November 9, 2008.

in various capacities from its founding in the 1960s until his death in March 2008); strategic flexibility; exploitation of Colombia's poorly controlled borders; and, more important, its linkage to the illegal drug trade, which provides it with an estimated annual income of between \$200 million and \$400 million.<sup>32</sup>

Although income from the drug trade was a critical factor in the FARC's ability to carry out and expand its operations in the 1980s and 1990s, the linkage with the drug trade was also a significant weakness. Involvement in the drug trade produced a loss of ideological cohesion, as some of the commanders became more interested in profits from the drug trade than in advancing the organization's politico-military agenda. This connection, in fact, led many to consider the FARC as largely a criminal, rather than political organization. It also resulted in a loss of domestic and international support and probably doomed the FARC's efforts to gain international recognition as a legitimate party to a civil conflict.

From a strategic perspective, the FARC's inability to execute the transition called for in the group's strategy from small-unit to large-scale (battalion-size) operations or to sustain attacks on strategic centers in Colombia's populated heartland signaled the failure of its grand strategy.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, despite strategic failure and (from the FARC's perspective) a deteriorating politico-military environment, the FARC derives strength, as noted above, from its connections to Venezuela and to other governments that share Chávez's regional agenda and hostility to the Colombian government. The ability of these governments to support the FARC has been compromised by the revelations in the

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<sup>32</sup> The FARC's involvement in the illegal drug trade has been extensively documented and includes the participation of high-level FARC leaders. According to the captured Reyes documents, Reyes negotiated directly with an associate of the notorious drug lord Juan Carlos Ramírez Abadía, aka "Chupeta," who was arrested in Sao Paulo, Brazil in August 2007. Reyes wrote that Chupeta pocketed \$15,000 (€9,680) per kilo of cocaine smuggled to Europe, where the market price is \$30,000 (€19,360) per kilo. Glüsing, "How Hugo Chavez Courted FARC," 2008.

<sup>33</sup> The strengths and weaknesses of the Colombian government and FARC strategies are analyzed in the section on Colombia in the RAND study *Money in the Bank: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations*, 2007.

captured Reyes documents, but covert support for the FARC on the part of these governments is likely to continue. Such support could enable the FARC to survive, but it is unlikely to transform the balance of forces in Colombia, in view of the impressive strengths displayed by the Colombian government.

The main strength of the Colombian government is its democratic character and popular and competent leadership. Despite imperfections, Colombia has one of the longest records of elected civilian governance on the continent. Colombia has managed free and competitive elections and peaceful transfers of power despite chronic political violence and an escalating insurgency in the 1990s. President Uribe was regarded as a strong and competent leader and has enjoyed unprecedented approval rates of over 70 percent for sustained periods of time. A poll released in February 2011 indicated that Uribe's successor, Juan Manuel Santos, had an approval rate of 86 percent after six months in office.<sup>34</sup>

Another factor was sustained U.S. support. U.S. military assistance was extended with a minimal footprint and, of course, without the involvement of U.S. military personnel in combat operations. The United States provided critical equipment, training, and logistical and intelligence support to the Colombian forces.

A key strength is the Colombian government's successful adjustment to the FARC's strategy and tactics. New operational and tactical approaches have enabled the Colombian armed forces to take the strategic initiative away from the FARC, while the seize-and-hold strategy has substantially increased the territory under government control and driven the FARC away from the country's populated heartland.

Despite notable advances over the past several years, there are weaknesses in the Colombian institutional and military structures that could be exploited by the FARC if the Colombian government's current efforts falter. One potential risk is the transition from the Uribe to the Santos presidency. Uribe's leadership was instrumental in energizing the Colombian government's response to the FARC threat and in reestablishing government control over much of Colombia's disputed

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<sup>34</sup> "Santos' Approval Rating at 86%," *Colombia Reports*, February 8, 2011.

areas. As minister of defense, Santos was a key player in the Colombian counterinsurgency effort and has continued the Uribe administration's consolidation strategy, but it is too soon to know whether the effort will be sustained. Second, despite the impressive progress made by government forces in reducing the FARC's military strength and command and control capabilities, the FARC remains a threat. Moreover, the FARC is likely to remain a viable organization as long as it maintains a significant presence and influence in the border regions as well as its sanctuaries in Venezuela. Third, the persistence of criminal networks constitutes a major and growing security challenge to the Colombian government. Finally, it is too early to tell what will be the impact of the reduction in U.S. assistance under Plan Colombia on the Colombian government's ability to maintain the tempo of its counterinsurgency campaign.

### **How the Parties Define "Victory"**

For the FARC, the definition of victory historically has meant the overthrow of the established political order in Colombia and its replacement with a socialist state. Realistically, the FARC leadership is aware that near-term military victory is not possible. In fact, at this stage the organization's main concern is survival. The FARC near-term political goal is to achieve international legitimacy and recognition as a belligerent party in a civil conflict with the Colombian government.<sup>35</sup> This is why the FARC has always insisted on international participation in so-called "humanitarian exchanges" of prisoners. A return to the level of recognition that the FARC enjoyed during the negotiations with the Pastrana government is probably the best that the FARC could realistically attain under current circumstances.

From the Colombian government's perspective, as stated by a senior Colombian commander at a conference in Bogotá in March 2009, victory should be irreversible, sustainable, and unquestioned, in

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<sup>35</sup> In international law, belligerency is the status of parties legally at war. Belligerency prescribes rights and obligations in accordance with the laws of war. The Colombian state has always refused to acknowledge the FARC's belligerency.

terms of both means and ends.<sup>36</sup> For Colombian governments, going back to the first negotiations with the FARC in the 1980s, an acceptable end to the conflict is defined in terms of the FARC's agreement to disarm and to participate as a normal political actor in the Colombian political process.<sup>37</sup>

## The Transition Period

The transition period in Colombia, defined as the transition from counterinsurgency to securing stability, has begun to occur in certain parts of the country since about 2007. The beginning of this transition came about as the result of a change in the strategic environment in Colombia that began in 2002, when the outgoing Pastrana administration declared an end to the demilitarized zone in southern Colombia that the FARC has been allowed to occupy during three years of peace negotiations. It should be noted, as described later in this report that the Colombians consider that counterinsurgency and stability operations need to occur simultaneously in different regions, depending on the conditions in each region.

President Uribe, elected in May 2002, inaugurated a more aggressive counterinsurgency strategy—the Democratic Defense and Security Policy and its military component, Plan Patriota—that sought to expand the presence of the state throughout the country and protect the population. Since then, the Colombian military has made significant headway in increasing the scope and pace of counterinsurgency operations, improving training, tactics, and interservice cooperation, and disrupting the guerrillas' infrastructure and support networks. Because of this progress, the Democratic Defense and Security Policy

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<sup>36</sup> Discussion at Conference on Contemporary Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency: The Colombian Experience, Bogotá, Colombia, March 30–April 2, 2009.

<sup>37</sup> A precedent could be the agreement that the government of President Virgilio Barco reached with an armed Marxist group, the M-19, in 1989. At the time the M-19 was the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia, after the FARC. The M-19 renounced armed struggle in exchange for an amnesty and guarantees of participation in the political process and became a political party, the *Allianza Democrática M-19* or AD/M-19.

was superseded by the Policy for the Consolidation of Democratic Security.

Since March 2008 there are indications that the FARC may be headed for strategic defeat. March 2008 witnessed the demise of three of the seven members of the Secretariat, the FARC's highest decision-making body: Luis Edgar Devia Silva, alias Raúl Reyes, the organization's second in command, was killed in a March 1 Colombian raid on his camp on the Ecuadoran side of the border. Iván Ríos was killed by one of his own bodyguard in order to collect a reward from the Colombian government. On March 26, 2008, the FARC confirmed the death of its leader, Manuel Marulanda Vélez, aka "Tirofijo." According to the FARC, Marulanda died of a heart attack, although Colombian officials have suggested a connection between Marulanda's demise and heavy bombing raids in the area where he was located about the time that he died.<sup>38</sup> On September 23, 2010, the FARC's leading strategist, Jorge Briceño, known by his nickname "Mono Jojoy," commander of the FARC's largest force, the Eastern Bloc, was killed in a large-scale military operation that targeted his camp in eastern Colombia.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, a record number of FARC combatants have been captured or have deserted, including some senior commanders. Among these was Nelly Avila Moreno, the one-eyed female commander known as Katrina, who had been with the FARC for 24 years and was the commander of the 47th front of the FARC in Antioquia when she surrendered in May 2008. Gustavo Arbeláez, alias Santiago, said to be the commander of the Manuel Cepeda Vargas urban front, was captured in the Pacific coast port of Buenaventura. José Márvel Zamora, also known as "Chucho" or "The Professor," a member of the inner circle of Jorge Briceño, was captured in the central department of Tolima in October 2008.

The overall strength of the organization has declined from between 15,000–20,000 fighters in 2000 to an estimated 7,000–9,000

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos, in "Tirofijo está muerto," *Semana* (Colombia), May 24, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> "Santos Congratulates Armed Forces on Death of 'Mono Jojoy,'" *Colombia Reports*, September 23, 2010.

today. At its peak the FARC was organized in some 70 fronts. Over the past two years, several of the most important fronts have been severely weakened or dismantled. The morale problems in the FARC are illustrated by the fact that in order to maintain discipline, some FARC commanders have resorted to large-scale executions.<sup>40</sup>

From a counterinsurgency perspective, the most significant development has been the collapse of the FARC's command and control structure. This was manifested in Operación Jaque (Operation Check), the rescue of Ingrid Betancourt and fourteen other hostages in July 2008. The operation succeeded entirely through deception. No violence was employed. The Colombian military personnel that impersonated an international NGO squad were unarmed. The operation succeeded only because the commanders of the group that was holding the hostages were unable to verify the presumed instruction from the FARC central command to transport the hostages to a meeting with Alfonso Cano, the new FARC commander.<sup>41</sup>

More than anything else, this dramatic episode illustrates the inability of the FARC Secretariat to communicate with its units in the field. And this has very profound consequences. If the central leadership cannot exercise command and control, it cannot pursue a coherent strategy. Moreover, loss of command and control accelerates centrifugal tendencies within the FARC. The FARC has never been a monolithic organization, because of the difficulties, even in the best of circumstances, to communicate and control operations across the vast expanses of Colombia's territory. Now with the selection of Alfonso Cano, a man who falls far short of Marulanda's prestige and authority, as head of the Secretariat, the FARC is likely to become more factionalized, with local commanders pursuing their own agenda.

### **Managing the Transition**

The Colombian government's focus has shifted from COIN to what the Colombians call "social recovery of territory," which means the coordination and reestablishment of a state presence in areas that have

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<sup>40</sup> Discussions with Colombian defense officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>41</sup> See Juan Carlos Torres, *Operación Jaque: La Verdadera Historia*, Bogotá: Planeta, 2009.



been, or are being cleared of guerrillas. The central elements of the analysis underlying the new strategy include: threats to democracy, the adaptation of irregular armed actors to the new strategic scenario, how the civil population is affected and the institutional capacity of the Colombian state. The goal is a coordinated, progressive, and irreversible process, which guarantees a sustainable environment of peace and security, allowing for the strengthening of democratic institutions and the free exercise of civil rights and human development for all of Colombia's citizens.<sup>42</sup>

The challenges in implementing this effort are in some ways more complex than the COIN campaign itself. The effort requires identifying priority areas, assessing costs and benefits, defining common purposes in the interagency process, and establishing a structure of coordination and mechanisms of control and accountability.

The concept for the Colombian post-COIN approach was developed as a course project by the members the Colombian Higher War College (*Escuela Superior de Guerra*) 2003 National Security Course (CIDENAL). The project responded to a concern of the military about how to extend the reach of the state to territories that the state had never reached before. The concept was to create a structure to coordinate state action in prioritized conflict areas where the military was advancing. When President Uribe received the proposal from the Ministry of Defense, he asked the U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) for help in mounting a strategy. As a result, the Center for Coordinated Integrated Action (CCAI) was established on May 10, 2004.<sup>43</sup>

### **Institutional Framework: Theory and Practice**

The CCAI was organized as a matrix of delegates of ministries and state agencies linked to the initiative. Each agency appointed a delegate who was the liaison with the delegate's home ministry or agency,

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<sup>42</sup> República de Colombia, Presidencia, Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCAI) Briefing, Sustainable Consolidation, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March/April 2009. One of the discussants was a participant in the 2003 CIDENAL course.

to ensure responsiveness by the ministry or agency.<sup>44</sup> The permanent members of the CCAI are shown in Figure 3.1.

In the Colombian government structure, the CCAI was placed under the Presidential Agency for Social Action and International Cooperation (*Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional*), known for short as Acción Social.<sup>45</sup> This agency is located in the Office of the Presidency and is responsible for coordinating domestic and international social development programs. Figure 3.2 shows the structure of the CCAI.

In addition, a number of state agencies are linked to, but not institutionally part of, the CCAI. These include the High Council for Reintegration, the Agricultural Bank, the Colombian Institute for Rural Development (INCODER), The Higher Council of the Judiciary, the National Ombudsman, the National Department of Planning, the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), the Energy Solutions Planning Institute (IPSE), the Department of Environment, Dwelling and Territorial Development, the Department of Communications, the Department of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, the Department of

**Figure 3.1**  
**Membership of the CCAI**

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• Acción Social (Office of the Presidency)	• Department of National Education
• Colombian Institute for Sports (Coldeportes)	• Department of Social Protection
• General Command of Military Forces	• Department of the Interior and Justice
• Office of the Attorney General	• Office of the High Commissioner for Peace
• Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF)	• National Police
• Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	• National Registry of Civil Status
• Department of National Defense	• National Service for Learning (SENA)

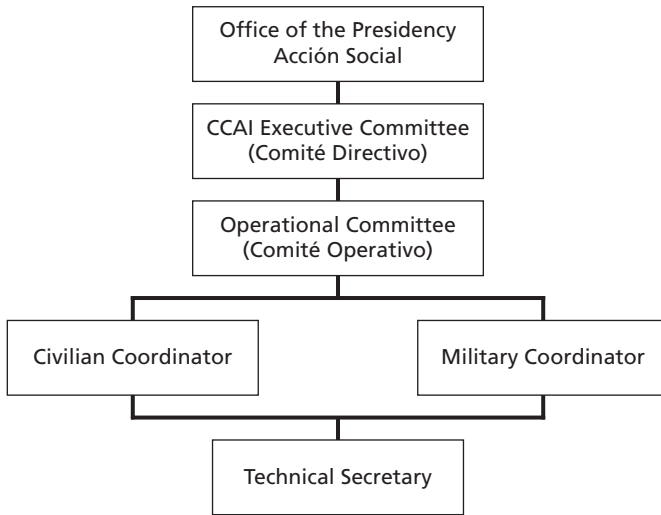
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<sup>44</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March/April 2009.

<sup>45</sup> See Acción Social web site.

**Figure 3.2**  
**Structure of the CCAI**



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Culture, and the Department of Mines and Energy.<sup>46</sup> In summary, the concept involves integrating and institutionalizing the activities of all relevant government agencies to support the stabilization effort.

At the ground level, in every CCAI zone there is a *padrino* (literally, godfather), a person appointed to coordinate all state activities in the zone and to generate responses. The *padrino* can be a delegate of a state agency or a contractor. In theory, each *padrino* is expected to have a strategic plan for his zone. In practice, according to an informed observer, one person in charge of a region with a complex set of problems cannot do everything. To develop a strategic plan, a team of specialists is needed, as well as operational support. In the view of this observer, the CCAI ended up as a facilitator for specific activities that did not reach the level of strategic plans. For instance, the *jornadas médicas*, where medical personnel were brought in for a day or two to

<sup>46</sup> Republic of Colombia, Acción Social, “Contemporary Anti-Terrorism: The Colombian Experience,” briefing, April 1, 2009.

provide services to the local population, have been very successful, but they represent a transitory presence of the state in the consolidation areas, while what is needed is a permanent presence.<sup>47</sup>

Also, while in theory the delegates to the CCAI should be high-ranking officials in their agencies, in practice, these agencies have delegated the responsibilities to individuals who do not have the authority to commit their agencies to support the CCAI's work. In short, the theoretical framework for integrated action is good, but there were failures of implementation of the concept of *padrinos* and at the level of the delegates of state entities to the CCAI central body.<sup>48</sup>

## Stages of Transition

According to the Colombian strategic plan, the transition process is to be implemented sequentially: (1) territorial control; (2) stabilization or transition; and (3) consolidation. In each of these phases there is an effort to coordinate the work of state agencies to achieve the desired result, but with a different mix of efforts.<sup>49</sup> As Figure 3.3 shows, in the phase of military operations, the main effort is by the military (blue line) and is focused on establishing territorial security. As the process moves to the second stage, transition, the military effort lessens, and the police and judicial system effort (green line), focused on providing protection to citizens and the economic, social and institutional development effort (orange line) increase. In the last phase, consolidation, the police and development efforts predominate.

The first phase involves establishing territorial control over security recovery zones. These are areas where illegal armed groups are still present. The priority in these areas is to neutralize the threat posed by these groups, regain control of territory, and protect the population. In the absence of basic security, measures to promote economic, social, and

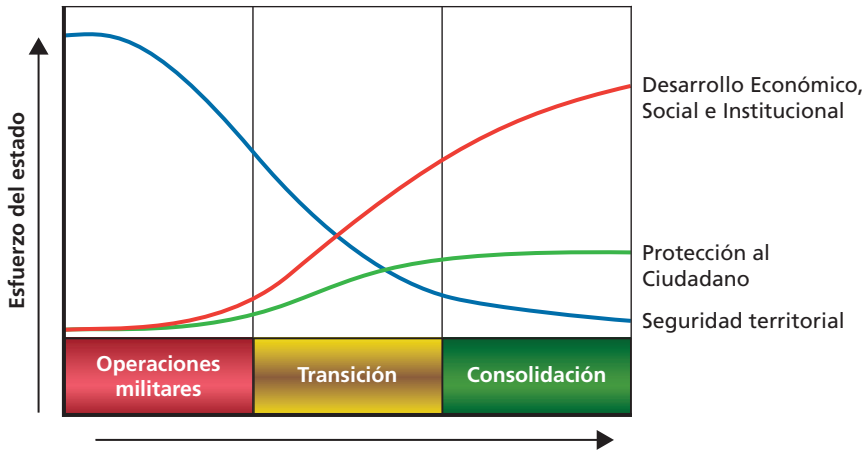
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<sup>47</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March/April 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Discussions with U.S. and Colombian officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Republic of Colombia, "PCSD," 2007.

**Figure 3.3**  
**Composition of State Efforts in the Three Phases of the Transition Process**



SOURCE: Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCAI), "Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena," Bogotá, August 2008.

RAND MG1111/2-3.4

institutional development are not effective and could even be counterproductive if insurgents or criminals are able to capture the resources allocated by the government to economic and social programs. As the FARC fronts are pushed out, however, and the FARC's militia structure (through which the FARC enforces day-to-day control) dissolves, people become more willing to cooperate with the authorities. At this point, the transition stage begins.<sup>50</sup>

Transition zones are those where the security forces have been able to neutralize the operational capability of illegal armed groups but where these groups maintain logistical support and information networks. To consolidate control of these areas, the government needs to gain the support of the population. Consequently, the priorities are to reestablish law enforcement institutions, primarily the police and the judicial system, and to meet the basic needs of the population in the transition from an illicit, drug-based economy to a legal economy. In

<sup>50</sup> Briefing, Fusion Center, Vista Hermosa, Colombia, March 2009.

this stage, the government begins to create the conditions for economic and social development with infrastructure projects (roads and communications), technical support and access to credit, and basic social services (education, health, and sanitation).<sup>51</sup>

A major challenge is responding rapidly to the economic dislocation generated by the eradication of coca crops. When coca disappears, there is a need to make up the income that farmers previously received from coca. Colombian officials decry the “mistaken view” of thinking about counterdrug operations only in terms of crops eradicated. Something needs to be done for those previously engaged in coca cultivation. The Colombian response is in three parts:

In the short term, emergency food aid is provided. Packages of basic commodities are distributed to families every 15 days over a 3–4 month period. The government tries to deliver the aid as soon as possible after the coca crops are eradicated.

In the medium term, the government provides help to farmers to grow subsistence crops, with a yield expected in 3–4 months. The government provides seeds, fertilizers, technical assistance for production and marketing of corn and beans, and for improvement of pastures.

Over the long term, the government’s expectation is that farmers will move to a credit-based commercial agriculture, producing crops such as cocoa, rubber, sugar cane and soybeans.<sup>52</sup>

Consolidation zones are areas that have been cleared of antistate actors. In these areas, the main task is to reestablish the presence of state institutions and create the conditions for sustained economic, social, and institutional development. Priorities for state action include the following:

- *Strengthening local governance and encouraging citizen participation.* One of the preconditions of successful consolidation is to

<sup>51</sup> Briefing, Fusion Center.

<sup>52</sup> Republic of Colombia, “PCSD”; Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCAI), “Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena,” 2008; discussions with Colombian officials involved in implementation of the Colombian government’s stabilization plan, Bogotá, Colombia, March/April 2009.

enable municipal authorities to govern effectively and provide services to the citizenry.

- *Clarifying property rights.* This is a significant problem in areas that have experienced large population displacement, such as Montes de María (see below). In a strategic consolidation zone, La Macarena, there is the additional problem that over half the area encompasses three national parks of high environmental value that were invaded by squatters during the period of FARC predominance. One of the goals of the consolidation effort in La Macarena is to return these areas to their original condition as national parks by relocating the illegal settlers in lands appropriate for cultivation.
- *Building basic infrastructure, especially secondary and tertiary roads.* This will help farmers bring their crops to market, as well as electricity and telecommunications. Many of the territories recovered from the FARC and other illegal actors were isolated from the rest of the country. Connecting them to the national infrastructure network is key both to consolidating state control and to generating economic and social development.
- *Providing education, health and social security services.* The education, health and social security levels in consolidation areas are generally much lower than those of the country at large. The goal of the consolidation effort is to bring these areas to the national average or to narrow the gap as much as possible.
- *Promoting economic development.* In promoting economic development, the government takes a market-oriented approach. Emphasis is placed on giving small and medium-sized producers access to credit and technical support so that they can benefit from the opportunities created by the process of institutional consolidation in these areas.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> CCAI, “Plan de Consolidación Integral de la Macarena.”

### **Implementation: What Is the Actual Experience of the Colombian Transition?**

The Colombian post-COIN plan has been implemented or is being implemented in three areas: (1) the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, a mountain range along Colombia's northeastern coast inhabited by indigenous peoples—the Kogi, Arhuaco, and Wiwa; (2) La Macarena, an area that was formerly part of the demilitarized zone controlled by the FARC; and (3) Montes de María, an area near Colombia's Caribbean coast that was heavily contested by the FARC and paramilitaries. There are also plans to extend the plan to other regions such as eastern Antioquia, the Pacific coast, the central cordillera of the Andes (southern Tolima and Valle de Cauca) and the Caguán river basin.<sup>54</sup>

**Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.** This is the most successful CCAI project. First, the problem was correctly identified: The local indigenous people were vulnerable to penetration by illegal armed groups into their lands. Together with the indigenous communities, the government formulated a plan to establish townships on strategic points that controlled access to the zone. The government financed the construction of the housing in the townships (which followed traditional forms, but with better conveniences), clinics, and other facilities. The indigenous people preferred not to have police stationed in their townships. Rather, they rely on social pressure to keep the illegal armed groups out.<sup>55</sup>

Two other factors contributed to security in the absence of state security forces: (1) the eradication of coca cultivation, which removed an incentive for illegal armed groups to move in; and (2) increased military pressure on illegal armed groups in the surrounding region, which has significantly reduced the threat from these groups. So far the system has worked well. However, it remains to be seen whether

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<sup>54</sup> Republic of Colombia, Acción Social, briefing.

<sup>55</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in the implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March 2009.



the social control structure is strong enough to keep out illegal armed groups permanently, especially if there is a return to coca cultivation.<sup>56</sup>

**La Macarena.** What happens in La Macarena could determine the future of Colombia's post-COIN experiment. From the point of view of the FARC, La Macarena has high strategic and operational value. The La Macarena region is composed of five *municipios* in the departments of Meta and Caquetá in southern Colombia (La Macarena, Mesetas, San La Uribe, Vista Hermosa, San Juan de Arama, and Puerto Rico). The region sits astride what in the FARC's heyday were the group's main logistic and mobility corridors and produced a large part of the coca that funded the FARC's operations. In addition, La Macarena has symbolic importance as a historic stronghold of the FARC (some 100,000 people were under FARC control at one point) and, as the headquarters of the FARC's Eastern Bloc, is its strongest military component.<sup>57</sup>

The Colombian government's decision to focus its efforts on recovery of La Macarena was informed by a number of considerations: the weakening of the FARC, the good prospects for consolidation within a reasonable period of time, and the availability of reconstruction funding from a variety of sources (Plan Colombia, the Colombian government's Acción Social funding, and international donors). In addition, the Colombian government sees La Macarena as a template for other social recovery efforts in other regions.<sup>58</sup>

The consolidation plan for La Macarena differed from the CCAI template in that it was decided that that the *padrino* was not adequate. Instead, a coordination team was established to manage the transition, composed of a civilian manager (*gerente civil*), a military coordinator, and a police coordinator. These officials operate out of a Fusion Center (*Centro de Fusión Integral*) established in the town of Vista Hermosa. The civilian manager has a team of coordinators responsible for six functional areas: property rights, institutional development,

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<sup>56</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in the implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Briefing, Fusion Center.

<sup>58</sup> Briefing, Fusion Center.

infrastructure and connectivity, social development, economic development, and transition initiatives (which refer to facilitating the transition from a drug economy to a legal economy). The military coordinator interacts with local military units to provide security for civilian teams and logistics (transportation of personnel and materials). The police coordinator is the liaison with the police. The plan is that the police should be phased in gradually, as the military clear the area of guerrillas. There are police contingents in the main towns of all six *municipios* that together constitute the zone of La Macarena.<sup>59</sup>

**Montes de María.** Unlike the zone of La Macarena, Montes de María was never a significant coca producing area, but in previous years it had strategic importance as a corridor for the transport of drugs to the Caribbean coast. In addition, the important Caño Limón–Coveñas oil pipeline and two major highways from Bogotá to the coast traverse the region, which allowed irregulars in the area to extort payments. In the 1990s and early 2000s, two FARC fronts, ELN guerrillas, and paramilitary forces heavily contested the area. There were some notorious paramilitary massacres of civilians in the villages of Chengue and El Salado, which caused significant population displacements.

The killing of Martín Caballero, the FARC kingpin in northern Colombia, in an air strike in October 2007, and the subsequent disbanding of his forces, together with the demobilization of the paramilitaries, marked an end to the violence in the region. The government priority now is to facilitate the return of displaced persons and to consolidate the post-violence environment. The initial strategy was to establish control of territory by permanently stationing troops and police in all of the *municipios*. Civilian agencies are to be gradually introduced.<sup>60</sup>

An indicator of the improvements in security and in the economic prospects of the area is that a hectare of land in the locality of Chengue,

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<sup>59</sup> Discussions with Colombian officials involved in the implementation of the Colombian government's stabilization plan, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>60</sup> The author visited the town of Chengue in March 2009. Now that security has been established, the population is gradually returning, but it has not yet reached the pre-massacre level.

which was going for 100,000–200,000 pesos (US \$52–\$104)<sup>61</sup> in June 2007, was selling at 2 to 3 million pesos (US \$780–\$1170) as of March 2009, over a tenfold increase in price.<sup>62</sup> This, in turn, has created a potential social problem, because of the temptation for small landholders to sell their land rights to outsiders for ready cash.<sup>63</sup>

From the military's perspective, gaining the trust and support of the population is the key to the transition process. This requires providing social services to the community. However, in Montes de María the civilian agencies have not been adequate to the task. The military does not want to do the work of the civil authorities, but it is clear from observations made during a trip to the region in the spring of 2009 that the military, the Colombian Navy and Marines in particular (the First Marine Brigade has responsibility for the area) are doing the heavy lifting in trying to bring economic and social development to the region. For instance, the Colombian Navy has flown in executives from Colombian food processing and distribution industries to arrange for planting and marketing of cocoa and avocados, and military engineers are improving roads to bring agricultural products to market. From an institution-building standpoint, the Marines have promoted community organizing and arranged workshops for community leaders.<sup>64</sup>

The Colombian strategic consolidation plan contemplates extending the process to other priority areas, as shown in Figure 3.4. Aside from (1) the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, (2) La Macarena, and (3) Montes de María, discussed above, the Colombian government has consolidation projects under way or in the planning stage in the following priority areas: (4) the Caguán river basin, (5) the Zona Sur in western Guaviare, and (6) Putumayo. These are areas in the south of

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<sup>61</sup> The exchange rate was 1,925.5 pesos per dollar in June 2007.

<sup>62</sup> The exchange rate was 2,561.21 pesos per dollar in March 2009.

<sup>63</sup> Clarification of property rights is a major challenge in consolidation. Usually, small landholders do not have titles to the land. What they have is a legal document that certifies that they have been in possession of the land, which confers certain rights. Without titles, however, they cannot gain access to credit.

<sup>64</sup> This discussion of Montes de María is based on a field trip to the region and discussions with Colombian military officials involved in the transition process there, March 2009.

**Figure 3.4**  
**Consolidation Regions**



SOURCE: Based on República de Colombia, Presidencia, Centro de Coordinación de Acción Integral (CCA) Briefing, Sustainable Consolidation, 2009.

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Colombia that in the past were FARC strongholds and now constitute the focus of the Colombian government's counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts. On the Pacific coast, the priority areas are (7) Nariño, (8) Cauca and Valle de Cauca, (10) the lower and middle Atrato river basin, and (11) the south of Chocó. These areas play an important role in the smuggling of illegal drugs via the Pacific route. (9) The central cordillera in the south of Tolima and Valle de Cauca, and (12) the south of Córdoba, and (13) eastern Antioquia are also priority areas, as are (14) Catacumbo and (15) Arauca, near the Venezuelan border.

## Gaps

The main gaps in the transition capabilities of both the Colombian government and its principal supporting state, the United States, relate to resources. The CCAI does not have its own budget and relies on other government agencies and international aid for funding and personnel. Moreover, the consolidation project is resource-intensive and some officials involved in the project are pessimistic that the Colombian government can muster enough resources to replicate the Macarena experiment in other regions. The same is true on the U.S. side. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives has played a critical role in assisting the Colombian government's consolidation initiatives by hiring key staff to manage logistics for the civilian elements of the consolidation plan and helping to develop a communications strategy for the consolidation effort. OTI funds small-scale community-infrastructure projects and quick-impact, small-scale income-generating activities to increase citizen confidence in the state's commitment and ability to resolve pressing needs. OTI activities in Colombia, however, were scheduled to be terminated in mid-2010.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> USAID/OTI Colombia Field Report, October–December 2008.

## Conclusions

### Assessment of Colombian Transition Plan

The effectiveness of the Colombian government's program of social recovery of territory is measured in terms of four indicators:

1. Indicators of violence. The extent to which these indicators (for instance, number of homicides, kidnappings, and terrorist attacks) decrease to the national average.
2. Social indicators rise to the national average.
3. Economic development strengthens.
4. Governance strengthens.
5. With regard to the last two indicators, the Colombian authorities do not believe that it is reasonable to expect that previously "ungoverned territories" can rapidly reach the level of economic development and governance of the rest of the country, but the expectation is that there can be measurable improvements in these areas.<sup>66</sup>

From an outside perspective, the Colombian transition plan is very solid. It has been successfully implemented in La Macarena. The military has been successful in clearing and holding the ground. There is a police presence in the towns. Illegal crop eradication is proceeding. Civilian agencies are providing services to the population, although their presence is not as robust as it could be. Some agencies are very strongly committed: for instance, the National Institute of Roads (INVIAS), the Electric Power Enterprise (ENSA), and some offices in the Ministry of Agriculture. On the other hand, according to well-informed sources, the ministries of Education, Health, and Justice are not seriously engaged.<sup>67</sup>

The plan is working in La Macarena because of two factors: the permanent presence of the security forces and the population's belief

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<sup>66</sup> Discussion at Conference on Contemporary Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency: The Colombian Experience, Bogotá, Colombia, March 30–April 2, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Discussions with U.S. and Colombian officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

that the civilian agencies will respond to its needs (and these agencies are indeed responding to some extent). The strong support of the Ministry of Defense and the military for the consolidation plan has been key to its success. In theory, civilians should be in charge of the process once security has been established, but the military have assumed the leadership of this effort by default. The challenge in La Macarena—and elsewhere in Colombia—is to motivate some of the civilian agencies to become more actively engaged.<sup>68</sup>

### **Prospects for the Future**

The success of the Colombian state consolidation project—and the future post-COIN environment—will be affected by a variety of factors. One is the change of leadership in Colombia from President Uribe to President Santos. As noted above, the success of the Colombian counterinsurgency effort was due to a large extent to Uribe's leadership and the high levels of support that he enjoyed throughout his presidency. President Santos' challenge is to maintain political support and commitment to the state consolidation effort.

External support will also likely continue to diminish. U.S. assistance to the Colombian military and police has been declining from \$591.1 million in FY 2007 to \$268.055 million in FY 2010 (Administration request) and is expected to continue to decline. The decline in U.S. military and police assistance will impose painful choices on the Colombians. Moreover, as noted above, USAID/OTI assistance to the consolidation program is scheduled to terminate in 2010. The critical question is whether Colombia will be able to compensate for the declining levels of U.S. assistance with national funds.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Discussions with U.S. and Colombian officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

<sup>69</sup> Discussions with U.S. and Colombian officials, Bogotá, March 2009.

## **What Capabilities Does the United States Need to Have or Need to Develop?**

The United States is not engaged in kinetic operations in Colombia. Its indirect approach to Colombia focuses on building capabilities through equipment transfers, logistical support, and training of Colombian personnel. The capabilities that the United States needs, therefore, reside in the area of building partnership capacity (BPC). These capabilities must be closely integrated with the Colombian government's counterinsurgency strategy to fill gaps in Colombian capabilities. On the military side, major potential gaps are in maintenance of rotary wing and fixed wing aircraft; support and training for riverine operations; communications and intelligence; institutional transformation, including the Colombian military justice system, and military education.<sup>70</sup> However, as the COIN effort moves into the consolidation phase, the United States will have to build greater civilian capabilities to support the shift that is foreseen in the Colombian strategic plan from a military to a civilian focus.

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<sup>70</sup> Discussions with U.S. and Colombian officials, Bogotá, April 2009.





# Counterinsurgency Transition Case Study: El Salvador

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Map of El Salvador



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

RAND MG11112-4.1

## Introduction

When war broke out in El Salvador in 1981, it was readily interpreted as another front in the global confrontation between capitalism and communism. Sponsored by the Soviet Union and Cuba, the leftist rhetoric of the Farabundi Martí National Liberation Front raised the specter of a communist takeover in Central America. To the U.S. administration, this outcome was unacceptable: Having lost Nicaragua

to the Sandinistas in 1979, President Ronald Reagan feared that without U.S. intervention, “new Cubas will arise from the ruins of today’s conflicts.”<sup>1</sup> The language was of “drawing a line” over El Salvador by helping the government counter the rebel threat.

Although El Salvador’s conflict fitted nicely within the Cold War narrative, its roots were deeper and related to the country’s long-running bifurcation of power and wealth. While under Spanish colonial control, a small percentage of the population was elevated by the Spanish crown to act as stewards of its lands. This system engendered a rich-poor divide between a small Salvadoran elite and a large population living in extreme poverty, which persisted beyond El Salvador’s independence from Spain in 1839. By the late 1920s, El Salvador’s middle class had all but disappeared. At this point, economic decline, combined with political marginalization, prompted many rural poor to mobilize and in 1930 the Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS) was formed. When President Arturo Araujo allowed the PCS to participate in the coming elections, he was overthrown in a military coup sponsored by the landed elite. Their theft of the ensuing election prompted an uprising, spearheaded by Agustín Farabundo Martí. The revolt was swiftly crushed by the security forces, which in a few weeks killed between 10,000 and 40,000 people. These events, since referred to as *la Matanza*, have strongly informed El Salvador’s politics.

The inequalities persisted into the period preceding the insurgency and provided the social base of the insurgent movements. During this period, beginning in the 1960s, however, there was considerable social change. Urban society became more complex with the development of industrial labor and a modern middle class of technicians, managers, and intellectuals. New parties and organizations—the most important of which was the Christian Democratic Party—sought to represent the interests of the urban sectors. By contrast, the traditional mechanisms of social control remained largely intact in the countryside.

The 1977 presidential election was a critical turning point. The Christian Democratic-led opposition nominated a retired military

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<sup>1</sup> “Transcript of President’s Address on Caribbean Aid Program,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1982, p. 14.

officer in the hope that he would be acceptable to the military and the elite. The outgoing administration, however, imposed the election of its candidate, a former minister of defense. The outcome provoked a crisis of legitimacy, at a time when the country was facing a campaign of terrorism by emerging Marxist revolutionary organizations and an uncertain international environment because of the Sandinista take-over in Nicaragua in 1979.

This history forms the backdrop to the emergence of the Farabundi Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), named after the leader of the 1932 uprising. Formed in 1980, the FMLN comprised five leftist groups seeking to trigger a popular uprising to reverse “decades of suffering [and] more than 50 years of military dictatorship.”<sup>2</sup> The origin of the Salvadoran guerrillas can be traced to splits within the PCS in the late 1960s. PCS Secretary-General Cayetano Carpio broke with the party in 1969 and established the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), which pursued a strategy of Vietnamese-style people’s war. The People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP) originated in a breakaway faction of the FPL and derived its inspiration from Che Guevara’s theories of guerrilla warfare. A breakaway faction of the ERP established the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). In the late 1970s these groups carried out a campaign of terrorism (the most notable attack being the kidnapping and assassination of Foreign Minister Mauricio Borgonovo in 1977), combined with attacks on small police and National Guard units. In 1980 the armed Marxist organizations were integrated, under Cuban auspices, into a unified military command with headquarters in Managua, Nicaragua, to direct the coming armed struggle. The insurgents had sanctuaries in the *bolsones*—disputed border areas between El Salvador and Honduras—and across the Gulf of Fonseca in Nicaragua.

The response of the authorities and the paramilitary groups of the right to the challenge of the radical left was to step up the counterterror operations, which extended to political activists who were seeking to organize urban and rural workers. The most spectacular assassina-

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<sup>2</sup> “FMLN: Call for a General Offensive (January 1981),” in Robert Leiken and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Central American Crisis Reader*, New York: Summit Books, 1987, p. 421.

tion was that of Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of San Salvador in March 1980, killed while he was conducting Mass. The murder is believed to have been ordered by Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, who later founded the right-wing political party Alianza Republicana Nacionalista or National Republican Alliance (ARENA). As the Kissinger Commission on Central America noted, the common denominator of these methods was the systematic use of mass reprisals and selective killings and torture to dissuade the civil population from participating in the insurgency or from providing any help to the insurgents. The methods, the Commission stated, magnified congressional pressures against U.S. military assistance to El Salvador, which in turn made more difficult the pursuit of an enlightened counterinsurgency effort.<sup>3</sup>

In the early years of the conflict, there were an estimated 6,000 front-line guerrilla fighters and a slightly larger number organized in militias and support units. Over time, the latter forces were increasingly well armed and involved in operations with the front-line forces. By the mid-1980s the Salvadoran armed forces grew to about 37,000 men.<sup>4</sup> The FMLN launched a 'final offensive' on January 10, 1981. Although the offensive failed to overthrow the government, it established the FMLN as a credible force. And it prompted the United States to provide El Salvador with increased military aid and advice, lest the country succumb to the same fate as Nicaragua.

The stage for a prolonged civil war was thus set. Seeking to assist the El Salvadoran government, the United States provided support to its ineffective and brutal military and pushed socioeconomic reforms intended to address the root causes of the conflict. U.S. leverage was low because the U.S. Congress limited the American military presence in El Salvador to 55 advisers, who were furthermore barred from accompanying the armed forces of El Salvador (ESAF) on combat operations. U.S. attempts at nonmilitary reforms also progressed slowly: El Salvador adopted a new constitution in 1983 and held general elections in 1984, in which José Napoleón Duarte from the center-right Chris-

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<sup>3</sup> *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America* (Kissinger Commission), January 1984, pp. 95–96.

<sup>4</sup> *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, p. 98.

tian Democrats was elected president, but the right wing control over the country's legislative, judiciary, and military drastically limited the scope for change.

### Strategy (Pre-Transition)

By the mid-1980s, the conflict had reached a stalemate: The ESAF had prevented the government from being toppled, but the government was incapable of defeating the FMLN, which continued to disrupt the nation's economy and stability through sporadic attacks, economic vandalism, and sabotage. These actions undermined ESAF morale and strained the economy, but they did not threaten the government's survival.

The stalemate was unsatisfactory to all sides, but not sufficiently so to force a change in approach. The FMLN posed a considerable threat to the Duarte government, but the government and its American patrons were convinced of the incumbent's advantage over the guerrillas. Within the Reagan administration, frustration mounted over its lack of leverage and over the congressional skepticism at what was after all a commitment of \$1.5 million per day. Nonetheless, attrition was deemed preferable to changing course, if only to deny the FMLN a chance at all-out victory.<sup>5</sup> The new constitution, the 1984 elections, and the ESAF's gradual professionalization undermined the FMLN's appeal and influence, yet the group still controlled one-third of the countryside and elected to keep fighting, perhaps to sap U.S. resolve and work toward victory on its terms.<sup>6</sup>

In short, none of the parties felt sufficiently threatened to compromise. In the first peace talks, held in La Palma, Chalatenango, in 1984, the government refused to discuss reforms to the constitution,

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<sup>5</sup> Todd Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention: Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Lessons in Central America*, Westport, Conn., & London: Praeger Security International, 2008, p. 155.

<sup>6</sup> Colonel Lyman C. Duryea, former U.S. Defense Attaché in El Salvador, cited in Max G. Manwaring and Court Prisk, eds., *El Salvador at War: An Oral History of Conflict from the 1979 Insurrection to the Present*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988, p. 377.

something that FMLN's far-reaching socioeconomic reforms would clearly require. Duarte's precondition was presented as his own, but was also dictated to him by the overbearing military.<sup>7</sup> The impasse was one reason that a later U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report described Duarte's second call for talks in June 1986 as "intended primarily as a dramatic public relations gesture."<sup>8</sup>

In the first half of the 1980s, the conflict was characterized by a cyclical pattern in which the initiative swung between government and guerrilla forces. But in the second half of the decade, the politico-military balance shifted in favor of the government as the result of a combination of guerrilla weaknesses and government strengths. The main guerrilla weaknesses were the following:

- *Lack of mass support.* The FMLN and its political front, the FDR, never enjoyed majority support among the population. Lack of mass support was manifested in the failure of several "final offensives" (1981, 1982, 1989) to provoke a mass uprising as anticipated by the FMLN. The guerrillas' strategy of systematic attacks on the country's infrastructure also cost them popular support.
- *Lack of political legitimacy.* The guerrillas were weakened politically by a sustained democratic process that brought to power a government with credible democratic credentials, led by José Napoleón Duarte's Christian Democratic Party.
- *Disunity.* Although the various guerrilla forces were formally unified in the FMLN, each retained its separate identity, doctrine, and area of operations. Moreover, suspicions and rivalries among the groups' leaders continued and sometimes turned deadly.
- *Inability to prevent U.S. assistance to the Salvadoran government.* Until the signing of the peace agreement in 1992, FMLN supporters and sympathizers mounted a campaign in the United States and Europe to bring about the end of U.S. and interna-

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<sup>7</sup> Manwaring and Prisk, eds., *El Salvador at War*, p. 377.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "El Salvador's Insurgents: Resurrecting an Urban Political Strategy," An Intelligence Assessment, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, September 1986, p. 11.

tional support of the Salvadoran government—a campaign facilitated by death squad activities.

- *Reliance on outside support.* One of the strengths of the insurgency—Cuban and Nicaraguan support—became a liability when that support declined as a result of changes in the international environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Soviet assistance to Cuba and Nicaragua. The Sandinista government of Nicaragua also came under additional pressure because of U.S. support of the Nicaraguan resistance (which some U.S. officials presented as reciprocal treatment for the Sandinistas for their support of the Salvadoran insurgency).<sup>9</sup>

The strengths of the government side were in some respect the obverse of the guerrillas' weaknesses. The main strengths of the Salvadoran government during the civil conflict were the following:

- *Political legitimacy.* In the 1980s El Salvador began a democratic experiment with a series of free elections (constitutional assembly and legislative elections in 1982, 1985, 1988 and 1991; and presidential elections in 1984 and 1989) that delivered a government that had legitimacy and broad popular support.
- *Duarte's leadership.* As leader of the Christian Democratic opposition to the pre-1979 military regime Duarte had great personal credibility. His leadership was instrumental in keeping El Salvador on a democratic track, curbing excesses by the security forces, and maintaining international support for El Salvador.
- *International support.* U.S. and international support was critical to the survival of the Salvadoran government. Despite the international campaign, international support for the Salvadoran government increased significantly during the conflict.
- *Restructuring of Salvadoran military and security forces.* At the onset of the insurgency the Salvadoran armed forces were a barracks-

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<sup>9</sup> Angel Rabasa, Lesley Anne Warner, Peter Chalk, Ivan Khilko, and Paraag Shukla, *Money in the Bank—Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgency (COIN) Operations: RAND Counterinsurgency Study—Paper 4*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-185-OSD, 2007, pp. 42–47.



bound, defensively minded organization with severe deficiencies in command and control, tactical intelligence, tactical mobility, and logistics. The U.S. security assistance program was designed to address these deficiencies and transform the Salvadoran armed forces' strategy, doctrine, training, and equipment, with a minimum of direct U.S. involvement. In formerly guerrilla-held areas, the government implemented a civic action program that consisted of rebuilding the social and economic infrastructure and training civil defense units to protect key targets and free the military to engage in offensive operations.<sup>10</sup>

Negotiations were again attempted in January 1989, when the FMLN offered to join the government in exchange for a postponement of the presidential elections in March. Duarte initially rejected the proposal but, encouraged by the United States, he reconsidered his position. The rebels elaborated on their offer: They would support the mainstream leftist party, Democratic Convergence, in the election, provided the election was postponed to September. They also wanted the army to be reduced to its prewar level, the police to be demilitarized, and the perpetrators of abuses to be punished; in return, FMLN dropped its demand for transitional power-sharing and for integration into the army. The efforts came to naught, as Duarte dismissed the six-month postponement of the election as unconstitutional and insisted on a ceasefire prior to talks.

While this effort fared no better than previous attempts, the context was different, signaling a first step in El Salvador's transition. Most critical was the change in U.S. leadership. The FMLN had predicted that "no matter what kind of administration follows [Reagan's], the tendency will be to diminish United States support to the government"; they therefore waited until Reagan was out of office to make their proposal.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, their analysis was correct, because President

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<sup>10</sup> Rabasa et al., *Money in the Bank*.

<sup>11</sup> Guillermo M. Ungo, President of the Revolutionary Democratic Front, as cited in Manwaring and Prisk, eds., *El Salvador at War*, p. 476. See also William Branigin, "Salvadoran Rebels Amplify Cease-Fire Offer," *Washington Post*, February 21, 1989.

George H. W. Bush quickly changed tack in El Salvador. Two weeks into his administration, Vice President Dan Quayle traveled to San Salvador to voice his tentative support for the rebels' peace offer. Later that month, the State Department backtracked on its opposition to talks and instead urged a negotiated settlement.<sup>12</sup> In March, Guillermo Ungo, then president of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), an FMLN component organization, traveled to Washington, D.C., for talks.

One reason for America's changed stance was the developments in the Soviet Union. The drawdown of the Cold War signaled that aid to El Salvador would be reduced. U.S. intelligence reports also suggested that the Kremlin was pressuring the FMLN "to curtail military activities and seek a negotiated settlement."<sup>13</sup> The changing strategic landscape eroded the ideological lens through which the U.S. had viewed the El Salvadoran conflict and placed in doubt the need for total victory. Instead, the priority for Bush was to find an acceptable conclusion to its commitment in El Salvador, one that would end the conflict, allow for a U.S. withdrawal, but nonetheless safeguard the country's democracy. This outcome would require negotiations with FMLN.

Despite these propitious circumstances, the prospect of negotiations appeared much weaker following the March 1989 elections, in which the Christian Democrats lost to ARENA, a right-wing party close to the land-owning elite and military. The new president, Alfredo Cristiani, sought to reassure his friends in Washington, D.C. and his local constituents with promises of respecting human rights and of pursuing negotiations, but it was difficult to persuade the U.S. Congress, particularly given the recent increase in death-squad activity. It was feared that Cristiani would be unable to control (or would become a front for) the more radical elements within his party.

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<sup>12</sup> See Rita Beamish, "Quayle Tells Salvadoran Military that Aid Depends on Rights Efforts," *Associated Press*, February 3, 1989; Jim Anderson, "State Department Shifts on El Salvador," *Associated Press*, February 27, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "El Salvador: The FMLN After the November 1989 Offensive," Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, January 26, 1990, p. 3.

In the end, Cristiani proved a more potent negotiator than his predecessor, as his political loyalties gave him more room for maneuver. For the initial five months of his administration, however, the situation in El Salvador did not change. In September 1989, the FMLN presented the government with a peace offer and proposed fundamental reforms to the armed forces, judiciary, and the agrarian system.<sup>14</sup> Despite some promising confidence-building measures, neither side was ready to make major concessions. “We are flexible,” a FMLN spokesman said, “but they are making a mistake if they think we are negotiating from weakness.” The government, meanwhile, dismissed FMLN as “a small reality [that] cannot oblige the government to change the republic’s constitutional system.”<sup>15</sup>

## The Transition Period

The turning point came with the FMLN’s second “final offensive,” launched on November 11, 1989, in which the rebels entered the capital and made some territorial gains before gradually being repelled to the city’s outskirts.<sup>16</sup> The offensive and its associated events turned the balance of power in El Salvador into a “mutually hurting stalemate.”<sup>17</sup> The position of weakness that both sides had denied was mutually exposed: Neither side could hold out for a better outcome than a negotiated solution.

For the rebels, the two sought-after effects of its offensive—a government surrender or negotiations on the FMLN’s terms—had not

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<sup>14</sup> Philip Bennet, “Salvador Rebels Say Peace Plan Would Give US a Low-Cost Exit,” *Boston Globe*, September 15, 1989.

<sup>15</sup> See Douglas Tweedale, “Little Hope Seen for Quick End to Salvadoran Civil War,” *United Press International*, October 16, 1989; Douglas Grant Mine, “Military Command Rejects Rebel Purge Demand as ‘Ridiculous,’” *Associated Press*, October 20, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> For the chronology and aftermath of the final offensive, see U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, “El Salvador: The FMLN After the November 1989 Offensive.”

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia J. Arnson, “El Salvador and Colombia: Lessons of the Peace Process,” in Margarita S. Studemeister, ed., *El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords*, Peaceworks No. 38, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, January 2001, p. 41.

materialized; and a massive popular uprising did not appear likely.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the FMLN's fighting power had been reduced and aid from the Soviet Union was drying up. The El Salvador government could have capitalized on all of this, had it not been for three developments. First, the offensive punctured the belief that the rebels were no longer capable of major offensives. The FMLN was certainly weakened,<sup>19</sup> but it was no spent force.<sup>20</sup> Second, during the counteroffensive, the ESAF's Atlacatl Battalion, an elite U.S.-trained unit, killed six Jesuit priests and two housekeepers. The act gained immediate media notoriety and inflamed an already heated debate in the U.S. Congress about U.S. support of the ESAF and the regime more generally. Henceforth, securing military aid would become far more politically difficult.<sup>21</sup> Third, the FMLN's infiltration of San Salvador's wealthier suburbs convinced many within the private sector that a negotiated solution was now necessary; others were disturbed by the overly autonomous military and wanted to cut it down to size.<sup>22</sup>

El Salvador thus embarked on a two-year-long process of negotiations, starting with initial overtures to the United Nations in late 1989 and ending with the signing of a peace agreement in Chapultepec Castle. The two sides met first in April 1990 in Geneva and then in Caracas to sequence the talks: first negotiations, then a ceasefire (an important concession by the government). Talks then stalled over

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<sup>18</sup> See Mark Levine, "Peacemaking in El Salvador," in Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr, eds., *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 229, fn. 8.

<sup>19</sup> A 1989 CIA analysis of FMLN shows that they had "lost 15 to 19 percent of their force over the last two years, [that] their base areas are less secure, and [that] their attacks on military targets have been less effective." U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "El Salvador: Government and Insurgency Prospects," Special National Intelligence Estimate, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, February 1989, p. iii.

<sup>20</sup> Rumors that the FMLN were acquiring surface-to-air missiles also informed the ensuing shift in government policy.

<sup>21</sup> Terry L. Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 2, Spring 1992, p. 153.

<sup>22</sup> David Holiday and William Stanley, "Building the Peace: Preliminary Lessons from El Salvador," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Winter 1993, p. 3.

reforms to the armed forces but were kept afloat by a number of smaller summits. Álvaro de Soto, the UN secretary-general's special adviser, organized a meeting in San José, Costa Rica, at which the two sides committed themselves to minimum human-rights standards and agreed to the deployment of a UN human-rights verification mission. In April 1991, the National Assembly voted to modify various clauses in the constitution, limiting the domestic role of the armed forces and of military courts, establishing a national police force under the Ministry of Interior and creating a "Truth Commission" to investigate wartime human-rights abuses.

A package of proposals put forward by de Soto at the New York summit of September 1991 addressed the main outstanding issues: The rebels were barred from integration within the army but could participate in the new police force, while the government would implement long-neglected agrarian reforms and submit its soldiers to an "Ad Hoc Commission" to review their human-rights records and competence. Finally a broad-based National Commission for the Consolidation of Peace (COPAZ) was created to oversee the implementation of the peace agreements.

The signing of the treaty to end the war on January 16, 1992 set in motion a carefully defined schedule. On February 1, the ceasefire would begin; five days thereafter both sides would abandon their military positions. Over the next month, the FMLN would concentrate its units in 15 sites, after which its demobilization and integration into the police force could begin. The ESAF, meanwhile, would be placed in 62 sites, dismantle its paramilitary forces, and transfer internal-security duties to the new police force. Terry Lynn Karl argues that a hallmark of a successful negotiation is that "both sides believe they have won."<sup>23</sup> In the case of El Salvador, this was precisely the case because all sides achieved results through negotiations that would have been largely unattainable through war. Cristiani secured the demobilization and disarmament of the FMLN yet maintained control of the government (pending elections). Moreover, the FMLN's exclusion from the army represented a security guarantee should the ceasefire unravel. To Cris-

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<sup>23</sup> Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," p. 160.

tiani, a former businessman, peace also signified an overdue opportunity to liberalize El Salvador's "broken economy," a higher priority for his administration than pursuing an unlikely military victory.<sup>24</sup> The FMLN, meanwhile, achieved almost all of the aims set out in its previous overtures: The government had agreed to constitutional changes, the army would be purged, and FMLN leaders were free to enter party politics. Although the FMLN did not secure an interim place within the government, the establishment of COPAZ would give it a say over the implementation of the peace accords.<sup>25</sup> Finally, the United States would be able to extricate itself from El Salvador without undermining El Salvador's democracy. In a circuitous manner, the final outcome promised to meet the four objectives that Reagan had identified during the conflict: democracy, development, dialogue, and defense.<sup>26</sup>

The antagonism that went into the negotiations—between the FMLN and the government; between the government and the ESAF; between the Bush administration and the FMLN, and between the White House and Congress—makes their outcome all the more astonishing. Beyond seeking to end the conflict if possible, there was no joint strategy, no unity of purpose, among the negotiating partners. Instead, levels of trust were low and there were instances in which a return to war appeared likely. Against this backdrop, a number of factors helped sustain the negotiations.

### **Domestic Factors**

The "hurting stalemate" mentioned above was the *sine qua non* of the peace agreements. Added to this factor was the specific role played by the political leadership on either side. Cristiani was well placed to make the compromises necessary for peace because the military trusted him not to give anything away but trusted him when concessions nonetheless had to be made. He also participated personally in the negotiations and was willing to trade concessions with the FMLN. By the end of

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<sup>24</sup> Levine, "Peacemaking in El Salvador," pp. 229–230.

<sup>25</sup> Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," p. 160.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Central America: Defending Our United Interests," Department of State, 1984, p. 4.

the process, he had earned the respect of UN diplomats for “his statesmanship and courage in leading a recalcitrant military down the path of peace, which was in many ways against its institutional interests.”<sup>27</sup>

Like Cristiani, the FMLN’s leadership kept its more radical factions in check. It also sought to improve its relations with the United States, particularly following the change of U.S. administrations. In February 1989, the FMLN announced a halt to attacks on U.S. personnel (barring advisers embedded with the ESAF). It also sent a letter to President Bush prior to his election, advocating a negotiated settlement. When FMLN fighters overtook the Sheraton Hotel in the capital as part of its final offensive, it opted not to confront the U.S. military personnel staying there but let them escape unharmed. To suggest any sort of rapprochement would be excessive, and several incidents greatly strained relations; nonetheless, the overtures established a degree of confidence that would later aid negotiations.

Two other domestic contextual factors fueled the talks. First, polls in the late 1980s showed that 83 percent of the population “supported an end to the war through negotiated settlement.”<sup>28</sup> Once the initial steps toward peace had been taken, public pressure for a settlement deterred both sides from abandoning the negotiations. Second, political space had opened up, enabling grassroots and civil-society organizations to build alliances with small business associations and other centrist forces. A reduction in state violence had also granted greater latitude to the left, leading to the return of exiled politicians and the participation of Democratic Convergence in the 1989 elections.<sup>29</sup> This progress was quashed following FMLN’s final offensive, but the bridges that had been established would later underpin the negotiations.

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<sup>27</sup> Levine, “Peacemaking in El Salvador,” pp. 246–247.

<sup>28</sup> Charles T. Call, “Assessing El Salvador’s Transition from Civil War to Peace,” in Stephen John Stedman, Donald Rothchild, and Elizabeth Cousens, eds., *Ending Civil Wars: the Implementation of Peace Agreements*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2002, p. 387.

<sup>29</sup> William Deane Stanley, “El Salvador: State-Building Before and After Democratisation, 1980–95,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2006, p. 106.

### The United States' Role

The Bush administration's shift in focus from defeating the FMLN to pursuing a negotiated solution was critical to achieving an agreement. As noted, Bush was eager to leave El Salvador, but he also wanted to ensure the survival of its young democracy and the elimination of armed threats from the right and the left. These aims would require careful diplomacy and leverage, an element conspicuously absent from earlier U.S. dealings with El Salvador.

The new U.S. approach centered on the reduction of military aid to the ESAF, through which the Bush administration signaled America's changed objectives and deterred a resumption of war. The move was risky: It could have led to increased abuses from an unrestrained and embittered military or emboldened the FMLN to capitalize on the United States' "losing heart." Yet despite a significant reduction in aid (see Figure 4.2), neither of these eventualities occurred. There are several reasons for this, three of which relate to the new U.S. approach.

First, Congress introduced a condition on aid that tied future allocations to the Salvadoran government's respect for human rights and its negotiations with the FMLN. The conditionality cut both ways, in that any transgression by the FMLN would trigger the restoration of U.S. assistance to the government, which—while not always helpful to the negotiations<sup>30</sup>—did provide for an even-handed system of sticks and carrots. The conditions for aid had more credibility than those stated throughout the 1980s, given the Bush administration's readiness to abandon its partner should its efforts be found lacking. In contrast, the imperative of defeating the rebels during the 1980s had provided the ESAF with almost unlimited leeway.<sup>31</sup>

Second, the U.S. government managed to reduce aid without alienating Cristiani or undercutting his domestic credibility. As one

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<sup>30</sup> According to T. E. Karl, the restoration of aid following the FMLN's downing of a U.S. helicopter in 1991 emboldened the ESAF to take more forceful action against the FMLN, which threatened ongoing negotiations. See Karl, "El Salvador's Negotiated Revolution," p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> See Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, R-4042-USDP, 1991.



American diplomat put it: “If we use public blackmail . . . that robs foreign leaders of dignity. We don’t want Cristiani to look like a U.S. puppet.”<sup>32</sup> It was therefore fortuitous that the reduction in military aid was mandated by the U.S. Congress and not the White House. Throughout the peace process, White House officials would lobby Congress for continued assistance to El Salvador and reassure Cristiani of their support. At the same time, Congress insisted on progress in the negotiations and gradually cut aid. This “good cop/bad cop” approach allowed for a continued partnership between the White House and Cristiani in which both could curse, but not easily circumvent, the demands of Congress. Indeed, some analysts suggested that while “administration officials do not say so publicly . . . they find Congressional pressure useful.”<sup>33</sup> More generally, it was decided that economic assistance to El Salvador would continue to flow at a healthy rate, whereas military aid was all but eliminated; this helped ensure the government’s economic viability yet made the ESAF appreciate the necessity of negotiations (see Figure 4.1).

Third, in marked contrast with the previous administration, the Bush administration entered office with a positive view of the UN and its role in conflict resolution. In February 1990, Secretary of State James Baker wrote a joint letter with his Soviet counterpart, urging the UN to assume a mediating role in El Salvador’s negotiations. The overt support for the UN gave it the authority and legitimacy needed during the talks. The United States was also happy to defer to various multilateral efforts to secure peace, which ultimately proved invaluable. This is not to say that the United States delegated the task of peacebuilding to the international community: A year into the negotiations, when levels of trust were higher and momentum had amassed, the United States began to play a greater role, meeting with FMLN leaders and sending senior U.S. officials to put pressure on the government.<sup>34</sup>

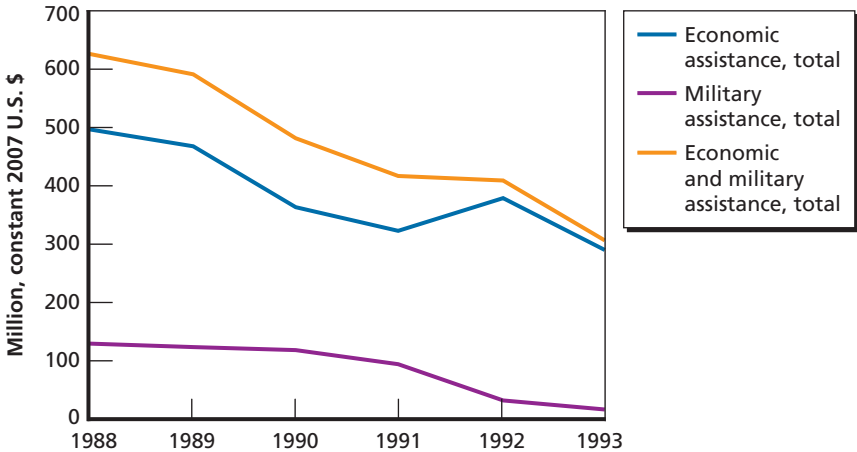
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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Foreign Service officer, cited in Robert Pear, “Congress Is As Skeptical As Ever on Salvador Aid,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Foreign Service officer, cited in Pear, “Congress Is As Skeptical As Ever.”

<sup>34</sup> Greentree, *Crossroads of Intervention*, p. 155.

**Figure 4.1**  
**U.S. Economic and Military Aid to El Salvador, 1988–1993 (in constant 2007 U.S. \$ millions)**



RAND MG11112-4.2

At the operational level, U.S. advisors in El Salvador adapted their work to facilitate the transition to peace. In 1990, the U.S. Brigade Operational Planning and Assistance Training Teams (OPATT) were given the added mission of monitoring and reporting suspected human-rights violations.<sup>35</sup> In coordination with the UN, U.S. advisors also became increasingly “concerned with civic action, psychological operations and garrison operations and the development of peacetime unit training management systems.”<sup>36</sup> These shifts complemented the OPATTs’ general contribution in professionalizing ESAF brigades and reducing the number of Army abuses. While progress here had always been slow, the net result was beneficial and the achievement lauded

<sup>35</sup> Cecil E. Bailey, “OPATT: The U.S. Army SF Advisers in El Salvador,” *Special Warfare*, December 2004, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum for Director, Security Training Management Office, Fort Bragg, N.C., Subject: Training Assistance Evaluation, El Salvador ETSS (OPATT), April 24, 1991.

even by FMLN, which asked for the advisers to remain following the peace agreement.<sup>37</sup>

### **The Role of the International Community**

At several instances, the personal involvement of UN Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar and his envoys was instrumental in overcoming obstacles that might otherwise have wrecked the peace process. UN mediators persuaded the FMLN to drop its demand to be included in a transitional government.<sup>38</sup> The secretary-general was also central in securing the San José agreement on human rights, first in proposing the agreement (as a means of keeping stalled negotiations afloat) and then in convincing Cristiani to agree to the human-rights monitors.<sup>39</sup> UN representatives were also responsible for the Ad Hoc Commission. The FMLN had long insisted on the abolishment of the military, Cristiani favored a self-administered cleanup, and the Ad Hoc Commission was a compromise solution proposed by the UN to which both parties eventually agreed and which later proved to be “remarkably effective.”<sup>40</sup> Here and elsewhere, the direct involvement of senior-level UN officials raised the costs of appearing obstructionist or of abandoning the peace talks.

The UN’s second major contribution to securing a peace agreement lay in its deployment of the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). Upon the request of the government and the FMLN, the 101-strong ONUSAL was established in July 1991 with a mandate to monitor compliance with the human-rights commitments agreed to at San José.<sup>41</sup> The mission had three immediate effects: Human-

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<sup>37</sup> See Levine, “Peacemaking in El Salvador,” pp. 251–252.

<sup>38</sup> Levine, “Peacemaking in El Salvador,” p. 236.

<sup>39</sup> Levine, “Peacemaking in El Salvador,” p. 235.

<sup>40</sup> Ian Johnstone, “Rights and Reconciliation in El Salvador,” and David H. McCormick, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding: Restructuring Military and Police Institutions in El Salvador,” both in Doyle, Johnstone, and Orr, eds., *Keeping the Peace*, pp. 316 and 294.

<sup>41</sup> See United Nations Security Council Resolution 693, May 20, 1991.

rights abuses declined;<sup>42</sup> the level of violence subsided, particularly in the cities; and the mission acted as a confidence-building measure between the two sides.<sup>43</sup> With the ceasefire, ONUSAL's mandate grew "to include the verification and monitoring of the implementation of all the agreements" between the two parties.<sup>44</sup> Its personnel were consolidated in a Human Rights Division, and a new Military Division and Police Division were formed to manage the mission's added duties.

Underpinning the UN's work was a web of bilateral and multilateral efforts to liaise between the negotiating sides and pressure each to make difficult compromises. Most significant were the "Four Friends" of the process: Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia, and Panama (later replaced by Spain). The Friends positioned themselves as subordinate to the UN secretary-general, which ensured unity of action, but they took the initiative to lean heavily on either side, if necessary. In this regard, the membership of the group was propitious: While none of the Friends was aligned to either party, Mexico and Spain enjoyed closer ties to the FMLN, whereas Colombia and Venezuela were more sympathetic to the government because of their experience with combating insurgencies.<sup>45</sup> The regional nature of the Friends brought three added advantages. First, their involvement signaled a regional climate that was conducive to peace. Second, the composition of the group ensured interventions that were sensitive to El Salvador's history and culture. Third, the Friends' participation obviated participation by the Organization of American States and the UN Security Council, both U.S.-dominated institutions and therefore likely to raise fears of bias or American interventionism.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Holiday and Stanley emphasize ONUSAL's ability to "enter any military facility without prior notice" as critical to its 'dissuasive' or 'preventative' impact. See Holiday and Stanley, "Building the Peace," p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Adapted from testimony of UN official, as cited in Holiday and Stanley, "Building the Peace."

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 729, January 14, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Levine, "Peacemaking in El Salvador," p. 250, n. 92.

<sup>46</sup> Levine, "Peacemaking in El Salvador," pp. 250–251.

## Managing the Transition

The final agreement, signed at Chapultepec, Mexico, in January 1992, was a remarkable achievement. Yet despite the two years of negotiations, it was only the beginning of El Salvador's transition. Much would now depend on whether the commitments made were respected, the root causes of the war could be satisfactorily addressed, and new sources of instability and unforeseen challenges would also be adequately tackled.

### Ceasefire and Demobilization

Perhaps the most fundamental success of El Salvador's transition to peace is that the ceasefire held, despite real moments of tension. In this sense, El Salvador truly did move from war to peace and, 20 years on, the transition could be characterized as a "success story" on this count alone.

This success was far from preordained. When the peace agreement was only weeks old, the military defaulted on the demobilization of the National Guard and Treasury Police; meanwhile, the ARENA-dominated legislature passed a law that extended the lives of these two controversial units. Further provoked by the government's security operations to evict FMLN supporters from land occupied since the ceasefire, the FMLN suspended its own concentration of forces, citing logistical reasons.

As it did during the negotiations, the UN intervened effectively. Under-Secretary Murrack Goulding traveled to El Salvador and persuaded the government to desist from the land-seizure operations and rescind the new law. Also, ONUSAL, together with other UN agencies, addressed the logistical burdens that had hindered FMLN cantonment.<sup>47</sup> Then and in general, the UN was critical in assessing compliance with prior commitments, maintaining open channels of communications, and securing renewed agreements.

Following the concentration of forces, the UN deployed observers to monitor both sides. The National Guard and Treasury Police were officially disbanded in March 1992, other civil defense units were

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<sup>47</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," pp. 393–394.

dismantled in June, and the government adopted an accelerated demobilization program by which the ESAF had shrunk by 54.4 percent by April 1993 (though this related also to the many “ghost soldiers” on the army’s payroll).

Although the FMLN needed to disarm and demobilize in order to transform into a political party, the maintenance of arms was its only source of leverage, without which it was entirely dependent on UN pressure to force government compliance. Partly for this reason, the FMLN delayed its demobilization by two months until December 1992. However, this hedging prompted the government to stall on the dismantling of its rapid-reaction forces, whose dissolution occurred only after the FMLN had completed its own demobilization. This staggered implementation signaled both a lack of trust between the two sides and an ability to make progress through incremental exchanges of ever more significant concessions.

FMLN disarmament proved more controversial, with both the government and the ESAF alleging foul play. The ONUSAL Military Department’s decision to declare the FMLN’s disarmament complete, on December 14, 1992, was probably pragmatic rather than empirical: ONUSAL certified what it must have known were incomplete FMLN inventories, thereby allowing the peace process to proceed, and gambled that any future arms discoveries would be less damaging than an early insistence on full compliance. As David McCormick notes, “In retrospect this decision appears justified. It is not clear that alternative actions would have had more desirable outcomes.”<sup>48</sup> When, six months later, an FMLN weapons cache was discovered in Nicaragua, ONUSAL’s credibility was undermined; yet, by intervening personally and swiftly, the secretary-general was able to push the FMLN to declare and destroy its remaining 120 weapons caches. By that point, given the FMLN’s own loss of face domestically and internationally, the infraction was less consequential than it might have been earlier: The government used the incident as a bargaining tool in its dealings with the UN but did not reverse its previous concessions.

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<sup>48</sup> McCormick, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding,” pp. 287–288.

The demobilization was helped by the flexibility of the implementation phase. Delays, deliberate or otherwise, led to “recalendarization” agreements where the two sides committed to new timelines and addressed the cause of the holdup. Overseen by the UN, the recalendarizations limited the disruptive impact of delays and sustained confidence that agreed-to action would be taken. It was, for example, through such an agreement in June 1992 that the government’s reluctance to dismantle its internal security forces was addressed.

Yet there was an important limit to the flexibility, which also aided demobilization. Per El Salvador’s constitution, elections were to be held in 1994, and the FMLN’s participation in the elections was fundamental to peace. To partake, the FMLN first needed to have undergone its transformation into a political party, which added pressure on its leadership to disarm and demobilize with enough time left to prepare an electoral campaign. This pressure forced the FMLN to maintain the pace of its demobilization and rely more heavily on the UN as a guarantor of government compliance.

### **Public Security and Security-Sector Reform**

As part of the peace accords, El Salvador implemented fundamental reforms to its security sector, restricting the military’s role to territorial defense against external threats and establishing a new civilian police. Although these two broad objectives were eventually met, security-sector reform was undermined by the ESAF’s initial reluctance to abandon its internal security functions and status, and by the difficulties in providing public security during this transitional period. While neither factor resulted in a resumption of full-scale war, both would significantly mar El Salvador’s transition to peace and its longer-term evolution.

### **ESAF Reform**

Given the army’s long-standing history of repression and role in society, security-sector reform in El Salvador was a deeply political as well as technical task. To assist with the process, approximately 40 U.S. advisers remained in El Salvador throughout 1993, deploying throughout the ESAF in four- to five-person teams. The U.S. military also helped

create the ESAF training and doctrine command (CODEM), reform the Military College, and create a School of High Strategic Studies, which opened in September 1993 to offer instruction to senior civilian and military officials.<sup>49</sup> In parallel, ONUSAL's military and human-rights divisions assisted the ESAF with the internalization of its new doctrine.

These efforts notwithstanding, ESAF reforms encountered several problems, many of which have since been attributed to ONUSAL's limited oversight of the process. First, the dismantling of the Treasury Police and National Guard, which the government said had occurred in March 1992, actually entailed their wholesale inclusion, under different names, in ESAF. Second, the army maintained some of its prior functions: Particularly after 1993 and following a dramatic increase in crime, it was called on to conduct patrols and other domestic operations. Third, the defense ministry's intelligence section remained focused on internal rather than external threats; the ESAF retained control over the recruitment and training of civilian intelligence operatives; and the new State Intelligence Office (OIE) came to be heavily staffed by former military intelligence personnel, some of whom were later implicated in various human-rights abuses.<sup>50</sup>

Demobilizing soldiers presented a different set of problems. Because of funding constraints and significant logistical requirements, the government was unable to provide many of the demobilizing soldiers the payouts promised in the accords: Charles Call notes that "over two years after the accords were signed, only 6,000 of 18,000 ex-soldiers had received their severance pay."<sup>51</sup> A related problem concerned the weapons of the demobilizing soldiers, many of which went missing and were not recovered. By February 1995, the minister of defense acknowledged that "approximately 300,000 weapons, 'intended for military use,' had found their way into civilian hands."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding," p. 297.

<sup>50</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," p. 399.

<sup>51</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," p. 396.

<sup>52</sup> As cited in McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding," p. 295.



Armed and militarily trained, many disgruntled former combatants turned to crime as a means of self-enrichment, which would become a significant problem for the new police force.

### **Police Reform**

An early decision in the transformation of the security sector was whether to retrain the old police or establish a new force. Given the distrust and abuses of the National Police (PN), it was agreed that a new National Civilian Police (PNC) would be formed, and that the majority of its officers (60 percent) would be civilian recruits. In terms of starting anew, this was a natural choice, yet it proved problematic in ensuring security during the transition to peace.

The establishment of a new police force requires time and resources and calls for an interim strategy for the provision of public security. In El Salvador, the shift from old to new security forces was further complicated by the deeply political nature of the transition: The ESAF deliberately obstructed the police reforms by delaying or otherwise disrupting the transfer of premises to the new force. Such action, along with funding shortages, impeded PNC recruitment and training and made the need for functioning interim public-security arrangements all the more acute.<sup>53</sup>

Regrettably, these arrangements proved largely inadequate. For example, the Auxiliary Transitory Police (PAT) deployed to former FMLN-controlled territories was composed of PNC cadets with minimal training; although overseen by ONUSAL, they were “woefully unprepared and underequipped to perform this mission.”<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, UN police monitors accompanied the patrols of the old police force. Yet as McCormick notes, “the PN was composed of soldiers, not professional policemen, who lacked enthusiasm for a job that they would soon lose, and harbored resentment for the UN observers whom they blamed for their predicament.”<sup>55</sup> During the transition, human-rights abuses, arbitrary detention, and levels of corruption all increased.

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<sup>53</sup> McCormick, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding,” p. 301.

<sup>54</sup> McCormick, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding,” pp. 288–289, fn. 20.

<sup>55</sup> McCormick, “From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding,” p. 289.

Where ONUSAL advisers were present, they were effective, yet with fewer than 400 police observers for a 6,000-strong police force, many of whom were also devoted to the standing up of the PNC, there were clear limits to the UN's oversight.

By 1993, the police academy was up and running and the PNC was becoming fully operational. Where deployed, the PNC were professional and effective; however, the institution faced new threats. First, the government and the ESAF inserted trusted units and personnel into the force, compromising its integrity and standards. The government appointed as operations director a military officer who brought with him staff from the military and terminated a PNC agreement with ONUSAL for technical and logistical support.<sup>56</sup> The government also transferred more than 1,000 former soldiers into the PN as a means of integrating them into the PNC. Similarly, two entire units, the Special Investigative Unit and the Anti-Narcotics Executive Unit, were transferred into the PNC in 1993. The FMLN had agreed to their inclusion subject to screening and retraining, yet these conditions were not fulfilled. Once in the new force, members of these units were implicated in various crimes and cover-ups.

The most fundamental threat to the PNC was its inability to control the rising levels of violent crime, caused in part by the security gap created during its own establishment. The demobilization of both the FMLN and the ESAF, along with the dismantling of other security forces, had "effectively cut the coercive forces available for deployment from some 60,000 to 6,000 in only a few weeks."<sup>57</sup> Given the inadequate compensation given to ex-combatants, a difficult economic climate, and the lack of a fully developed police force, many unemployed, embittered and militarily trained young men gravitated toward crime as a means of making a living or settling scores. Violent crime quickly became and remained a most urgent concern; in 1995 there

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<sup>56</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," pp. 401–402.

<sup>57</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," pp. 399–400.

were an estimated 8,500 murders, more than the average annual death toll during the war (6,250).<sup>58</sup>

This widespread insecurity undermined the PNC in several ways. First, the PNC's inability to counter crime encouraged the government to lean on armed units that should have been dismantled or given new roles under the accords. It was the rise in insecurity along the highways that prompted the government to send the army to conduct patrols. Similarly, the crime wave delayed the dismantling of the PN.

Second, the PNC's standards of recruitment and training were compromised by the acute need to grow and deploy the force. This dilution of standards fueled corruption within the force. Moreover, the fact that the shift to a more "civilian" force coincided with a dramatic rise in crime served to discredit the standards and norms promoted by ONUSAL and the international community.<sup>59</sup>

Under the administration of Armando Calderón Sol, elected in 1994, many of the PNC's problems were addressed: The old police force was dismantled, the PNC was able to deploy throughout the country and develop the remainder of its specialized agencies, the operations director was replaced, and a technical agreement with ONUSAL was restored.<sup>60</sup> Yet many of the old issues left permanent marks: Accusations of human-rights abuses, corruption, and incompetence have continued, as has El Salvador's acute problem with crime. Therefore, while PNC was celebrated as an achievement by the international community, the domestic reputation of the force has suffered. More broadly, the dramatic rise in crime and insecurity since the war remains the most serious and fundamental problem in El Salvador's transition to peace.

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<sup>58</sup> Philippe Le Billon, with Joanna Macrae, Nick Leader, and Roger East, *The Political Economy of War: What Relief Agencies Need to Know*, Humanitarian Practice Network Paper 33, London: Overseas Development Institute, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," in Studemeister, ed., *El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords*, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding," p. 303.

### Human Rights, Truth and Reconciliation

After a conflict such as El Salvador's, marked by its "harmful climate of impunity," it is often important to address society's need to deal with the past, either by punishing those guilty of wrongdoings or by reconciling former enemies to build a brighter future.<sup>61</sup> In El Salvador, both sides agreed to a purge of the ESAF based on the findings of the Ad Hoc Commission and to a "Truth Commission" to investigate wartime human-rights abuses. Truth and reconciliation were therefore integral to the peace being formed. However, this area is often inflammatory. A delicate balance must be struck between uncovering the past and moving forward, and there is a risk that finger-pointing by outsiders may provoke a backlash and imperil progress being made on other fronts.

When the Ad Hoc Commission's confidential report was issued on September 23, 1992, it recommended the discharging of 103 officers, including most of the ESAF's high command, along with the minister and vice minister of defense. The government delayed implementing these recommendations, the scope of which had not been expected. In securing full compliance with the report, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali blended pragmatism with pressure. While acquiescing with various delays, he dispatched UN envoys to agree to new timetables and thereby achieved a slow but gradual process of implementation. He was helped by a U.S. announcement in February 1993 that \$11 million worth of military aid would be suspended unless the recommendations were all applied.<sup>62</sup> The next month, six months after the report's release, Cristiani submitted a plan for full compliance, which was duly executed.<sup>63</sup> Despite the delays, this "constituted an unprecedented civilian review of the military."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sentence drawn from 1989 U.S. Department of State report on human rights, as cited in Pear, "Congress Is As Skeptical As Ever."

<sup>62</sup> Levine, "Peacemaking in El Salvador," p. 252, fn. 96.

<sup>63</sup> This episode is recounted in McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding," pp. 292–293.

<sup>64</sup> Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," p. 11.

The implementation of the Ad Hoc Commission's recommendations was helped by the March 1993 release of the Truth Commission's report, which implicated some of the same officers, including the defense minister. Because of time constraints, the Commission only investigated a number of particularly egregious abuses, for which its definitive findings provided closure. The Commission also made other recommendations, the bulk of which implicated the judiciary, but these were largely ignored.<sup>65</sup> Cristiani protested that the Commission had unnecessarily dug into the past and exceeded its authority by including the judiciary; he proclaimed an amnesty prior to the report's release to prevent the prosecution of those it had named.<sup>66</sup> The FMLN had its own concerns because the report's citing of several guerrilla leaders by name would bar them from assuming government posts. The FLMN's vow to implement the recommendations only after the government had done the same led to stasis.

Margaret Popkin makes the point that temporary commissions, such as the Truth Commission, "should facilitate a longer-term societal process, not become a substitute for it."<sup>67</sup> In the end, the Truth Commission did neither. Its short time span, limited scope, and inability to force compliance made it at best a promising starting point for the catharsis it had meant to engender.<sup>68</sup> But the truth and reconciliation process never took off after the report's release: No prosecutions, reparations, official reports, or investigations into wartime abuses ever emerged. Nor, significantly, did the population express a strong desire for such action; in general, they suggested that "both sides inevitably commit terrible abuses in wars, and that the best thing to do is bury the past and make changes to make sure it cannot be repeated."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See Johnstone, "Rights and Reconciliation in El Salvador," pp. 319–320.

<sup>66</sup> The amnesty excluded those already cited in the Ad Hoc commission. See Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," p. 12.

<sup>67</sup> Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> "Central America: UN to Verify 1994 Elections in El Salvador," *UN Chronicles*, Vol. 30, No. 2, June 1993, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," p. 14.

The dilemma presented to the UN was whether to insist on compliance with emerging human-rights norms or to acquiesce to the silence on past abuses. The risk lay either in antagonizing the government or abandoning the efforts of those who did want to address the conflict's legacy. In this case, the international community did not insist. The United States, the principal donor to the justice sector, expressed no dismay at the amnesty law and the secretary-general, beyond noting his concern, yielded to government preferences.

The degree to which these partial efforts at truth and reconciliation have marred El Salvador's transition to peace is debatable. On moral grounds, a more just outcome may have been desired. Nonetheless, if the local population sees digging up of the past as hurtful and unnecessary, the insistence on such action by international actors can do more harm than good. In El Salvador, the fact that the military was behind the vast majority of abuses (95 percent of them, according to the Truth Commission),<sup>70</sup> and the need to keep the military on board (while simultaneously downsizing, reforming and purging it) may also have contributed to the amnesty and to its acceptance by the international community.

The effect of such pragmatism was to stymie future efforts at truth and reconciliation. In 2000, the Salvadoran Supreme Court did finally challenge its predecessor's finding that the amnesty was "not subject to its constitutional control," but it saw nothing unconstitutional with the amnesty *per se*.<sup>71</sup> More critically, Herrera and Nelson describe how, as late as 2003, government officials still asserted that various high-profile wartime crimes remained "under investigation," even though

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<sup>70</sup> The Truth Commission found the ESAF responsible for 85 percent of the abuses; death squads, for 10 percent; and FMLN for the remaining 5 percent. See United Nations Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, *From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador*, S/25500, New York: United Nations, April 1, 1993, p. 43. As Cynthia Arnson notes, "[T]he death squads in El Salvador were deeply rooted in official security bodies." See Cynthia J. Arnson, "Window on the Past: A Declassified History of Death Squads in El Salvador," in B. B. Campbell and A. D. Brenner, eds., *Death Squads in Global Perspective: Murder with Deniability*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 110.

<sup>71</sup> Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador," p. 14.

the Truth Commission had effectively established accountability.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, attempts to revisit the 1981 El Mozote massacre, in which at least 1,000 civilians were killed, or to establish the facts behind war-time disappearances have, with few exceptions, gone nowhere.

### **Addressing the Factors Contributing to the Insurgency**

For the transition to peace to be sustained, it is necessary to address the factors that contributed to the insurgency, to prevent them from giving rise to renewed conflict. In this instance, there were three areas to consider: combating El Salvador's climate of impunity; expanding political participation; and reintegrating formerly excluded communities into the productive life of the country.

**Ending the Climate of Impunity.** The climate of impunity in prewar El Salvador enabled the repressive enforcement of the status quo, which in its denial of peaceful avenues for change, ultimately gave rise to the insurgency. To correct this system, the Chapultepec Accords ended the *fuero militar*, or military jurisdiction for government forces; installed an inspector general to oversee the security forces; and empowered the legislature to remove PNC and OIE directors for human-rights violations.<sup>73</sup> Security-sector reform was also part of this process, as was ONUSAL's human-rights instruction to the country's police and magistrates.<sup>74</sup> Together, these and other measures contributed to a dramatic improvement in human rights between 1991 and 1995.<sup>75</sup>

To sustain the progress being made, the secretary-general proposed the Joint Group for the Investigation of Politically Motivated Armed Groups in 1993. Composed of UN and government representatives, this group was mandated to investigate the activities of illegal armed groups since Chapultepec and the surge in political killings seen in 1993. It found that illegal armed groups were still active and, in

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<sup>72</sup> Major M. Chris Herrera and Major Michael G. Nelson, "Salvadoran Reconciliation," *Military Review*, Vol. 88, No. 4, July–August 2008, p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," p. 406.

<sup>74</sup> McCormick, "From Peacekeeping to Peacebuilding," pp. 290–291.

<sup>75</sup> For statistics, see Charles T. Call, "Democratisation, War and State-Building: Constructing the Rule of Law in El Salvador," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 35, 2003, p. 846.

some cases, protected by the security forces. As a more general finding, the report stated that the justice system had “continued to provide the margin of impunity these structures require” and recommended various reforms to the PNC and judiciary.<sup>76</sup> The Joint Group’s existence and ability to publish its findings were significant, and the investigation itself served to curb the rise in political violence.<sup>77</sup> Even so, most of its recommendations were ignored and virtually no action was taken against those cited in the report.

The fate of the Joint Group highlighted a fundamental problem with UN efforts to institutionalize a human-rights regime in El Salvador: While the UN was quite successful in imposing human-rights mechanisms, it was less able to encourage local ownership over such efforts. As an example, the peace accords had created a National Human Rights Advocate’s Office to act as a host nation version of ONUSAL’s human-rights division, but lack of political interest and support meant the new office struggled to get off the ground. ONUSAL and international assistance rescued the new entity from an early demise and helped it establish a nationwide presence. Yet despite a surge of activity under a new and notably effective director, the end of her term in 1998 left the organization once again floundering.<sup>78</sup>

UN efforts to reform the judiciary, a bulwark of El Salvador’s climate of impunity, also confronted a lack of local interest and will. The judiciary suffered from three main problems: corruption, politicization, and the centralization of power at the Supreme Court.<sup>79</sup> Reforms had been agreed to in the Chapultepec agreement, but their implementation lagged, partly because the terms were vague and partly because the

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<sup>76</sup> Johnstone, “Rights and Reconciliation in El Salvador,” pp. 323–324.

<sup>77</sup> Joaquín M. Chávez, “Perspectives on Demobilisation, Reintegration and Weapons Control in the El Salvador Peace Process,” in Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, *Reflections on Guns, Fighters and Armed Violence in Peace Processes*, Vol. 1, Geneva, Switzerland: HD Centre, 2008, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Call, “Assessing El Salvador’s Transition,” p. 407; Popkin, “Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador,” pp. 14–15.

<sup>79</sup> Stanley, “El Salvador: State-Building Before and After Democratisation,” p. 105. See also Johnstone, “Rights and Reconciliation in El Salvador,” pp. 332–333.



Supreme Court opposed them and considered itself above the agreements struck between the FMLN and the executive. ONUSAL's efforts to force change were imaginative, multifaceted, and often valuable, but achieving institutional reform proved beyond its capacity. Even after the 1994 elections, when a new Supreme Court and legislative assembly were formed, progress in this field was slow; a 1998 poll ranked the Supreme Court as the institution least capable of defending human rights and, years later, the judiciary remained "weak, inefficient, antiquated, overly partisan, and subject to corruption."<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, the climate of impunity that had caused and characterized El Salvador's war was no longer in effect. Profound problems continued to mark its human-rights regime and judiciary, but—due to the changed political atmosphere in El Salvador and to the other reforms implemented as part of its transition to peace—there has been no deliberate attempt to exploit the weaknesses of its institutions to commit human-rights abuses with impunity.

**Electoral Reform.** The absence of democratic political space was a fundamental cause of El Salvador's civil war. For this reason, the peace accords proposed various reforms to produce a more open democratic system. In 1993, a new electoral code was enacted, creating institutions to ensure fair elections. At the government's behest, ONUSAL formed an Electoral Division to monitor the coming 1994 elections.<sup>81</sup>

The deep problems with El Salvador's electoral system could not be entirely fixed in time for the 1994 elections. Part of the problem lay with the new Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), which did not adequately address the issue of voter registration, and for whose inadequacies ONUSAL's Electoral Division could only partially compensate.<sup>82</sup> An ONUSAL survey of August 1993 found that 27 percent of El Salvador's voting population was still not registered and, at the elections,

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<sup>80</sup> Call, "Constructing the Rule of Law," pp. 858–859.

<sup>81</sup> Ricardo Córdova Macías, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing Salvadoran Politics," in Studemeister, ed., *El Salvador: Implementation of the Peace Accords*, p. 29.

<sup>82</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," p. 409.

an estimated 300,000 people intending to vote were unable to do so, representing 20 percent of the electorate.<sup>83</sup>

Despite these significant shortcomings, the 1994 elections were sufficiently fair to be celebrated. They also confirmed the FMLN's transformation into a political party, meaning that "for the first time in the contemporary history of El Salvador, the political parties contesting an election reflected the nation's entire spectrum."<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the FMLN was able to establish itself as the main opposition party only two years after the cessation of hostilities.

In spite of efforts by the administration of Armando Calderón, problems with the electoral system persisted, primarily because the legislative assembly refused to approve several much-needed reforms. Nonetheless, El Salvador has held several elections since 1992 without major irregularities. In the latest presidential contest in 2009, the FMLN defeated ARENA by 2.6 percent of the vote, indicating the very real possibility of change through democratic means. Indeed, El Salvador's democracy constitutes one of the more successful outcomes of its transition to peace.

**Land Reform and Reintegration.** In addition to reconciling the political elites of the two parties, a perceived requirement for sustained peace was the reintegration into society of former combatants, their base, dependents, and other war-affected populations. These groups were to be given a stake in El Salvador's future through the National Reconstruction Plan (NRP), a five-year effort unveiled by the government in 1992. The NRP involved infrastructure repair in war-damaged areas, poverty reduction, the reintegration of former combatants, and a land-transfer program benefiting ex-combatants and war-affected civilians.

The NRP's results were uneven. While many quantitative targets for reintegration and employment were met (often with heavy foreign assistance, particularly from the United States, the circumstances facing the program's beneficiaries did not improve much, if at all. Throughout the 1990s, almost half of surveyed former combat-

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<sup>83</sup> Johnstone, "Rights and Reconciliation in El Salvador," p. 329.

<sup>84</sup> Macías, "Demilitarizing and Democratizing," p. 29.

ants were pessimistic about the future and believed that conditions had worsened since the end of the war.<sup>85</sup> In part, this was due to the inadequacies of the program and its implementation, whose logistical and resource requirements were significant. However, even those successfully “reintegrated” through the NRP necessarily “returned to the relatively low-level of productivity and economic integration that typifies their neighbors”—in other words, “to say that the demobilized have been reinserted or inserted in productive life does not imply any great economic success.”<sup>86</sup>

An underlying reason for the NRP’s mixed results was the persistence of El Salvador’s economic disparities. Although it was a root cause of El Salvador’s war, the socioeconomic imbalance between rich and poor was not fully addressed in the peace accords. Subsequent financial reforms also did little to address the problem. A convinced neo-liberal, Cristiani hoped that liberalizing the country’s economy opportunities for employment and wealth generation would help lift the whole of society out of war. By means of ambitious neo-liberal economic policies, Cristiani oversaw an impressive growth in GDP, which increased threefold between 1986 and 1994.<sup>87</sup> However, these gains did not address the country’s socioeconomic imbalance. Instead, El Salvador remained toward the bottom of the UN’s Human Development Index in regional terms.<sup>88</sup> Between 1989 and 2004, poverty levels actually rose from 47 percent to 51 percent; by 2008, “the income of the richest 10% of the population [was] 47 times higher than that of the poorest 10%,” with 25 percent of the population looking to emi-

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<sup>85</sup> For a summary of these surveys, see U.S. Agency for International Development, *Assistance to the Transition from War to Peace: Evaluation of the USAID/El Salvador’s Special Strategic Objective*, Project No. 519-0394, Washington, D.C., 1996, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> USAID, *Assistance to the Transition*, p. 7.

<sup>87</sup> In this endeavor, Cristiani was helped by U.S. nonmilitary aid and by the remittances sent by Salvadorans living in the United States, which amounted to \$1 billion per year in 1993 and 1994. See Call, “Assessing El Salvador’s Transition,” p. 411.

<sup>88</sup> Call, “Assessing El Salvador’s Transition,” p. 411.

gration as a necessary means of finding work.<sup>89</sup> In such a context, reintegration into civilian life, even if well implemented, was not a very attractive prospect.

The land-reform program implemented throughout the 1990s was another means by which the imbalances alluded to above were to be addressed. While the Chapultepec accord did not foresee a redistribution of land, it did envisage that “access to productive activities” would help give former combatants and civilians a stake in peace.<sup>90</sup> To that end, the government provided low-interest loans for land purchases, agricultural training, and technical assistance along with other forms of help.

Despite the centrality of the land issue, time-constraints during the peace negotiations meant the final accords were vague as to how the land was to be transferred.<sup>91</sup> From then on, any ambiguity in the accords turned political, whereas more detailed provisions became obstacles rather than aids in implementation. In both cases, the logistical and resource requirements of the endeavor, the challenge of turning former combatants into farmers, and the deeply political nature of this process, ensured slow and difficult progress.

Graciana del Castillo describes the many technical, political, and logistical impediments to the land transfers, which in general would proceed slowly, reach an impasse, require senior-level mediation by the UN, and then advance slightly only to confront another obstacle downstream.<sup>92</sup> The Chapultepec agreement had stipulated that the legalization of land tenure in former conflict zones would be completed by July 31, 1992, but it took until late 1995 for just 85 percent of potential beneficiaries to receive title to land. Of those, only 34 percent had their title filed with the national land registry, which, as del Castillo notes, meant

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<sup>89</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, *El Salvador: Political, Economic, and Social Conditions and U.S. Relations*, CRS Report for Congress, RS21655, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, updated November 18, 2008, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Graciana del Castillo, “The Arms-for-Land Deal in El Salvador,” in Doyle, Johnstone, and Orr, eds., *Keeping the Peace*, p. 342.

<sup>91</sup> Chávez, “Perspectives on Demobilisation, Reintegration and Weapons Control,” p. 15.

<sup>92</sup> See del Castillo, “The Arms-for-Land Deal in El Salvador,” pp. 349–357.

the land-transfer program had actually processed less than 30 percent of potential beneficiaries.<sup>93</sup> As with the NRP, even those who were successfully processed faced difficulties because many were unable to pay back the government-provided loans or sustain themselves on their acquired land.<sup>94</sup> Helped by USAID, the government passed various laws to forgive debt, but given the declining importance of the agricultural sector in El Salvador and the difficulties of many to access credit and technical assistance, land reforms became an inadequate means of addressing social inequality.<sup>95</sup>

Reintegration, land transfers, and economic reforms were all intended to address the root causes of the conflict. While success in these endeavors has been at best uneven, war has not resumed. Even so, the failure to do better has contributed to frustration and the rise of new sources of instability. Indeed, as a USAID assessment of the NRP concluded in 1996, the “further disintegration of the Salvadoran society, with associated internal problems of violent crime and destruction of property, and the external problems of uncontrolled migration, will be the price to pay for inadequate attention to the needs of this population.”<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusions

### A Successful Transition?

Through a UN-mediated peace process, rivals who had fought a bloody, decade-long war met at the negotiating table and agreed to difficult and important concessions, all while respecting the agreed-to ceasefire. The accords, in T. L. Karl’s words, represented a “negotiated revolution” in that they promised to address the causes of the conflict:

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<sup>93</sup> del Castillo, “The Arms-for-Land Deal,” p. 356. As del Castillo explains, unregistered lands could not be sold, meaning that the beneficiaries of these lands had “incurred a debt without having the possibility of selling the asset should they desire to do so or were forced to by failing to service their debt.”

<sup>94</sup> Macías, “Demilitarizing and Democratizing,” p. 28.

<sup>95</sup> Chávez, “Perspectives on Demobilisation, Reintegration and Weapons Control,” p. 15.

<sup>96</sup> USAID, *Assistance to the Transition*, p. 10.

the armed repression, authoritarianism and human-rights abuses, the social inequalities and the militarization of society.

The maintenance of the ceasefire since then is an accomplishment for El Salvador and for the international community. The implementation of reforms, meanwhile, has been uneven. The development of democracy, the reform of the ESAF and the security-sector in general all count as relative successes, while reforms to more fundamental aspects of the state—its judiciary, the economy and the land-reforms program—suffered delays and a lack of political will. In many cases, change required more time than anticipated; in others, the continued existence of entrenched norms and a lack of economic and political support has prevented change. Social inequalities persisted after the signing of the peace agreement. Richard Tardanico's study of social inequalities and basic infrastructure in post-civil war San Salvador states that San Salvador's poor (estimated at some 30 percent of households at the beginning of the 21st century) face "lack of housing finance; settlement in ravines vulnerable to earthquakes, floods and landslides; property tenure insecurity; overcrowded housing; serious air, land and water pollution; absent or woefully deficient utilities and health programs; and chaotic public transportation."<sup>97</sup>

Beyond the implementation of agreed-on reforms, the most fundamental problem in El Salvador's complete transition from war to peace was the failure to provide public security following the cessation of hostilities. A second major problem was the government's reintegration strategy, which failed to provide for the thousands of former combatants and dependents who were demobilized as part of the peace process or required particular care. Neither of these problems resulted in a resumption of war, yet they did contribute to a crime wave that continues to affect El Salvador today. This rampant criminality cannot be seen as a mere footnote to an otherwise successful transition because it has resulted in a level of violence comparable to the war itself. The gangs formed since 1992 have also become increasingly involved in

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Tardanico, "Post-Civil War San Salvador: Social Inequalities of Household and Basic Infrastructure in a Central American City," *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2008, pp. 127–152.

human trafficking, drug trafficking, and kidnapping, threatening El Salvador's stability.<sup>98</sup>

Just as seriously, widespread insecurity has tarnished El Salvador's political transformation; in a survey in 1999, 55 percent of respondents cited crime as a justification "for the toppling of the democracy."<sup>99</sup> Such action against the government has not materialized, yet crime has encouraged vigilantism and produced a mass-scale subcontracting of security to private actors. The government's own crime-reduction strategies are also problematic: The deployment of military anti-gang units prompted charges of brutality by the armed forces and was a reversal on one of the peace process's key accomplishments: the demilitarization of the provision of public order.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, widespread criminality has also compounded the other inadequacies of El Salvador's transition by overloading the judiciary and the PNC and eroding El Salvador's patience with human rights and due process.<sup>101</sup> While the crime wave has also added impetus to further reform of El Salvador's institutions, such as the judiciary and security forces, initiatives arising from these pressures have been condemned by some as representing a return to the repression typical of earlier times.<sup>102</sup>

Underlying the crime wave was the failure to address the social and economic imbalance that once provided FMLN with a promising recruitment base. In part, this failure relates to a lacuna in the accords, of which only 10 percent was devoted to socioeconomic reforms.<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, some observers have faulted the peace accord for reconciling two upper-middle class elites while excluding the El Salvadoran

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<sup>98</sup> Seelke, *El Salvador: Political, Economic, and Social Conditions*, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Call, "Constructing the Rule of Law," p. 828.

<sup>100</sup> Mo Hume, "El Salvador: The Limits of a Violent Peace," in Michael Pugh, Neil Cooper, and Mandy Turner, eds., *Critical Perspectives on War-transformed Economies*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008, pp. 327–328.

<sup>101</sup> Popkin, "Building the Rule of Law," p. 17.

<sup>102</sup> Hume, "El Salvador: The Limits of a Violent Peace," pp. 327–328. See also "El Salvador: Terrorism Law Misused Against Protesters," *Human Rights Watch*, July 30, 2007.

<sup>103</sup> Call, "Assessing El Salvador's Transition," p. 389.

people.<sup>104</sup> It is, however, difficult to see how the accords could have accommodated demands more ambitious than already included; given the combustible atmosphere in which the agreement was made, not much more could have been hoped for than the creation of an open and demilitarized political system that at least offered the opportunity for the required socioeconomic changes to be made over the long term.<sup>105</sup> More than the accords themselves, it is the subsequent failure to see these changes through that represents, in Call's words "the mugging of a success story."<sup>106</sup>

### Lessons Learned

El Salvador offers several lessons for future efforts to transition from war to peace. First, the case study illustrates once again that any rigid distinctions between "war" and "peace" do not accurately reflect the continuities that persist across these supposedly distinct phases. As Mats Berdal notes, "the formal end of armed conflict, especially if reached through a negotiated settlement, rarely entails a clean break from past patterns of violence, nor does it mean that the grievances which gave rise to conflict in the first instance have been entirely removed."<sup>107</sup>

One important lesson is that restraint of militias or paramilitary formations and the imposition of discipline on the military is essential to reaching a negotiated solution. Militias or paramilitary units supported by the military but operating without effective supervision by local authorities tend to extend insurgencies and undermine support for the government.

Second, the El Salvador case study illustrates the contributions that the UN, and the international community more broadly, can

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<sup>104</sup>See Hume, "El Salvador: The Limits of a Violent Peace," p. 320.

<sup>105</sup>Stanley, "El Salvador: State-Building Before and After Democratisation," p. 109.

<sup>106</sup>Charles T. Call, "El Salvador: The Mugging of a Success Story," in Charles T. Call, ed., *Constructing Justice and Security After War*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2007.

<sup>107</sup>Mats Berdal, "Consolidating Peace in the Aftermath of War: Reflections on 'Post-Conflict Peace-Building' from Bosnia to Iraq," in John Andreas Olsen, ed., *On New Wars*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2007, p. 121.



make to the processes of peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. The efforts of the UN, in particular, and of the United States and its regional partners were manifold and wholly indispensable to the final agreement and to the implementation of subsequent reforms. Coordination among these actors was a force multiplier. It helped the UN muster the authority and leverage needed for the multifaceted responsibilities it chose to undertake.

Third, international assistance, no matter how well designed, can never carry a country from war to peace but must form part of a local political process. In El Salvador, the transition required a favorable alignment of international, regional, and domestic circumstances in the late 1980s. In the words of de Soto, the negotiations took place “almost in laboratory conditions.”<sup>108</sup> Absent these conditions, the same actions by outsiders would have brought entirely different results.

Fourth, peace-building is a long-term process likely to encounter setbacks and delays. The peace negotiations in El Salvador lasted for two years; implementation dragged on for many more. It was therefore critical that ONUSAL maintained a presence until 1995, and was then replaced by various follow-on missions and finally by the UN’s specialized agencies. Similarly, the transition benefited from the willingness of the United States to sustain its investment in peace beyond the conclusion of the 1992 agreement.

Fifth, the long duration of peace-building demands a mandate and skill set that can be adapted to suit the host nation’s evolving requirements. In El Salvador, there was an initial, urgent need for public security that was not adequately met. Later in the transition, the mission required technical skills: judicial experts, human rights lawyers, and specialists in agrarian reform. Overall, these endeavors call for an ability to strengthen and complement the host nation wherever it is weak.

Sixth, while the role of the international community in securing peace is important, there are definite limits to what international assistance can bring. In El Salvador, the initial negotiations to end the war

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<sup>108</sup>As cited in Nicole Ball and Tammy Halevy, eds., *Making Peace Work: The Role of the International Development Community*, Overseas Development Institute, Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 12.

presented a fruitful opportunity for deep-rooted reforms. After this point, imposing change from outside became more difficult, as evidenced by the struggles throughout the 1990s to reform the judiciary.

Finally, the international community must be careful not to engender a dependence on external institutions and initiative. Ultimately, whether internationally sponsored reforms sink or swim will be up to local institutions. Counterintuitively, in seeking to ensure local compliance, the guaranteed and sustained commitment of outside actors can be counterproductive because the host nation is never required to take responsibility for the evolution of its own institutions. As the United States found in El Salvador, in these cases the threat of withdrawal can produce better results than continued assistance.



# The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali, 2006–2009

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Map of Mali



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

RAND MG1111/2-5.1

## Introduction

### Background: Mali's North-South Divide

One of the largest countries in Africa, Mali is also one of the poorest, ranking 173rd out of 177 in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) human development index.<sup>1</sup> Geographically, eth-

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 2005 data. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Human Development Report 2007/2008*, New York, 2007, p. 232.

nically, linguistically, and even economically, Mali is broadly divided in two. The south of the country, where the capital city, Bamako, is located, has a subtropical climate, most of the country's farming and economic activities, and 80 percent of the population (mostly of Mande ethnicity). The north, which comprises the regions of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal, belongs to the Sahelian belt and, further north, to the Sahara.

The four main ethnic groups living in the north are broadly divided between nomadic (Tuaregs and Arabs) and sedentary (Songhai and Fula) people. The former have increasingly sedentarized over the past decades, both as a result of the modernization policy of the Malian government in the 1960s, which promoted farming over herding, and the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s that decimated the herds of cattle, sheep, and goats on which the nomads depended for their subsistence.<sup>2</sup> Increasing desertification and overgrazing have represented additional challenges to the nomads' traditional lifestyle.<sup>3</sup> In addition to these episodic hardships, northern Mali has remained less developed, in terms of infrastructure, than the rest of the country.<sup>4</sup> Until 1985, for instance, there was no tarmac road between Gao and Mopti, the next-largest town further south.<sup>5</sup>

This lack of infrastructure, as well as the sheer size of the country, contributes to further isolating a northern region that has long been politically remote from the south. Travelling by road from Bamako to Gao takes an estimated 35 hours; 4–5 days is a realistic travel time to

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<sup>2</sup> Baz Lecocq, "Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara: The Teshumara Nationalist Movement and the Revolutions in Tuareg Society," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 49, Supplement S12, December 2004, p. 89; David Gutelius, "Islam in Northern Mali and the War on Terror," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, January 2007, p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Hershkowitz, "The Tuareg in Mali and Niger: The Role of Desertification in Violent Conflict," ICE Case Study No. 151, *The Inventory of Conflict and Environment (ICE)*, Washington, D.C.: American University, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Kalifa Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in the Sahel: The Tuareg Insurgency in Mali*, Strategic Studies Institute Report, Carlisle, Pa.: United States Army War College, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Robin-Edward Poulton and Ibrahim Ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu: Democratic Governance, Development and African Peacemaking*, Geneva: UNIDIR (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research), 1998, p. 31.

reach Kidal.<sup>6</sup> An airline with unreliable and sporadic schedules connects Bamako to Timbuktu, the only city in the north with an airport. Because of this isolation, civil servants and technicians posted to the northern regions have often been reluctant to take their posts or never come at all, reinforcing the lack of economic and social services in these regions and the northern populations' feeling of living on the margins.<sup>7</sup>

As a consequence, the populations of northern Mali have historically been closer to the populations of southern Algeria or western Niger than to the rest of Mali. Relative socioeconomic deprivation and the distance from the capital have led the northern populations to establish their own economic networks. Northern Malians commonly procure basic consumer goods across the border from neighboring Algeria rather than obtaining them from Bamako.<sup>8</sup> This is even more so for goods that are subsidized in Algeria—and thus cheaper than their Malian equivalents—such as fuel, sugar, couscous, and milk. Informal trade in the region also includes higher-value “goods,” such as cigarettes, weapons, drugs, and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. Trans-Saharan routes have been used over centuries and are still to this day largely unregulated due to the remoteness of these areas and the inhospitality of the terrain for police and customs patrols. A sharp increase in smuggling activities can be traced to the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, which forced pastoralist nomads to find other means of subsistence. Cross-Sahara smuggling routes were used extensively during the Tuareg rebellion of 1990–1996, providing the rebels with weapons, fuel, and vehicles. Recently, narcotics—especially cocaine

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<sup>6</sup> Macartan Humphreys and Habaye Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” in Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, eds., *Understanding Civil War Africa: Africa Evidence and Analysis*, Volume 1: *Africa*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2005, p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> Poulton and Ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu*, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Baz Lecocq and Paul Schrijver, “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust: Potholes and Pitfalls on the Saharan Front,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2007, p. 159.

from South America—have been an increasing share of the cargos that are transported across the desert toward Europe.<sup>9</sup>

### A History of Contestation

The northern regions' relative isolation carries political implications. The north has long been considered a nest of dissent and separatism; the Tuaregs, in particular, have a history of contesting against the Malian state.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, long before Mali gained independence from France, the Tuareg north had a difficult relationship with the southern part of the country due to its isolation and the region's cultural ties to the other regions of the Sahara. Since its independence from France in 1960, Mali has experienced three Tuareg-led rebellions:<sup>11</sup> in 1962–1964, 1990–1996, and 2006–2009.<sup>12</sup> This track record of rebellions is critical to understanding current events in northern Mali because the key actors and the claims for which they fight tend to recur from one rebellion to the next.

In 1962, the Tuaregs, feeling excluded from the government of newly independent Mali and oppressed by its modernization policy that clashed with their traditional lifestyle, initiated a rebellion, which

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<sup>9</sup> 2004 seems to have been the turning point for drug trafficking in Africa. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the amount of cocaine seized in Africa jumped from 266 kg in 2003 to 1,788 kilograms the following year. In 2007, this figure reached 6,458 kg. See UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime), *Drug Trafficking as a Security Threat in West Africa*, November 2008, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed history and sociology of Malian Tuaregs and in particular the Kel Adagh tribal confederation, see Pierre Bouilley, *Les Touaregs Kel Adagh*, Paris: Karthala, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Although the words “rebellion” and “insurgency” have both been used in the media to describe Tuareg uprisings against the Malian state, “rebellion” is the one that was used almost exclusively by the participants themselves—whether on the rebels or the government side. The word “rebellion” is accordingly used most often in this chapter (phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, August 17, 2009; phone interview with Malian military official, August 18, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> There were also Tuareg uprisings during the French colonization period, most notably in 1894 and 1916. Both were severely repressed by the authorities (Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 254). Historically, Kidal has always been the epicenter of these contestation movements (Panapress, “Mali: La rebellion touarègue dans le Nord vue de Tripoli,” May 21, 2008).

was brutally repressed by the Malian authorities. An estimated 1,000 Tuaregs were killed, and many fled the country toward Algeria and Libya, while the central government in Bamako put the three regions of Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal under military administration.<sup>13</sup> The decades that followed saw a reinforcement of the political marginalization of Tuaregs and Arabs, with an administration and an army made up almost exclusively of Songhai.<sup>14</sup>

The second rebellion, which is also the most important one in terms of duration and number of actors involved, started in 1990. It was driven mainly by economic factors: The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s had impoverished and socially marginalized many Tuaregs, whose frustration was compounded by the fact that little of the drought relief funds handed to the Malian government ever reached them, due to high levels of corruption in the administration.<sup>15</sup> A number of Tuaregs who had migrated to Libya in the 1970s came back to Mali after the sharp decline in oil prices in the mid-1980s cost them their jobs. In June 1990, a small group of Tuaregs from the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Azawad<sup>16</sup>) attacked a military outpost in Menaka (near the border with Niger), killing soldiers and capturing weapons.<sup>17</sup>

The Malian government, following its blueprint of the 1960s rebellion, declared a state of emergency in the northern region and responded to the Menaka attack with repressive measures against civilians—Tuaregs and Arabs alike. As a result, numerous Tuaregs, who previously had had little interest in politics and armed action, decided to join the rebellion. The Arab communities created their own armed

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<sup>13</sup> Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, pp. 10–11; Lecocq, “Unemployed Intellectuals,” p. 89; Chérif Ouazani, “Priorité à la médiation,” *Jeune Afrique*, September 10, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 274.

<sup>15</sup> Lecocq, “Unemployed Intellectuals,” p. 89; Gutelius, “Islam in Northern Mali,” p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Azawad* is the Tuareg-populated region that spans across northern Mali, southern Algeria, and northwestern Niger.

<sup>17</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 247.



émovement, the FIAA (Arab Islamic Front of Azawad), which emerged out of the MPLA.<sup>18</sup>

Facing simultaneously a Turaeg-Arab rebellion in the north, whose first military actions were rather successful,<sup>19</sup> and an increasing movement for democratization in the south, Malian president Moussa Traoré, who had been presiding over a military dictatorship since overthrowing President Modibo Keita in a coup in 1968, decided to accept Algeria's offer to serve as a mediator.<sup>20</sup> The Tamanrasset Peace Treaty of January 6, 1991, between the Malian government, the MPA, and the FIAA stipulated that the Malian army would reduce its presence in the north. It also gave more administrative and political powers to local actors and promised that sizable funds would be funneled to the north for development programs.<sup>21</sup>

The peace, however, was short-lived: Some elements of the army were hostile to the terms of the accord, which they saw as too favorable to the north, and continued to carry out attacks and abuses against the civilian population. Tuaregs and Arabs soon became equally unsatisfied with the accord, which was not implemented for lack of funding and failed to translate into any concrete improvement of their situation. The MPA split and gave rise to two new groups, the Popular Liberation Front of Azawad (FPLA) and the Azawad Liberation Revolutionary Army (ARLA).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The remainder of the MPLA became the MPA (Popular Movement for Azawad). See Poulton and Ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu*, p. 56–57.

<sup>19</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed note that “Militarily, [...] the MPLA turned out to be strong. In one battle at Tuxemene in September 1990, the movement defeated the army with up to 200 troops lost on the government side. [...] By the end of the year, the *maquis* comprised an estimated 3,000 fighters.” (“Senegal and Mali,” pp. 255–256.)

<sup>20</sup> Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, p. 16. Traoré was deposed in a coup in late March 1991, and its democratic successors proved more prone to providing the Tuaregs with political reforms.

<sup>21</sup> Government of Mali, MPA and FIAA, “Communiqué de presse et texte des Accords de paix signés à Tamanghasset,” January 6, 1991.

<sup>22</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 257. FPLA is the “Front Populaire pour la Libération de l’Azawad” and ARLA is the “Armée Révolutionnaire pour la Libération de l’Azawad.”

On April 11, 1992, all parties eventually signed a “National Pact” whose provisions differed little from those of the Tamanrasset accord but this time included a timetable for implementation.<sup>23</sup> Its two major problems, however, were lack of funding to support its implementation and the fact that sedentary populations were not consulted and felt excluded from the accord.<sup>24</sup> Violence resumed once again, and this time included inter-ethnic violence between the Tuareg groups and the Arab FIAA, as well as between the Tuareg and Arab groups on one side and the Patriotic Movement of the Ganda Koy—a self-defense militia created by the Songhai and Fula population—on the other.<sup>25</sup> The conflict eventually petered out around 1995: the FIAA was militarily defeated by the army and the Tuareg groups, the ARLA disappeared when most of its members decided to join the MPA and the FPLA, and the FPLA decided to start negotiating with the Ganda Koy.<sup>26</sup> On March 27, 1996, in Timbuktu, 3,000 weapons were publicly burned in a ceremony known as the Flame of Peace. Close to 12,000 former Tuareg rebels were integrated into the Malian armed forces or the administration.<sup>27</sup>

When Tuaregs took up arms again in 2006, many elements of the new insurgency were reminiscent of the 1990s rebellion. To a large extent, the main actors involved were the same, and the claims for which they fought had barely changed since the signing of the National Pact. The rebellion covered three years, from 2006 to 2009, but is best understood as comprising two main phases interrupted by almost a year of respite. During the first phase, from May to July 2006, a Tuareg

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<sup>23</sup> Government of Mali, “Pacte national conclu entre le gouvernement de la République du Mali et les mouvements et fronts unifiés de l’Azawad consacrant le statut particulier du Nord Mali,” April 11, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 258.

<sup>25</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 258. *Ganda Koy* means “the masters of the land” in Songhai. For more on the Ganda Koy, see Poulton and Ag Youssouf, *A Peace of Timbuktu*, pp. 71–72.

<sup>26</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, “Senegal and Mali,” p. 260.

<sup>27</sup> IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks), “Mali-Niger: Insecurity Persists Despite Militia Leader’s Arrest,” September 29, 2008.

group, the May 23, 2006, Democratic Alliance for Change (Alliance Démocratique du 23 mai pour le Changement or ADC), started negotiating with the government almost immediately after its first attacks and signed a peace agreement under the mediation of Algeria within three months. Less than a year later, a splinter group from the ADC, the Niger-Mali Tuareg Alliance (ATNM), resumed fighting. The ending of this second phase came in February 2009 when the ATNM incurred major losses, the group split, and its leader fled the country.

## Phase 1: The ADC Rebellion, May–July 2006

### Introduction: Brief History of the Conflict Leading Up to the Period of Transition

On May 23, 2006, 150 Tuareg officers and soldiers billeted in the military posts of Kidal and Menaka deserted their bases with their weapons and army vehicles.<sup>28</sup> The Menaka garrison was a highly symbolic place to attack, for that is where the 1990 rebellion started. This event had been preceded, a few months earlier, by the desertion of a well-known figure of the 1990s rebellion, Lieutenant-Colonel Hassan Fagaga, who left his military post in Bamako and retreated to the area north of Kidal with a few men he had recruited.<sup>29</sup>

The deserters called themselves the May 23, 2006 Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC) and quickly let the Malian government know what their demands were: an increased level of autonomy for the northern regions and a more equitable distribution of national resources in order to contribute to the development of the north. Such claims were almost exactly identical to those brought during the 1990s

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<sup>28</sup> RFI (Radio France Internationale), “Les Touaregs rebelles veulent négocier,” May 24, 2006. For a detailed account of the Kidal attack by Hassan Fagaga, see Mustapha Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga: ‘Il faut un statut particulier pour Kidal,’” *El Watan* (Algiers), June 24, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Zaïre Djaouane, “Les insurgés attendent une médiation étrangère,” *Afrik.com*, May 29, 2006; Evariste Ouédraogo, “Désertion du colonel Fagaga de l’armée malienne: Ne réveillez pas la rébellion qui dort!” *L’Observateur Paalga* (Ouagadougou), February 21, 2006; Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga.”

Tuareg rebellion; they were fueled by a feeling of frustration borne out of the perceived delays in the implementation of the 1992 National Pact.<sup>30</sup> The main figures of the ADC were Tuaregs who had taken part in the 1990s rebellion. The ADC leader, Iyad Ag Ghaly, was the former leader of the MPA, and his military chief, Fagaga, had been a key member of the same group.<sup>31</sup>

### Strategy (Pre-Transition)

**Incumbent.** For the Malian government, the history of successive rebellions and how they had been dealt with by previous leaders represented a considerable learning opportunity. Accordingly, the government's counterinsurgency strategy benefited from the lessons of what had worked and what had failed ten years earlier. The main lesson the Malian government had learned in the 1990s was that a repressive policy against the civilian population bred support for the rebellion rather than deterring it. But when the government agreed to negotiate and came up with a peace accord, civilians tended to withdraw their support to the rebels.<sup>32</sup> Another lesson from the 1990s was that, with the wrong strategy, the conflict could quickly intensify and spread to other categories of the population besides the Tuaregs.

These considerations may explain why, after the initial attacks, the immediate reaction of the Malian government followed two lines: appeasement and containment. President Amadou Toumani Touré called for dialogue with the mutineers; he also asked the population to stay calm and to not confuse the rebels with the rest of the Tuareg community.<sup>33</sup> Army spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Coulibaly made

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<sup>30</sup> *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, "Malian Tuareg Groups," August 12, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> *Jane's*, "Malian Tuareg Groups."

<sup>32</sup> Lecocq, "Unemployed Intellectuals," p. 107. Or, as a military official put it: "We found out in the 1990s that a military solution is never final. It is the political solution that is most durable" (interview with Malian military official, August 18, 2009).

<sup>33</sup> "Déclaration à Diéma du Président Amadou Toumani Touré sur la situation à Kidal," quoted in Mohamed Sacko, "Attaques rebelles à Kidal : l'armée sécurise la zone," web site of the Ministry for Expatriate Malians and African Integration (*ministère des Maliens de l'extérieur et de l'intégration africaine*), May 23, 2006. President Touré's crisis management

clear that the army would not reiterate the mistakes of the 1990s and publicly stated that “The Malian army, who perfectly controls the situation in Kidal and the surrounding areas, did not allow itself to be caught in the rebels’ trap. They thought that the regular forces would react indiscriminately against Tuaregs and incite other [Tuaregs] integrated [in the army] to leave the ranks to join the rebellion. Obviously, this plan did not work. . . . Currently we can say that the Malian army has the city of Kidal and its surrounding areas completely safe without harming anyone.”<sup>34</sup> Beyond appeasement and containment, however, President Touré also prepared for the worst by sending additional troops from Bamako, Mopti, and Gao toward Kidal.<sup>35</sup>

**Insurgent.** The main request of the ADC was the implementation of the 1992 National Pact that had not, ten years later, been fully carried out.<sup>36</sup> In particular, they wanted a lesser presence of the army in the north and more development funds.<sup>37</sup> Some of the soldiers who had deserted also accused the army, into which they had been integrated as a result of the peace accord, of discriminating against them—limiting their professional advancement and even the supplies to which they had access.<sup>38</sup>

The ADC, to a large extent, followed the same containment policy as the government. They did not attempt to rally other Tuaregs (such as those living in Niger) or other nomadic populations (such

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was also very much in line with his leadership style, which is centered on negotiation and coalition-building.

<sup>34</sup> Sacko, “Attaques rebelles à Kidal.”

<sup>35</sup> RFI, “Les Touaregs rebelles.”

<sup>36</sup> Lecocq and Schrijver, “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust,” p. 155.

<sup>37</sup> Abdoulaye Tamboura, “Le MNJ et la crise d’identité des sociétés touarègues,” in “Crises touarègues au Niger et au Mali,” roundtable organized by IFRI (Institut Français de Relations Internationales), November 27, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Chahana Takiou, “Situation dans la région de Kidal: une paix à consolider!” *L’Indépendant* (Bamako), February 19, 2009. The populations of the north harbor contradictory feelings toward the army.

as the Arabs) to their cause.<sup>39</sup> There was no consideration, either, of attempting to collaborate with the Mali-based cells of al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which has represented a new actor in the region since the rebellion of the 1990s. At its highest, the ADC had up to 1,000 members,<sup>40</sup> but they were generally restricted to the Ifoghas tribe, which is mostly present in the Kidal region; other tribes and regions remained largely outside of the rebellion.<sup>41</sup> Within a few days, the ADC requested negotiations with the government.

**External Powers Supporting Belligerents. Algeria.** Algeria has long been, and remains, a key actor in northern Mali. The geographic proximity between northern Mali and southern Algeria and the porosity of the border have resulted in their respective populations engaging in frequent exchanges and trade relationships. Algeria has had a sustained record of diplomatic involvement in the disputes that arose between the Malian Tuaregs and Bamako. Both the 1991 Tamanrasset agreement and the 1992 National Pact were negotiated under its auspices.

In May–July 2006, when Algeria was called to act as a mediator between the Malian government and the ADC, it reportedly put two conditions to its involvement: a commitment from the ADC not to involve other Tuaregs in the dispute, in particular those from Niger, and a pledge that the ADC would not seek autonomy or independence.<sup>42</sup> The interests of the Algerian government were therefore perfectly in line with those of the Malian government: to contain the crisis and to avoid disintegration of the state in the region.

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<sup>39</sup> Iyad Ag Ghaly apparently considered that the rebellion was an internal issue that should be confined to Malian Tuaregs (phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, September 1, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> *Jane's*, "Malian Tuareg Groups."

<sup>41</sup> Tamboura, "Le MNJ et la crise d'identité des sociétés touarègues"; phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009. This alignment of rebel groups with tribal confederations is not unusual. During the 1990s rebellion, the MPLA was largely composed of Kel Adagh, while the FPLA drew support from the Chemenammas tribe (Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, "Senegal and Mali," p. 282).

<sup>42</sup> Ouazani, "Priorité à la médiation."

**The GSPC.** One reason why the crisis in northern Mali received more international attention than it had in the 1990s is the emergence of a new local actor: the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) and its Saharan cells. The GSPC is a splinter group of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), a radical Islamist group that was particularly active during the Algerian civil war of the 1990s. The GSPC pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda and renamed itself Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in January 2007. Among the emirs of the GSPC, some are more ideologues and others more opportunistic; overall, it is often difficult to distinguish between Muslim fundamentalists and traffickers, the two categories largely overlapping.<sup>43</sup> The activities of the GSPC in the Sahara came to public attention in 2003 when one of its emirs, Abderrazak el-Para, kidnapped 32 European tourists and reportedly reaped a € 5 million ransom for their release.

After more than ten years sharing the same territory, GSPC/AQIM members and local nomadic tribes (mainly Arabs, but also Tuaregs) have developed business and, in some cases, family relationships, especially in the Timbuktu region.<sup>44</sup> Not only do the two groups occasionally compete for the control of smuggling networks, but the activities of the GSPC/AQIM—such as the kidnapping of Westerners—also risk attracting unwanted local and international attention on the informal trade that still represents the basic livelihood of many families in the region.<sup>45</sup> Tuaregs have also complained that the GSPC/AQIM represents a risk to their communities—imposing a much more fundamentalist approach to religion and an ideology that differs radically from their traditional way of life.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, "Mali Peace Accord Could Counter AQIM's Reach," March 2, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Ali Lmrabet, "Mali: Al-Qaida veut séduire les Touaregs," *Courrier International* (originally published in *El Mundo*, Madrid), October 9, 2008; phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Anneli Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb: The Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism*, ISS monograph No. 144, June 2008, p. 195; *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, "Mali Peace Accord."

<sup>46</sup> *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, "Mali Peace Accord."

The ADC publicly denied having any link with the GSPC.<sup>47</sup> Eglasse Ag Idar, a spokesman for the ADC, also denied that the Tuaregs were in any way receptive to GSPC ideas, stating instead that “Our Democratic Alliance handles security in the region and we chase out those who are not from there, that’s the position we’ve taken to control the zone.”<sup>48</sup> The two groups clashed militarily on at least two occasions. A leader of the GSPC was reportedly killed and three Tuaregs were wounded in a firefight that took place northwest of Kidal on September 19, 2006.<sup>49</sup> This was followed a month later by a revenge attack from the GSPC in which nine Tuaregs were killed, several of them injured, and two taken prisoners.<sup>50</sup> According to one media source, the clashes happened in retaliation for the GSPC’s trying to recruit Tuaregs.<sup>51</sup>

### The Transition Period

Unlike past Tuareg insurgencies, the conflict ignited by the ADC moved very quickly toward a resolution.

For the government, it was clear that the rebels were not interested in protracted fighting. The ADC asked for negotiations immediately after the Kidal and Menaka incidents, and it did not engage in further attacks after that.<sup>52</sup> This suggests either that the group did not have much of a military plan or that its objective was to put pressure on the government to advance a political agenda rather than to achieve military victories. In an interview he gave almost a year later, Fagaga confirmed this point: “If we had wanted war for war itself, we would have repeated our attacks and locked all ways toward dialogue—which

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<sup>47</sup> “Démenti pour toute connexion de notre mouvement avec le GSPC,” Azawad-Union blog, June 9, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> *Reuters*, “Mali Tuaregs Say Algerian Militant Killed in Clash,” October 1, 2006.

<sup>49</sup> *Reuters*, “Mali Tuaregs.”

<sup>50</sup> *Reuters*, “Algerian Militants Ambush Malian Tuaregs, Kill 9,” October 24, 2006.

<sup>51</sup> *Reuters*, “Algerian Militants Ambush Malian Tuaregs.”

<sup>52</sup> Phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, August 11, 2009.



we did not. We thought of this attack [in Kidal and Menaka on May 23, 2006] as a warning.”<sup>53</sup>

The ADC, however, refused to speak directly with the Malian government, which it distrusted, and expressly requested a foreign mediator. Fagaga told a journalist that “there were four candidates: the United States, France, Libya, and Algeria.”<sup>54</sup> The Malian government chose Algeria, which became the lead mediator in the crisis.<sup>55</sup>

### **Managing the Transition**

With negotiations under way, the conflict seemed circumscribed. Abdelkrim Ghrieb, Algerian ambassador to Mali, helped the two parties (represented by Minister of Territorial Administration General Kafougouna Koné for the Malian government and Iyad ag Ghaly for the ADC) reach a peace agreement, which was signed in Algiers on July 4, 2006.

The Algiers Accord granted the Tuaregs more development funds, with Bamako pledging to funnel \$2 million to the north for that purpose.<sup>56</sup> It specified a list of infrastructure projects that would be built in the region. It also recognized the specificity of the northern regions and promised a quickening of the devolution of power toward local institutions. The rebels who had deserted were allowed back into the army, which would largely evacuate the north. In exchange, the Tuaregs pledged not to seek political autonomy, and reintegrated rebels would return the weapons they had seized from the Malian security forces.<sup>57</sup>

The Algiers Accord provided for the reintegration of ADC combatants not just into the Malian army but also within the Special Units, where they would be mixed with Malian soldiers. These units,

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<sup>53</sup> Hassan Fagaga, quoted in Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga.” Author’s translation.

<sup>54</sup> Hassan Fagaga quoted in Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga.”

<sup>55</sup> Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga.”

<sup>56</sup> IRIN, “Mali: Civil Society Cautiously Optimistic About Prisoner Release,” September 10, 2008; Chérif Ouazani, “Priorité à la médiation.”

<sup>57</sup> BBC, “Tuareg rebels in Mali Peace Deal,” June 30, 2006; Government of Mali, “Accord d’Alger pour la restauration de la paix, de la sécurité et du développement dans la région de Kidal,” July 4, 2006.

to be “composed essentially of elements originating from nomadic regions,” included many former combatants and were tasked with basic security and patrolling roles in the north.<sup>58</sup> More than 400 new recruits were planned to join these Special Units, which were put under the commandment of Hassan Fagaga.

The brief rebellion of 2006 was a winning game for both the government and the ADC. Bamako solved a crisis that could have turned into a civil conflict within a matter of weeks, and secured its prime interest: the preservation of the country’s territorial integrity, with the ADC renouncing any claim to political autonomy. President Touré gained direct political benefits from his appeasement strategy: support from Tuareg leaders in the presidential elections that took place on April 29, 2007, allowed him to win with a large majority.<sup>59</sup> The Tuaregs successfully brought to the government’s attention the problems they were facing in the north and, more generally, their frustration that most of the provisions of the 1992 National Pact had not been implemented. They quickly obtained the negotiations they asked for, and their main grievances were addressed in the Algiers Accord.

The leaders of the rebellion were either reintegrated into the army or given prominent positions. Ag Ghaly and Bahanga became members of the *Haut Conseil aux collectivités* (the Malian senate).<sup>60</sup> In 2007, Ag Ghaly was appointed Consul of Mali in Saudi Arabia, and his deputy Amada Ag Bibi was elected a representative to Mali’s National Assembly.<sup>61</sup>

For a few months, the crisis seemed resolved. On March 8, 2007, the weapons of more than 2,000 former combatants were collected,

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<sup>58</sup> Government of Mali “Accord d’Alger,” Chapter III, § 4. AFP, “Joint Malian-Tuareg Commission to Prepare New Round of Talks,” August 20, 2008; *Jeune Afrique*, “Le casse-tête des unités spéciales,” February 23, 2009.

<sup>59</sup> Tiemoko Diallo, “Tuareg Rebels Attack Police Post in Northeast Mali,” *Reuters*, May 11, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> *El Watan* (Algiers), “Les rebelles touareg attaquent Tinzaouatène,” September 14–15, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> Panapress, “Mali: La Rebellion”; *Jane’s Intelligence Digest*, “Mali Peace Accord.”

and their owners were billeted in Kidal.<sup>62</sup> Two weeks later, a large donor meeting (the “Forum de Kidal,” planned for in the Algiers Accord) took place, with the objective of gathering international contributions to fund a \$1.1 million, ten-year development plan for the region.<sup>63</sup>

Overall, Bamako transitioned out of the counterinsurgency by pursuing a number of measures that were all aimed at promoting national reconciliation. The government

- addressed the grievances of the ADC by granting its two main requests (a lesser military presence in the north and a larger share of national financial resources)
- built confidence within the northern communities by refraining from forcible disarmament
- increased the role of local actors in securing the north
- integrated the rebel leaders into the national political apparatus
- quickly followed through on some of its most essential promises, such as making resources available for the development of the northern regions.

In exchange, the Malian government obtained the promise that Malian territorial integrity would not be challenged by the ADC. The situation reverted to normal, but this peaceful transition lasted only a few months. What the government could not prevent was a schism in the ADC and the emergence of an unyielding minority that denounced the Algiers Accord and took up arms again.

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<sup>62</sup> Chérif Ouazani, “Rebellion au Nord du Mali: Les dessous d’une attaque,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 20, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Ouazani, “Rebellion au Nord du Mali.” See Conclusions et recommandations du forum de kidal pour le developpement des régions nord du Mali, Kidal, les 23 et 24 mars 2007.

## Phase 2: The ATNM Rebellion (May 2007–February 2009)

### Introduction: Brief History of the Conflict Leading Up to the Period of Transition

The peace was short-lived. Bahanga had only half-heartedly accepted the Algiers Accord and, less than a year later, founded a new group, the Niger-Mali Tuareg Alliance, and attacked a Malian security post in Tin-Zaouatène, near the Algerian border, on May 11, 2007. This attack was deadlier for the rebels than for their victims, because eight men out of the ten who were killed belonged to their ranks, but it marked the beginning of a new insurgency. On August 26, 2007, another ATNM attack in the Tedjeret region resulted in the kidnapping of 60 soldiers.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike the ADC, the ATNM reportedly had links with trafficking networks active in the region,<sup>65</sup> as well as with the Niger's Movement for Justice (MNJ), a Tuareg group involved in a rebellion against the government of Nigerien President Mamadou Tandja. The Tin-Zaouatène attack of May 2007 was reportedly conducted with the help of Nigerien Tuaregs.<sup>66</sup> It is unclear whether this alliance was born out of commitment to a pan-Tuareg ideology or if it was mainly opportunistic and represented a way for Bahanga to make up for his lack of manpower.<sup>67</sup> The latter interpretation is more consistent with the fact that, overall, only a small fraction of the MNJ fought alongside Bahanga, and only for a short period of time.

### Strategy (Pre-Transition)

**Incumbent.** Initially, the strategy of the Malian government was very similar to the one it had pursued with the ADC. This strategy was fourfold: (1) to isolate the rebels and avoid contagion; (2) to avoid antagonizing neutral Tuaregs; (3) to pursue a diplomatic track with the

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<sup>64</sup> *El Watan*, "Qui est Ibrahim Bahanga?" September 14–15, 2007, p. 12; BBC, "Mali Boosts Army to Fight Tuareg," September 18, 2007.

<sup>65</sup> *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, "Malian Tuareg Groups."

<sup>66</sup> Diallo, "Tuareg Rebels Attack Police Post."

<sup>67</sup> Ouazani, "Rebellion au Nord du Mali."

help of Algeria and Libya; and (4) to keep a low level of military pressure on the insurgents.

The government attempted to separate those members of the ADC who supported the Algiers Accord from Bahanga's followers.<sup>68</sup> Its attitude toward Bahanga was very different from what it had been toward the ADC. From the very beginning, the government presented Bahanga as a drug smuggler and a bandit, claiming that he did not have any legitimacy speaking for the Tuaregs.<sup>69</sup> A ministry of defense spokesman called members of the ATNM terrorists rather than rebels.<sup>70</sup> After the Nampala attack of December 2008 (see below) Malian authorities described those responsible as "an armed gang linked to drug traffickers."<sup>71</sup> One interpretation of Bahanga's rationale for fighting was that he was trying to get the army to withdraw from the Tin-Zaouatène area, a move that would allow him to carry out smuggling activities undisturbed. Rather than acting for the common good of the Tuareg people, Bahanga was accused of trying to secure a sanctuary for his business interests<sup>72</sup>—an interpretation supported by several Malian and Western sources.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> AFP, "Mali: 'Pas de trêve' dans les combats contre le group rebelle d'Ag Bahanga," February 3, 2009.

<sup>69</sup> IRIN, "Mali: Indignation Dominates Reaction as Attacks in North Escalate," August 31, 2007. ADC members were first called "deserters" and then "rebels" by the Malian government, but never (at least publicly) "bandits" (phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, August 17, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Voice of America, "Analyst Says Mali Troop Buildup Raises Risk for Renewed Violence," October 22, 2007.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in BBC, "Tuareg Rebels Raid Mali Army Base," December 20, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> BBC, "Mali Boosts Army to fight Tuareg." Army Chief of Staff Colonel Gabriel Poudiougou described the conflict as "part of a battle for control over lucrative smuggling routes across the Sahara for goods such as cigarettes. 'It is a struggle of interests between traffickers, that's how it has to be understood'" (Colonel Poudiougou, quoted in *Reuters*, "Interview—Mali Counts on Negotiation, Not Force with Rebels," November 17, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, "Mali Peace Accord"; phone interview with a Malian journalist, August 14, 2009; see also interview of Head of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) bureau in West and Central Africa Antonio Mazzitelli in Pascal Fletcher, "Interview—West Africa Is Crime, Terrorism 'Black Hole'—UN Expert," *Reuters*, January 13, 2008.

In what appears as another attempt to discredit the rebels, the Malian government accused the ATNM of having links with AQIM and of having participated in the kidnapping of four Western tourists in January 2009.<sup>74</sup> Bahanga formally denied the claim and described his group's relations with AQIM as one of "war" in an interview to Algerian newspaper *El Khabar*, stating that "their cause is not ours."<sup>75</sup>

The Malian government's effort at attempting to isolate Bahanga within the Tuareg community paid off. Malian army spokesman Colonel Abdoulaye Coulibaly told Reuters that members of the ADC were helping soldiers hunt down those who had attacked the Tin-Zaouatène post.<sup>76</sup> The ADC, in fact, had publicly condemned the May 2007 attack. Moderate Tuaregs not only helped militarily, but also diplomatically. In September 2007, Tuareg elders undertook to negotiate with Bahanga on behalf the Malian government.<sup>77</sup>

Avoiding a spread of the crisis also required that other ethnic or political groups be kept out of the fighting. This became a pressing issue for the Malian government when a Fula and Songhai militia group, the Ganda Izo (meaning "the sons of the land" in Sorhaï), emerged in 2008 in the Gao area.<sup>78</sup> Presented by its instigators as a self-defense movement against cattle raiding and acts of violence committed by Tuaregs, the Ganda Izo was the natural successor of the Ganda Koy movement that had taken part in the 1990s rebellion on the side of the government.<sup>79</sup> Contrary to the Ganda Koy, however, the Ganda Izo was not well-structured, and probably never counted more than

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<sup>74</sup> *El Watan*, "Des rebelles touaregs pénètrent en Algérie," February 7, 2009.

<sup>75</sup> *El Khabar* (Algiers), "Brahim Ag Bahanga: 'Le Gouvernement malien n'a fait aucune concession,'" July 26, 2008.

<sup>76</sup> Diallo, "Tuareg Rebels Attack Police Post."

<sup>77</sup> BBC, "Mali Boosts Army to fight Tuareg."

<sup>78</sup> "Ganda-Izo" can also be found with the spelling "Gandaïso."

<sup>79</sup> Abdoulaye Diakité, "Conflit intercommunautaire à Ansongo: Que veut réellement le leader du mouvement 'Gandaïso'?" *L'Indicateur Renouveau* (Bamako), June 26, 2009.

100 members.<sup>80</sup> The Malian army did not back or arm the Ganda Izo, unlike what it had done with the Ganda Koy in the 1990s.<sup>81</sup>

The Malian government started negotiating promptly with the ATNM, but its mediation effort differed in one major way from the one it had pursued with the ADC: Bamako never intended to sign an “encore Algiers Accord” with the ATNM. The existing Algiers Accord had already raised much criticism from the army and the population in the south, who thought that too many concessions had been made to the rebels while the full application of the National Pact could have sufficed.<sup>82</sup> The government’s objective was to get Bahanga to cease the fighting but without making any additional concessions in exchange. Combined with a military strategy that remained largely defensive—no effort was made, for instance, to attack the logistics base of the ATNM—this policy effectively gave Bahanga the initiative. His sudden stepping down was the only way the conflict would stop, but the government offered him no incentive—whether carrot or stick—to do so.<sup>83</sup>

**Insurgent.** Sources differ on how many combatants the ATNM could claim, with estimates ranging from 100 to 1,000.<sup>84</sup> Bahanga himself claimed to have 3,000 Malian Tuaregs following him.<sup>85</sup> The ATNM’s tactics consisted in taking civilian and military hostages, as well as conducting attacks against military posts.

Ibrahim Bahanga’s motivations for reverting to military action after the Algiers Accord are unclear. To the Malian newspaper *L’Indépendant* he claimed that the way the Algiers Accord was applied

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<sup>80</sup> Tiemoko Diallo, “Niger Arrests Mali Militia Leader After Killings,” *Reuters*, September 27, 2008; phone interview with a Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>81</sup> See, for instance, Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, p. 20.

<sup>82</sup> Phone interview with Malian military official, August 18, 2009.

<sup>83</sup> Phone interview with Malian military official, August 18, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> *Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism*, “Malian Tuareg Groups”; phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009; phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, August 11, 2009.

<sup>85</sup> *El Khabar* (Algiers), “Brahim Ag Bahanga: ‘Le gouvernement malien n’a fait aucune concession.’”

was “not normal,” arguing that there was a “reinforcement of the military deployment in the area, security posts were created, and houses were searched.”<sup>86</sup> The deployment of military units in the north may have been perceived as an infringement on the Algiers Accords, which provided for a reduction of the military presence in the northern regions.<sup>87</sup> ATNM spokesperson Hama Ag Sidahmed also cited the lack of implementation of the Algiers Accord as the reason why Tuaregs were taking up arms again, adding that the ATNM’s objectives were to get the governments of Mali and Niger to “accept” that “Tuareg regions obtain a complete autonomy that takes into account all [their] particularities.”<sup>88</sup>

The ATNM’s requests differed little from the ADC’s, except that its main focus was the complete evacuation of the northern regions by the army. The Malian government refused to give in to the ATNM’s demands, arguing that this would create a no-law zone and allow all trafficking activities, in particular drug trafficking, to prosper in that region.<sup>89</sup>

Like the ADC before it, the ATNM quickly asked for negotiations. In September 2007, ATNM spokesman Ag Sidahmed claimed that the 2006 Algiers peace process had been concluded “too fast” and that the provisions of the accord had either not been implemented or were changed unilaterally by the Malian government; accordingly, the ATNM requested new negotiations.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, repeated attacks against military posts and convoys suggest that the group was

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<sup>86</sup> Ibrahim Bahanga in *L’Indépendant*, August 30, 2007 (quoted in *El Watan*, “Pourquoi les troubles ont repris?” September 14–15, 2007). Author’s translation.

<sup>87</sup> Panapress, “Mali: La Rebellion.”

<sup>88</sup> Naima Chekchak, “La Nouvelle Alliance Touareg du Niger et du Mali (ATNM),” Occitan-Touareg blog, September 9, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> AFP, “Crise au Nord-Mali,” December, 28, 2008. A 750-kg shipment of cocaine was intercepted by the Malian police near the northern town of Tin-Zaouatène in January 2008, after a firefight with the traffickers (*Reuters*, “Mali Seizes 750 kg Cocaine After Saharan Gunfight,” January 3, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Chekchak, “La Nouvelle Alliance Touareg du Niger et du Mali (ATNM).”



also trying to put the Malian government under military pressure to gain leverage in future negotiations.

**External Powers Supporting the Belligerents.** Algeria returned to its mediating role when the new rebellion broke out, and was at one point replaced in this effort by Libya. Other key external actors during the ATNM rebellion were Niger and, to a lesser extent, the United States.

**Algeria.** The second phase of the rebellion was marked by a series of negotiations leading to truces that were quickly broken. After the attacks of July 2007, the ATNM and the Malian army agreed on August 31 to a ceasefire after a mediation in which Iyad Ag Ghaly took part.<sup>91</sup> The ATNM pledged to cease attacks and kidnappings.<sup>92</sup> This ceasefire was broken two weeks later, when the ATNM attacked a Malian army position near Tin-Zaouatène. In early September 2007, Algeria was asked officially by the Malian government to become once again the lead mediator in the crisis. New talks, again mediated by moderate Tuaregs and Algeria, led in mid-September 2007 to a new truce.<sup>93</sup>

Algeria suspended its mediation efforts for a few weeks in early 2008, reportedly in reaction to the arrival of Libya in the negotiations, and to critics in the Malian media accusing President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of not making sufficient efforts to help obtain the release of hostages, some of whom were thought to be on Algerian soil.<sup>94</sup> Algeria, however, agreed to resume its efforts in May, after Libya's failure to secure a longer-lasting truce than Algeria and a particularly murderous attack on Abeïbara, where ten soldiers lost their lives. Violence resumed again in December 2008, when members of the ATNM attacked an army post in Nampala.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *El Watan* (Algiers), "Les troubles dans le nord du Mali en 2007," September 14–15, 2007.

<sup>92</sup> *El Watan*, "Les rebelles touareg."

<sup>93</sup> BBC, "Mali's Tuareg Rebels Agree Truce," September 19, 2007.

<sup>94</sup> Ouazani, "Priorité à la médiation"; *El Watan*, "Crise malienne: l'Algérie reprend la médiation," May 25, 2008; phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, August 11, 2009.

<sup>95</sup> BBC, "Tuareg Rebels Raid Mali Army Base."

**Libya.** Libya represents the other major powerbroker in the region, along with Algeria. Like Mali, Algeria, and Niger, Libya has a Tuareg population that is mostly located in the southwestern corner of the country. Libya's leader Mu'ammār Qadhafi has long presented himself as a defender of the Tuareg cause. During the 1970s and 1980s, many Tuaregs migrated to Libya, mainly for economic reasons. Qadhafi also promised Tuaregs—in Mali and elsewhere—to help them in their fight against their respective central governments.<sup>96</sup> Many young Tuaregs benefited from Libyan military training, and first used their skills in Qadhafi's expeditionary corps (the "Islamic Legion") before putting them at use in their own country.<sup>97</sup> Many of the actors in the rebellion of the 1990s returned from Libya with experience of sustained fighting gained with the Legion, including in Lebanon and Chad.<sup>98</sup> During the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s, Qadhafi was present at the negotiation table—along with Algeria and Niger—after President Traoré eventually decided to search for a mediated solution. The Libyan leader famously showed up to the meeting wearing the traditional Tuareg dress.<sup>99</sup> Qadhafi's involvement with the Tuareg cause has allowed him to become a central actor in the Sahelian region.<sup>100</sup> Libya's interest in North Mali is also evidenced by its opening of a consulate in Kidal in early 2006, which it closed only a few months later in an effort to back its official claim that Tripoli had no involvement in the rebellion.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, "Senegal and Mali," p. 255.

<sup>97</sup> Other Tuaregs were incorporated in Libya's regular army (Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, p. 13).

<sup>98</sup> Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, "Senegal and Mali," p. 255.

<sup>99</sup> Tor A. Benjaminsen, "Does Supply-Induced Scarcity Drive Violent Conflicts in the African Sahel? The Case of the Tuareg Rebellion in North Mali," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 45, No. 6, 2008, p. 830.

<sup>100</sup> Libya's influence in Northern Mali is also important on the religious front: the Libyan World Islamic Call Society (WICS) occupies an important place in the region alongside other missionary Muslim movements such as the Da'wa (backed by Saudi Arabia) and the Da'wa al-Tabligh (backed by Pakistan). On this point, see Gutelius, "Islam in Northern Mali," p. 72, n. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Sacko, "Attaques rebelles à Kidal." This claim was backed later by Bahanga himself, who claimed that the sole source of weapons procurement for his group was their attacks against

Libya was nevertheless involved diplomatically, becoming lead mediator in early 2008. On April 2, a truce was signed in Tripoli.<sup>102</sup> The ATNM promised to release more than 30 prisoners,<sup>103</sup> and the Malian government agreed to reduce its military presence in the north.<sup>104</sup> Libya also promised to provide some development assistance to the region.<sup>105</sup>

**Niger.** Niger's Tuareg issue is, to a large extent, very similar to Mali's. Niger's northern regions are home to Tuareg communities who have taken part in several armed rebellions over the past decades, including a large-scale one in the 1990s that was concluded by a peace agreement mediated by Burkina Faso and whose provisions mirrored closely what the Malian Tuaregs had achieved through the Tamanrasset Accord and the National Pact. 2007 saw a resurgence of Tuareg unrest in Niger.<sup>106</sup> In February, a Tuareg group calling itself the Niger Movement for Justice, led by Aghaly ag Alambo, launched an attack against the town of Iferouane, near Agadez (460 miles northeast of the capital Niamey). As in Mali, Tuaregs complained that their region was underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of Niger and called for a better redistribution of the country's revenue—especially the part

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Malian troops and bases—suggesting that Libya had not provided military support to the group (*El Khabar*, “Brahim Ag Bahanga.”)

<sup>102</sup>Panapress, “Mali: La Rebellion.”

<sup>103</sup>BBC, “Mali Tuareg Rebels in Peace Pact,” April 4, 2008.

<sup>104</sup>BBC, “Tuareg Rebels in Deadly Mali Raid,” May 22, 2008.

<sup>105</sup>BBC, “Tuareg Rebels in Deadly Mali Raid”; B. Daou, “Bahanga attaque le Camp militaire d'Abebara et exige l'ouverture du dialogue,” *Le Républicain* (Bamako), May 22, 2008. The ADC, which had been at peace with the Malian government since the Algiers accord, is said to have taken part in the Abebara attack along with the ATNM. Both attacks were perceived by Tuaregs as retaliation for the killing of Barka Ag Cheikh and Mohamed Ag Moussa. Many Tuaregs outside of Bahanga's group felt that it was their duty to avenge their deaths (phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009; phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, August 17, 2009). This reversal of the ADC's support for the government (albeit unofficial, and probably not permanent) illustrates the volatility of the situation in the area.

<sup>106</sup>It is, however, unclear whether the 2006 Tuareg rebellion in Mali—and its relative success for the insurgents—influenced Nigerien Tuaregs' decision to resort to arms in early 2007.

derived from the exploitation of Niger's uranium resources, which are located in Tuareg-populated areas.<sup>107</sup> The governments dealt very differently with their respective internal crises. Nigerien President Mamadou Tandja chose an exclusively military response, calling the rebels a band of bandits and smugglers. Not only did this fail to crush the movement, it also led a number of soldiers to desert their posts and join the MNJ.<sup>108</sup>

In terms of the tactics employed by the ATNM, the involvement of Nigerien Tuaregs may help explain the use of antipersonnel and anti-vehicle mines in the rebellion. They represented a novelty in Mali, having been used neither during the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s nor during the ADC's rebellion of 2006.<sup>109</sup> The MNJ, however, was known to use them routinely on the other side of the Mali-Niger border.<sup>110</sup>

The Nigerien connection dwindled rather quickly, and the MNJ soon denied being involved in the ATNM's activities.<sup>111</sup> A few months later, in an interview in the Algerian newspaper *El Khabar*, Bahanga denied that his group included any Nigerien (or Algerian) Tuareg.<sup>112</sup> It is unclear whether this was a pragmatic response to the disengagement of Nigerien elements from the Malian theater or whether it represented a change of strategy on the part of Bahanga, who realized that his movement would have more appeal if it focused on Mali and gave up on pan-Tuareg claims. In any case, both groups are unlikely to have ever held serious pan-Tuareg claims,<sup>113</sup> and the links between Malian and Nigerien Tuaregs should not be overstated. They are better described as occasional and temporary alliances rather than a deep-

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<sup>107</sup> STRATFOR, "Niger: A Rebel Threat to the Uranium Sector," February 1, 2008.

<sup>108</sup> David Zounmenou, "Niger: Making Sense of the New Tuareg Rebellion," *ISS Today*, Institute for Security Studies (Pretoria), July 27, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> IRIN, "Mali: Indignation Dominates Reaction as Attacks in North Escalate."

<sup>110</sup> IRIN, "Mali: Indignation Dominates Reaction as Attacks in North Escalate."

<sup>111</sup> IRIN, "Mali: Indignation Dominates Reaction as Attacks in North Escalate."

<sup>112</sup> *El Khabar*, "Brahim Ag Bahanga."

<sup>113</sup> Zounmenou, "Niger: Making Sense of the New Tuareg Rebellion"; *Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism*, "Nigerien Tuareg Groups," September 23, 2008.

rooted partnership. The two groups' concerted action may have been limited to providing each other with logistical support and a rear base when the situation was becoming a little too hazardous on either side of the border, or to move hostages around.<sup>114</sup>

On August 22, 2007, the governments of Mali and Niger agreed to grant each other a "right of hot pursuit" on their respective territories and to create joint patrols.<sup>115</sup>

**The United States.** The 1998 terrorist attacks against the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania led the United States to reevaluate the relevance of Africa for American national security. The events of 9/11 and a concern that some areas in Africa might be providing sanctuaries for terrorist groups heightened this change of perception. The 2006 National Security Strategy stated that "our security depends upon partnering with Africans to strengthen fragile and failing states and bring ungoverned areas under the control of effective democracies."<sup>116</sup> The Saharan-Sahel belt—Northern Mali in particular—fit well the "ungoverned area" definition, for it combines weak control from central governments and porous borders. The area also has a history of smuggling and political instability, a large presence of small arms, and evidence of a radical Islamist group (GSPC/AQMI) taking root in the area. All these elements explain why the United States has paid increasing attention to this region over the past decade. Not everyone agrees with the inclusion of northern Mali in the "ungoverned area" category, however. Baz Lecocq and Paul Schrijver, for instance, contend that Tuareg leaders and the Malian government have a solid and long-held arrangement according to which the former are unofficially in charge of governing and policing the area. This system already existed during the colonial period and has continued since.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Phone interview with a Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>115</sup> *El Watan*, "Les troubles dans le nord."

<sup>116</sup> USNSC (United States National Security Council), *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, March 2006, p. 37.

<sup>117</sup> Lecocq and Schrijver, "The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust," p. 156–157. According to these authors, "The position of tribal leader grew to become that of a fully-fledged colonial civil servant with its own rank, career path and salary scale, responsible for justice, safety,

The Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) announced by Washington in late 2002 provided training and assistance to the armed forces of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, and Chad, with the objective of making them more capable of patrolling and securing their respective territories. In 2005, the PSI became the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and was extended to Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, and Senegal. The Flintlock joint military exercise of June 2005 brought together up to 1,000 U.S. military personnel and participants from Algeria, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Senegal.<sup>118</sup> Since the early days of U.S. involvement in the region, Northern Mali has been considered an area of priority, absorbing more than half of PSI funds.<sup>119</sup> Such assistance has been welcomed by Malian authorities: In 2006, the Army Chief of Staff stated that “Mali by itself can’t sort out terrorism and Mali is only a link in the chain in the global fight with world terrorism. Our weakness is we have a big territory that we can’t control with our very limited means, and for that we need partners like the United States, France and others.”<sup>120</sup>

When the Bahanga rebellion broke out in 2007, the United States used some of the assets it had deployed in the context of the TSCTP to assist the Malian government in its fight against the rebels.<sup>121</sup> This discreet assistance was brought to public attention when an American C-130 supplying an isolated military outpost near Tin-Zaouatène was shot at by the ATNM on September 12, 2007. This aircraft was in Mali to be used in the Flintlock exercise that had taken place a few weeks earlier.<sup>122</sup> The United States downplayed its involvement, noting about the resupplying plane that “U.S forces were in a position to assist,

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taxes and education. [...] In 1961 this civil service status given to clan leaders was formally revoked. But, like the French before them, the Malian authorities quickly discovered that direct rule without tribal leaders was not possible.

<sup>118</sup> EUCOM (United States European Command), “Exercise Flintlock 05 Under Way in Africa,” June 9, 2005. This exercise was repeated in 2007 and 2009.

<sup>119</sup> Lecocq and Schrijver, “The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust,” p. 144.

<sup>120</sup> *Reuters*, “Interview—Mali Counts on Negotiation.”

<sup>121</sup> BBC, “Mali Boosts Army to Fight Tuareg.”

<sup>122</sup> *El Watan*, “Les rebelles touareg.”

as they had just completed the [Operation] Flintlock exercise, so they conducted the re-supply mission.”<sup>123</sup>

### The Transition Period

The Nampala attack of December 2008 was the turning point of the conflict, and it led to a radical change in the Malian government’s strategy. On December 20, the ATNM attacked a military garrison located in Nampala, near the Mauritanian border, 300 miles north of Bamako. The attack was the deadliest since the June 2, 2007, attack against an army convoy near Tin-Zaouatène.<sup>124</sup> Nine soldiers were killed, along with 11 rebels, and several soldiers were taken hostage.<sup>125</sup> The high number of casualties in the Nampala attack provoked outrage within the ranks of the army, where an increasing number of soldiers and officers were criticizing the appeasement policy of the government and called for forceful retaliation for the lives lost at Nampala.<sup>126</sup> The Nampala attack also confirmed, after the Diabaly attack of May 2008 (only 150 miles away from Bamako), that the crisis threatened to spill outside of the three northern regions.<sup>127</sup> Finally, Nampala may also have been a turning point because it marked the end of a five-month ceasefire and suggested that the seemingly endless cycle of negotiations/truces/resumption of violence would continue unless the ATNM was eliminated for good.

Bamako decided that it was time retake the initiative. It abandoned, at least temporarily, the diplomatic track and opted for a more-

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<sup>123</sup>Captain Darrick Lee, EUCOM Public Affairs Officer, quoted in Dulue Mbachu, “US Tactics in Africa Could Lead to a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of a Desert War,” *ISN Security Watch*, International Relations and Security Network at ETH Zurich, November 7, 2007.

<sup>124</sup>Christophe Boisbouvier, “ATT entre en guerre,” *Jeune Afrique*, January 27, 2009; AFP, “Mali: Brève ‘offensive’ de l’armée contre des rebelles touareg dans le nord,” January 2, 2009.

<sup>125</sup>BBC, “Tuareg Rebels in Deadly Mali Raid.”

<sup>126</sup>Phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, August 11, 2009; phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>127</sup>*Reuters*, “Nouvelles attaques des rebelles touaregs,” May 7, 2008.

offensive military approach.<sup>128</sup> On December 22, President Touré publicly stated, “Enough is enough. We cannot keep on suffering, counting our dead and looking for peace,”<sup>129</sup> and followed the same line in his speech of New Year’s eve 2008: “While reaffirming its commitment to pursue the implementation of the Algiers accord, our country cannot tolerate acts of violence such as the attack perpetrated against Nampala by armed bandits with links to narcotraffickers.”<sup>130</sup> As a first step, he sent additional troops to the north. The military effort was led by Colonel Mohamed Ould Meidou (an Arab from Timbuktu who was the military commander—*Chef de Zone*—of Mopti), and Colonel El Hadj Gamou, a Tuareg who was the military commander of Gao.<sup>131</sup> The forces deployed were reinforced with civilians, who formed militias and provided the Malian army with logistic logistic and combat support. These civilians were young (mostly in the 18–22 year-old range). Their precise number is not known; estimates vary between 200 and 600. They included Arabs (mostly from the Timbuktu region) and Tuaregs (mostly from the Kidal and Gao regions).<sup>132</sup> Chosen for their knowledge of the terrain, they were officially referred to as “guides” who helped the army along desert trails, but they were armed and took part in the fighting.

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<sup>128</sup>BBC, “Tuareg Rebel Base Is ‘Destroyed,’” January 21, 2009; Boisbouvier, “ATT entre en guerre.”

<sup>129</sup>President Touré, quoted in Boisbouvier, “ATT entre en guerre.” Author’s translation.

<sup>130</sup>Government of Mali, “Discours à la Nation, Décembre de Son Excellence Monsieur Amadou Toumani Touré, Président de la République, Chef de l’Etat,” December 31, 2008. Author’s translation.

<sup>131</sup>AFP, “Mali: Brève ‘offensive’”; phone interview with Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>132</sup>Boisbouvier, “ATT entre en guerre”; *Le Malien* (Bamako), “Région de Kidal: Les Colonels Gamou et Meidou aux Trousses de Bahanga,” January 19, 2009; phone interview with a Malian journalist, August 14, 2009; phone interview with Fihouroun Maïga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, September 1, 2009. The acknowledgement that Arabs should be involved more deeply in the resolution of the crisis came from the fact that in order to reach Diabaly and Nampala, Bahanga and his men had to go through the Timbuktu region, which is largely populated by Arab communities (phone interview with a Malian military official, August 18, 2009).



The endgame for the ATNM was marked by two fateful—and linked—trends: the progressive implosion of the group and a succession of military defeats. On January 4, 2009, Fagaga and 300 other combatants left the ATNM with their arms.<sup>133</sup> Another smaller group of 35 combatants left the group a few weeks later.<sup>134</sup> After a January 1, 2009, series of grenade attacks by the ATNM against Tuareg officials, the government-backed forces quickly retaliated by launching offensives against the ATNM bases.<sup>135</sup> They first targeted a base in the Aguelhoc area (near the Algerian border) and killed 20 ATNM members, arresting eight more.<sup>136</sup> On January 22, the Malian army took over a rear base of the ATNM at Tin Essalek, near the Nigerien border.<sup>137</sup> During the firefight, 31 ATNM members were killed.<sup>138</sup>

This intensification of military pressure led Bahanga to ask for a ceasefire on February 1, to which a Malian official replied that there would be “no truce.”<sup>139</sup> The Malian ministry of defense declared that the army would keep on chasing the “Bahanga gang,” and would ignore the request for a ceasefire sent by “armed bandits.”<sup>140</sup> Bamako’s new no-negotiation policy was again reaffirmed when it sent the army farther than ever in the northeast corner of the country.<sup>141</sup> With the

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<sup>133</sup>Chérif Ouazani, “Ibrahim Ag Bahanga,” *Jeune Afrique*, January 27, 2009.

<sup>134</sup>AFP, “Des rebelles Touareg acceptent les propositions de Bamako pour la paix,” February 5, 2009.

<sup>135</sup>AFP, “Mali: Brève ‘offensive’ de l’armée.”

<sup>136</sup>*Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism*, “Malian Tuareg Groups.”

<sup>137</sup>Ouazani, “Ibrahim Ag Bahanga.”

<sup>138</sup>According to Malian authorities. See *El Watan*, “Ag Bahanga demande à réintégrer l’accord d’Alger,” February 4, 2009; AFP, “Mali: ‘Pas de trêve’ dans les combats.”

<sup>139</sup>Malian Ministry of Defense official quoted in AFP, “Mali: ‘Pas de trêve’ dans les combats.” This represented a quick and complete reversal for Bahanga, who on January 25 was telling Algerian newspaper *El Khabar* that “Today our position is clear: our only alternative is to respond [to the Malian army’s January 22 attack] and armed war” (quoted in *El Watan*, “Ag Bahanga demande à réintégrer”).

<sup>140</sup>Official from the Malian Ministry of Defense, quoted in AFP, “Mali: ‘Pas de trêve.’”

<sup>141</sup>AFP, “Mali: ‘Pas de trêve.’”

Malian government refusing dialogue, Bahanga appealed to Algeria for a negotiation and a ceasefire, to no avail.

By February 6, according to Malian military authorities, all ATNM bases had fallen. Bahanga and a few of his men fled the country. Libya admitted to hosting him “for humanitarian reasons,” in the words of a Libyan diplomat who added that “[Bahanga] has agreed in writing not to conduct politics or anything else. We have informed our Malian brothers” that Bahanga “has not come here to negotiate.”<sup>142</sup>

### **Managing the Transition**

With the ATNM de facto disbanded and its leader on the run, Bamako had to address the issue of the group’s former combatants. The disarmament process proved particularly thorny. The disarmament ceremony had to be postponed for several weeks until a decision was made on whether the former rebels should be allowed to enter the city with their weapons or whether the weapons should be collected first. It was ultimately decided that only those who would be integrated in the Tuareg/Army Special Units would be allowed to keep their weapons in the city, while others were to hand their arms to the Algerian mediator.<sup>143</sup> On February 17, 2009, the disarmament ceremony eventually took place in Kidal under the auspices of Algeria, with the participation of 578 former rebels, both from the ADC and the ATNM. In addition to arms and ammunition, two vehicles were returned to the Malian army.<sup>144</sup> Four hundred former rebels were billeted in Kidal.<sup>145</sup>

Algeria remained engaged in northern Mali after the crisis was resolved. It pledged to provide development funds for the region and to contribute, along with the Malian government, to the initial budget of €1.5 million devoted to the reintegration of former combatants. Algeria also announced it would be building infrastructure in the region,

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<sup>142</sup>Libyan diplomat quoted in AFP, “Mali Rebel Leader Takes Refuge in Libya: Diplomat,” February 23, 2009.

<sup>143</sup>AFP, “Des rebelles Touareg acceptent. ”

<sup>144</sup>Tiemoko Diallo, “Nearly 600 Malian Rebels Disarm in North,” *Reuters*, February 17, 2009.

<sup>145</sup>Phone interview with a Malian military official, August 18, 2009.

including a professional training center and clinics.<sup>146</sup> It also provided for the logistics, training, and equipment of the Special Units tasked with patrolling the northern areas.<sup>147</sup>

There is, however, a concern that development efforts may not suffice to mitigate the risks of conflict resurgence. Although the lack of development and, more generally, the poverty of northern Mali is largely claimed by the Tuaregs to be the reason why they occasionally turn to violent action, political claims are also extremely important, and a number of Tuaregs do want, ultimately, an autonomous territory.

Such autonomy is not necessarily perceived, however, as a short-term goal, which may explain why the ADC renounced it relatively easily: most of the group's members believe in autonomy in the longer term, if only because it makes more strategic sense to develop communications, infrastructures, and education with funds from the Malian state *before* attempting to break away.<sup>148</sup> In a June 2007 interview to an Algerian newspaper, Hassan Fagaga clearly explained why independence—or even too strong a decentralization—was not in the interests of the north: “Decentralization means that for everything related to the commune, the *cercle*,<sup>149</sup> and the region, each governs alone by drawing on its own resources. The fact is that our region has no wealth. We have no human or natural resources. We do not even have fiscal revenues. This region is poor, arid, and thirsty. Asking a commune like Tinzaouatine (Algeria-Malian border) to live on its farming resources and its taxes is like sentencing it to death.”<sup>150</sup> It is extremely difficult to assess

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<sup>146</sup>AFP, “Nord du Mali: lancement d’un programme de réinsertion de 10.000 jeunes,” July 25, 2009.

<sup>147</sup>*Jeune Afrique*, “Le casse-tête des unités spéciales,”

<sup>148</sup>Phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, August 17, 2009.

<sup>149</sup>The *cercle* is an intermediary administrative division in Mali. The Gao and Kidal regions have four *cercles* each. The Timbuktu region has five.

<sup>150</sup>Hassan Fagaga, quoted in Benfodil, “Interview of Hassan Fagaga.” According to Kalifa Keita, concerns about the sustainability of an independent north have been present since before decolonization: “According to Bakara Diallo, governor of Gao in the 1960s, some French colonial officials apparently tried to pressure the Tuaregs to fight for an independent Tuareg homeland, although this met with less than universal enthusiasm among the nomads. The Tuareg leaders consented at the time to be part of the new Republic of Mali.”

what percentage of the Tuareg population shares this ambition of an autonomous state, but this political claim, whether widespread or not, is most likely to remain a thorn in the side of the Malian government.

Algeria also pursued its role as mediator between the Malian government and the Tuaregs on the modalities of implementation of the Algiers accord. The Follow-up Committee (*Comité de suivi*) of the accord met for the first time in Bamako on July 18, 2009.<sup>151</sup> The meeting's agenda went beyond the Algiers accord and tackled security issues in general, including the presence of AQIM cells in northern Mali.<sup>152</sup>

Bamako had been reluctant to intervene against AQIM, probably for fear of igniting more troubles in the North with Arab and maybe Tuareg populations, and because of its lack of ability to take action in a region that is difficult to patrol and control. There was no immediate reason to do so, either: AQIM, which attacked numerous military and official targets in Algeria and Mauritania, always refrained from doing the same in Mali.<sup>153</sup> Mali's stance changed in early May 2009, when Bamako sent three combat units from Kidal to hunt down what was described as a convoy of armed men—although it was unclear, at the time, whether they were members of AQIM or simple traffickers.<sup>154</sup>

Mali's forceful stance toward AQIM had important implications for the north. Tuareg representatives had tried to convince the Malian

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(Keita, *Conflict and Conflict Resolution*, p. 37, n. 27). The French project of Common Organization of the Saharan Regions (*Organisation Commune des Régions du Sahara*, or OCRS) was, however, taken up again by a number of Tuaregs during the 1962 rebellion (Humphreys and Ag Mohamed, "Senegal and Mali," p. 292, n. 37).

<sup>151</sup> AFP, "Mali/Touareg: Réunion à Bamako pour relancer le processus de paix," July 19, 2009. This committee, set up by the Algiers Accord, includes three representatives from the Malian government, three from the ADC, and three from Algeria (Mustapha Benfodil, "Les réserves de l'ex-rébellion et le satisfecit du general Diagouraga," *El Watan* (Algiers), July 4, 2007, p. 10).

<sup>152</sup> N'Tji Diarra, "Face à la menace Al Quaïda . . . l'armée malienne et les ex rebelles touaregs font cause commune," *Aurora* (Bamako), July 20, 2009.

<sup>153</sup> There are, however, unconfirmed reports that the GSPC had planned to blow up the American Embassy in Bamako some time before 2002 (Lecocq and Schrijver, "The War on Terror in a Haze of Dust," p. 152).

<sup>154</sup> Tiemoko Diallo, "Mali Pursues al Qaeda Suspects in North," *Reuters*, May 9, 2009; AFP, "Mali Announces Joint Operations Against Al-Qaeda," July 21, 2009.

government that they could take care of the AQIM threat, and that they ran a higher chance than the army of doing so thanks to their knowledge of the terrain and their experience in guerrilla tactics.<sup>155</sup> The Malian government held back for a few weeks but reversed its position following mediation by the Algerian ambassador to Mali. The July 18 meeting of the *Comité de Suivi* resulted in the Malian government agreeing to officially enroll the help of Tuaregs against AQIM. This commitment was reaffirmed on August 2 during a “reconciliation” meeting that included all three major northern communities—Arab, Tuareg, and Songhai.<sup>156</sup>

Overall, the Malian government’s strategy for transitioning out of the insurgency was largely similar to the one it followed after the ADC insurgency; Bamako

- Increased development funds (with the help of Algeria);
- Disarmed former combatants and integrated some of them in Special Units;
- Increased the role of locals in the securing of the north and the elimination of AQIM, along with the Malian army.

It is still too early to assess whether the transition can be hailed as a success. On September 15, 2009, the United Nations lowered its threat assessment level for Kidal,<sup>157</sup> but tensions between communities remain. In June 2009, six Tuaregs were murdered in Ansongo, the former base of the Ganda Izo movement, arousing suspicions that Ganda Izo sympathizers may have been involved.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Jane’s Intelligence Weekly*, “Mali’s Tuareg Tribesmen Join Fight Against Al-Qaeda,” July 21, 2009; phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, July 17, 2009.

<sup>156</sup> AFP, “North Mali Rivals Meet to Back Anti-Qaeda Fight,” August 2, 2009.

<sup>157</sup> Ouazani, “Le retour du chef rebelle,” *Jeune Afrique*, September 28, 2009.

<sup>158</sup> Toure Sambé and Chahana Takiou, “Six Touaregs assassinés à Ansongo: La Signature du Mouvement armé ‘Gandaïso,’” *Info-Matin* (Bamako), June 17, 2009.

## Conclusions

A number of factors must be taken into consideration to appreciate the degree of threat that the Tuareg insurgency of 2006–2009 represented for Mali.

First, it is important to note that the government was not, at any point, seriously threatened by the ADC or the ATNM. It is unclear whether the rebels ever considered taking the fight to Bamako. The ATNM leadership apparently toyed with the idea (which acted as a strong incentive for the young recruits in the group) but were discouraged to do so.<sup>159</sup> From the point of view of the army, this was not a realistic threat: the group had no sufficient means and no supporters in the south.<sup>160</sup> Overall, it may be precisely because President Touré knew that his power was not directly threatened that he could afford a protracted policy of mediation with the ATNM in spite of the numerous truce violations.

Secondly, one important characteristic of the Tuareg community is its deep division according to castes and tribes. Unless the Malian state makes a major mistake that will somehow antagonize all Tuaregs and unite them against Bamako, as happened in the 1990s, it is likely that the rebel movements will always find it difficult to rally large numbers of supporters. And it is equally likely that the government will always be able to play one Tuareg community (or tribe) against the other. The division of the Tuareg community explains why the ADC asked for negotiations immediately after launching their movement, and never represented a real threat.

Considering that the 2006–2009 rebellion was the third one of its kind since Mali's independence, it is difficult to be overly hopeful that there will never be a fourth one. The last rebellion was caused, in large part, by the frustration of the population in the northern regions regarding the delays in the implementation of the National Pact signed ten years earlier. The Algiers accord of 2006 will be judged on how it is implemented by the Malian government. New delays or obstacles may

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<sup>159</sup> Phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, August 17, 2009.

<sup>160</sup> Phone interview with a Malian military official, August 18, 2009.

re-ignite the situation at any time. An even more pessimistic view holds that claims for an independent, or autonomous, Tuareg state that would cover the three northern regions of Mali (as well as, possibly, Tuareg-populated regions in Algeria, Niger and Libya) are deep-rooted and likely to resurge in the coming years whether or not the government delivers on its promises to provide better development to the north. Another issue is the number of weapons handed in during the various collection initiatives that took place after the Algiers Accord; this number does not come close to the account of those that were stolen in Kidal and Menaka. Most of the weapons that were used during the insurgency are most likely still in circulation.<sup>161</sup> The reasons for keeping a working weapon in this region are many, but it is likely that many people involved in the rebellion doubt that the crisis has been solved for good, and they keep arms “just in case,” as appears to have been true after the 1996 Flame of Peace.

An important issue is the fact that few insurgent weapons were collected. A number of the young men who enrolled voluntarily in the militias will benefit from the socio-economic reinsertion program put in place by the Algiers Accord for young ex-combatants and unemployed people.<sup>162</sup> This program will benefit former combatants and noncombatants alike, so as not to favor those who took up arms. However, because it is not specific to ex-combatants, it does not involve any disarmament initiative. The young members of these militias are therefore likely to still have the weapons with which they fought the ATNM in early 2009.

Nonetheless, there are grounds for hope. Mali seems to have been learning from its past mistakes. Most of the pitfalls in which it had fallen in the 1990s and which had resulted in turning the Tuareg rebellion into a protracted conflict that included, at some point, inter-ethnic violence (after the emergence of the Ghanda Koy), were avoided in

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<sup>161</sup> Phone interview with former MPA member and expert on North Mali, June 6, 2009; phone interview with a Malian journalist, August 14, 2009.

<sup>162</sup> RFI, “Lancement d’un programme de réinsertion de 10.000 jeunes,” July 26, 2009; phone interview with Fihouroun Maiga, former Ganda Koy combatant and expert on North Mali, September 1, 2009.

2006–2009. In addition, the Malian government resorted to a number of strategies that may provide useful lessons for counterinsurgencies beyond the specific case of Mali.

The winning strategy of the Malian government against the ADC was to focus on finding a political solution to the crisis while keeping a low degree of military pressure. It pursued the same strategy against the ATNM, but with sustained military action once it became clear that Bahanga's rebellion, rather than losing momentum, was extending geographically and becoming more intense. This change of strategy was also a reaction to popular and army dissent in the face of the mounting casualties on the government side. Although the first phase of the strategy may appear far from optimal (it seems that mediation was pursued only to give Bahanga a face-saving way to surrender, and that the government had no intention of making any concession beyond what it had already granted in the Algiers Accord), it did play the role of showing all Malians, including Tuaregs, that the government had tried everything before resorting to more powerful means. Overall, the government also managed to circumscribe the rebellion to a limited number of Tuaregs, and to keep other communities (especially the Fula and Songhai) out of the fight. By choosing a defensive rather than offensive stance, and protecting the population (by clearing mined areas, for instance) rather than going after the group's bases, the Malian army has followed a classic population-centric approach that has proven successful in preventing the insurgents from widening their support base. Bamako's restraint paid off—a lesson that may be applicable to other theaters of conflict.

Studying the post-counterinsurgency transition in Mali also provides useful lessons in the subtle art of political and military decentralization. Northern Mali, because of its geographic isolation, has a long history of self-reliance that began in the colonial era with the French delegating much of the central state's political power to tribal leaders. The current Malian government has adopted a position whereby it has a limited presence and impact in the area, and only intervenes when serious political and military issues such as a rebellion arise, in which case it co-opts local actors to help it get rid of the threat. It followed this strategy first with the ADC, then with the ATNM.



U.S. policymakers should explore how existing traditional hierarchies, such as those that are clan and tribe-based, can be utilized to promote security and enforce order. Providing security to their constituents is often the most important task such traditional leaders undertake, and it is their ability to do so successfully that makes them legitimate in the eyes of their community. To a large extent, therefore, clan leaders and the state share a similar interest in enforcing civil order.

Arguably, this method has its limits, as the number of locals who can be co-opted by the government must represent a critical mass—or, at least, a majority compared to those willing to follow the rebellion. In the 1990s, co-opting Tuareg tribal leaders against the rebel groups did not prove sufficient.<sup>163</sup> This, however, can be partly blamed on the adoption of a repressive policy that rallied to the rebellion large numbers of previously non politicized Tuaregs and Arabs.<sup>164</sup> In the light of the subsequent resolution of the crisis, and the successful experience of 2006–2009, Bamako is unlikely to revert to such a policy.

After its successful counterinsurgency effort, the Malian government has continued to rely on local actors for security and the maintenance of order in the north. In a way, the Malian government is currently re-applying the method that proved successful in chasing and ultimately defeating Bahanga: co-opting members of the local population who know the terrain and guerrilla tactics much better than the Malian regular army. The development of Special Units composed mainly of Tuaregs has had three main benefits: providing former combatants with a legitimate occupation, reducing the army's footprint in an area where it was not welcomed, and reducing the army desertion rates, which were due, in part, to the reluctance of integrated northerners to be deployed in the south of the country.

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<sup>163</sup>Tribal chiefs saw rebel leaders as direct competitors for power in the Tuareg community and accordingly denounced them publicly as “bandits and traitors”; the chief of the Kel Adagh tribal confederation was even kidnapped in March 1994 by the ARLA, and subsequently formed his own small self-defense militia. See Lecocq, “Unemployed Intellectuals in the Sahara,” p. 106–107.

<sup>164</sup>Inter-Tuareg fighting was also part of the reason why the conflict lasted as long as it did. The Malian government's actions had only limited impact on these internal disputes.

Ironically, the transition was much aided by the emergence of AQIM as a common enemy for the government and the Tuaregs. Although AQIM had been present for years in the region, increased pressure from Algeria and AQIM's first targeting of a Malian official resulted in this threat being taken more seriously than it had been in years. This gave the Tuaregs, who have a good knowledge of the terrain, some leverage in their dealing with the government; it also gave the government an incentive to hasten the deployment of the Special Units.

It is too early to tell whether this strategy will pay off and rid Mali of AQIM cells, but if it proves successful it may provide a model for delegating local policing to local actors, rather than relying on a central government that is often perceived as unwelcome and barely legitimate in some areas. Bamako pragmatically came to the realization that, of the two issues it faces in the north—AQIM and Tuareg separatism—at least the first may be solvable. Making the Tuaregs part of the solution, furthermore, may give these communities the political and social recognition they have been longing for. Scrutiny should be paid to how the government will manage this small devolution of its powers, and how it will impact on the Tuareg separatist movement. Although the latter is unlikely to disappear in the near future, Bamako's strategy may contribute to withholding it for a time.



# The Transition in Al-Anbar, Iraq

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Map of Iraq



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

RAND MG11112-6.1

## Introduction

Insurgent activity was widely reported throughout Iraq in the period of interest to this case study, 2003 to 2008. However, there was no single “insurgency” in the country. Instead, following the invasion by the U.S.-led coalition forces (CF), various groups sought to repulse the coalition and reject the governing institutions it supported. These groups had different agendas—from restoring Saddam Hussein’s regime to estab-

lishing an Islamic caliphate. Some of them more resembled criminal gangs than insurgents but nonetheless posed a threat to CF objectives.

The insurgent environment varied from place to place in Iraq, depending on the groups that dominated or fought for control of local areas and their objectives. Similarly, there has been uneven reporting on the course of insurgency and counterinsurgency activities across Iraq.

Al-Anbar is a noteworthy case study for several reasons. First, it was considered one of the most violent regions of Iraq. Many American soldiers and Iraqi civilians lost their lives in a conflagration that spiraled into prolonged insurgency. Yet the reversal of conditions in Anbar was about as dramatic as the violence itself. Understanding how this change evolved merits attention. Second, U.S. strategies in Anbar provide models and lessons for COIN operations in other theaters, such as Afghanistan. More pragmatically, participants on all sides of the conflict in Anbar have been documented and widely reported on, and veterans of the U.S. campaign there agreed to share their experiences during the conflict. Finally, a period of transition from COIN to stability operations (SO), which occurred between 2005 and 2008, is discernable in the case of Anbar.

For the purposes of this case study, we considered the COIN and SO elements of CF operations in Anbar in the context of definitions offered by the United States government. In this regard, counterinsurgency is a blend of civilian and military efforts designed to contain simultaneously insurgency and its root causes.<sup>1</sup> Counterinsurgency involves the political, military, paramilitary, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency. An *insurgency* itself is defined as an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.<sup>2</sup> Joint military doctrine defines *stability operations* as

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, February 2008.

... various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.<sup>3</sup>

In Iraq, the incumbent central government in Baghdad was supported by an intervening actor, the U.S.-led coalition. As we describe further below, the insurgency in al-Anbar specifically was an amalgam of sometimes competing groups. COIN and SO methods involved an array of military operations that were combined with reconstruction and stability initiatives designed to secure the province and to support political reform and long-term recovery efforts.

## **A Brief History of the Conflict in Al-Anbar Province**

Al-Anbar province was once the cradle of a brutal Sunni insurgency that mired the Sunni-dominated province in violence and spread to other parts of Iraq. Many observers believe that insurgent forces were stronger in Anbar than in any other area in Iraq. This perception earned the province the dubious distinction of being the most lethal region in the country.

Al-Anbar became intractable following the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent occupation by U.S. and other coalition forces. The city of Ramadi was especially dangerous; the area of operations in Ramadi averaged over three times more attacks per capita than any other Iraqi region.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, insurgents enjoyed almost complete freedom of movement throughout the city and dominated most of its vital institutions. Ease of mobility also allowed insurgents to deploy complex improvised explosive devices, further contributing to Anbar's isolation. By fall 2008, more than 1,000 U.S. military personnel had

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, September 2006, p. iv; U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0.

<sup>4</sup> Major Niel Smith, U.S. Army and Colonel Sean McFarland, U.S. Army, "Anbar Awakens: the Tipping Point," *Military Review*, March–April 2008.

died in Anbar, amounting to a quarter of the total American death toll in Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

The insurgency in Anbar occurred against a backdrop of complex external and internal factors. The insurgency itself, though predominantly Sunni, was far from monolithic. It comprised nationalists, Ba'athists and former regime elements, Salafi-jihadi Islamists, and foreign fighters. With dozens of groups and organizations, the face of the insurgency constantly shifted as various actors and individuals moved in and out of threat groups.

Tribes with a long history of revolt added to the potent mix in Anbar. Indeed, in some respects, U.S. and other coalition forces faced an insurgency that was based on pre-established networks defined by kinship, loyalty, and self-interest.<sup>6</sup> Anbar was also vulnerable to the influence of external actors, which contributed to the prolonged violence. The province, home to a population of 1.2 million,<sup>7</sup> is bordered by three countries that either served as major transit points for foreign fighters seeking to join the insurgency in Anbar and throughout Iraq or were major centers of recruitment for insurgents and other oppositionists.

The devastation wrought by the insurgency in Anbar was significant. The city of Fallujah was almost completely razed, and entire neighborhoods in Ramadi were severely damaged.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the municipal and provincial governments, local security forces, and infrastructure barely functioned and in some cases even ceased to exist.

Significant coalition battles in Fallujah during 2004<sup>9</sup> to purge the province of Sunni rebels were largely unsuccessful and only tem-

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<sup>5</sup> Dexter Filkins, "U.S. Hands Off Pacified Anbar, Once Heart of Iraq Insurgency," *New York Times*, September 2, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, 1-MEF, 2005–2006, interview by authors, Arlington, Virginia, July 26, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, "Population Projection 2003," Office of Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs, Baghdad, Iraq, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, "Anbar Awakens."

<sup>9</sup> These were known as Operation Valiant Resolve and Operation Phantom Fury in April 2004 and November 2004, respectively.

porarily suppressed insurgents who eventually reclaimed the area. The second battle, in particular, would eventually be seen as one of the most hard-fought and destructive of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Thereafter, insurgents made the city of Ramadi their power base (see Figure 6.1).

By 2005 the al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) group dominated the insurgent landscape. The Anbari public, hardened against coalition forces and their tactics,<sup>10</sup> turned their support toward the insurgents.

**Figure 6.1**  
**Map of Iraq Featuring Al-Anbar Province**



SOURCE: Central Intelligence Agency.

RAND MG11112-6.2

<sup>10</sup> Many mosques, homes, and infrastructure were destroyed as a result of U.S.-insurgent fighting. Some 200,000 Anbaris were internally displaced in Iraq.



It was not until late-2006 that the United States would make a third push to re-establish control in Anbar. By this time, the 2004 experience in Fallujah, along with national Iraqi elections in January 2005, led some tribal leaders to determine that “the political process might hold more benefit than continued fighting.”<sup>11</sup> This notion was reinforced as AQI’s intentions vis-à-vis Anbar became evident. Upon its arrival the group had portrayed itself as an ally in the Anbari tribes’ fight against the CF “occupation” of Iraq. By 2005, however, AQI was clearly attempting to subvert traditional governance structures in order to establish a pan-Islamic, fundamentalist theocracy. Moreover, AQI had begun to compete “for control of revenue sources—such as banditry and smuggling—that had long been the province of the tribes.”<sup>12</sup>

The U.S. experiences in Fallujah prompted the development of a revamped counterinsurgency strategy, which later facilitated the transition from COIN to stability operations. Below we describe the foundations, key determinants, and select components of the transition from COIN to SO in Anbar, as well as some capability gaps identified during the process. Our account is based largely on the writings of and/or interviews with U.S. military personnel who operated in Anbar before and during the transition period. These individuals were in positions that enabled them to initiate and sustain the process of transitioning from COIN to SO in Anbar, arguably one of the most important achievements by coalition forces during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

## **Pre-Transition Strategy, 2005–2006**

For the purposes of this study, we consider the 2005–2006 timeframe to be the pre-transition period in Anbar Province. During this period, Multi-National Force–West<sup>13</sup> (MNF-W, also referred to hereafter as “the Command”) began to implement a new strategy to arm Anbari

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<sup>11</sup> Austin Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” *Survival*, Vol. 50, No. 2, April–May 2008, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> MNF-W comprised a U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force, which commanded subordinate U.S. Army and Coalition Force units.

tribes and secure the local population. We begin our assessment of the pre-transition period with a description of insurgent strategies and conclude with observations on the insurgents' external supporters.

### **Insurgent Strategies in the Pre-Transition Period**

The goals of the AQI-led Sunni insurgency were multifold from 2005 to 2006. These generally reflected the belligerents' aims throughout their campaign against incumbent Iraqi government and the coalition. They included the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Iraq, with Ramadi as the capital, and the defeat of U.S. forces on Iraqi soil.

Insurgents launched indiscriminate attacks against coalition forces, various Iraqi government organizations, and Shi'a civilians to foment inter-sectarian violence and fuel perceptions that Iraq's governing institutions were incapable of securing and controlling the country. Members of the Shi'a-led, central government in Baghdad, the Iraqi security forces, Kurds, and coalition forces were AQI's main targets. AQI's strategy also extended to the execution of attacks against infrastructure vital to the Iraqi economy.<sup>14</sup>

In Anbar, AQI's efforts to control the province saw the group's role shift from collaborator to oppressor, committing acts of extortion against Iraqi merchants and laborers, and intimidating the population and local law enforcement. AQI's reach also extended to control of the fuel market. Each month, the province was scheduled to receive roughly 80,000 gallons of subsidized gasoline. AQI, instead, diverted those deliveries to Jordan and Syria, resulting in a profit of \$10,000 per shipment for the insurgents.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the centuries-old tribal structure in Anbar collapsed, as sheikhs were murdered or co-opted by AQI or fled the area.

Despite group promulgations to bring Islamic law to Iraq starting with Anbar, AQI did not initially strictly enforce or even itself adhere to religious tenets in the province. In fact, they functioned more

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<sup>14</sup> Institute for the Study of War, Commentaries: "Intercepted Document Discusses AQI Strategy," April 27, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Bing West and Owen West, "Iraq's Real 'Civil War,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, April 5, 2007.

like a criminal group than an exemplary Islamic organization.<sup>16</sup> AQI relied on patronage to gain the cooperation of local sheikhs, and was arguably in a better position to do so, given its advantage of wealth vis-à-vis that of other local actors. AQI insurgents also permitted the expansion of smuggling in the province, which served the interests of tribes already engaged in such activity. However, the reservoir of goodwill between AQI and community notables and sheikhs ran dry by 2006, after AQI began to harshly punish those who used tobacco, alcohol, or pornography. In addition, AQI began to assassinate prominent Anbari sheikhs who opposed them. This combined with AQI extortion—which diminished economic gain for tribes engaged in similar activity—and tribal opposition to AQI ideology galvanized local tribes into resisting the group.

Critics of AQI and the Sunni insurgency point to a number of missteps and weaknesses that led to its eventual displacement from Anbar. First, AQI never controlled enough territory to establish an Islamic state in Iraq and could not provide enough security for such an entity. Second, Sunni leadership was not involved in the decision to form an Islamic state and thus withheld their support. Third, AQI maintained that “improving conditions of the people is less important than the conditions of their religion,”<sup>17</sup> which led to harsh tactics and intimidation that alienated the Sunni population. Insurgents went too far in their indiscriminate use of force and coercion against ordinary Anbaris. Moreover, the criminality, harassment, and assassination of tribal and community leaders turned local elites once loyal to the insurgency into forces of resistance.

### **External Powers Supporting the Anbar Insurgents**

The involvement of external actors contributed to the complexity of the insurgent environment and prolonged the conflict in Anbar. While some countries intervened directly, others were involved more indirectly.

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<sup>16</sup> West and West, “Iraq’s Real ‘Civil War.’”

<sup>17</sup> West and West, “Iraq’s Real ‘Civil War.’”

**Syria.** In Anbar, Syria emerged as a key supporter of belligerents and thus contributed to sustained violence in the province. Although Syria had only minimum capacity to broadly effect developments in Iraq, its position both as a source of and throughway for foreign fighters, combined with Syrians' linkages to Iraq's exile community made Syria a source of destabilization and ongoing violence. Syria's interests in Iraq were based on calculations of how events in the country would influence domestic conditions and Syria's regional standing.

During the pre-transition period in question, Syria's goals included promoting the establishment of an Iraq that was stable yet sufficiently weak, so that Damascus could continue to influence events in the country without inducing harm to its own security interests. Syria did not want an Iraq that was strong enough to militarily confront Syria to the extent of challenging its regional position or posing a security threat regionally. Syria did, however, want sufficient ability to influence Iraq in order to strengthen its hand with the United States, Iran, and other regional actors. To this end, Syria relied on two primary strategies which influenced events in Anbar, and by extension Iraq.

First, parts of Syria's 360-mile border with Iraq served as a main thoroughfare for foreign fighters seeking to join the insurgency. This was a major means through which Syria was a destabilizing force in Iraq. According to U.S. military officials, 70 percent of the 60 to 80 foreign fighters entering Iraq each month did so via Syria.<sup>18</sup> Though leadership in Damascus did not admit to actively encouraging passage of individuals, the constant and heavy traffic of foreign fighters confirmed suspicions that Damascus was providing at least passive support to the insurgency.

Syria and its local communities also enjoyed long-standing linkages to Iraqi exile groups and numerous tribes in Iraq. Syria maintained deep ties to Ba'athists and former regime elements in Iraq.<sup>19</sup> Such relations extended to tribes as well. Historically, transnational

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<sup>18</sup> Steven Simon, "Won't You Be My Neighbor: Syria, Iraq and the Changing Strategic Context in the Middle East," Working Paper, United States Institute of Peace, March 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Some of these individuals are wanted for war crimes. Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri and Mohamed Younis Ahmed are well-known Ba'athists believed to still reside in Syria.

links between tribal groups in Syria and Iraq have cemented relations through marriage and lineage. Some of these actors were intransigent and hostile to the Shi'a-led central government in Baghdad. Others were hostile to coalition forces. Whatever their predilection, Syria skillfully used these groups to advocate on the behalf of Syrian interests. For example, members of the Association of Muslim Ulama—a group with strong ties to Syria and led by Harith al-Dari—joined Syria in its opposition to the U.S. presence in Iraq.<sup>20</sup>

**Saudi Arabia.** By comparison, Saudi Arabia's role in influencing events in Anbar was more indirect. Saudi was a source country for Salafi-jihadi recruits that would later join the insurgency. Some 45 percent of insurgents are believed to have been from Saudi, perhaps the largest supplier of insurgents in Iraq. Of that number, half arrived as suicide bombers.<sup>21</sup> Saudi nationals are thought to have executed more suicide bombings than any other nationality,<sup>22</sup> thus underscoring Saudi's role as a source of recruits, and the part this dynamic played in augmenting the ranks of the insurgency in the pre-transition period.

Despite its role as a source of recruits for the insurgency in Anbar and elsewhere in Iraq, Riyadh was acutely aware that militants hostile to the Saudi regime could flow into the kingdom and pose a serious threat to its government. Therefore, preventing an influx of militants from Iraq as well as a flow of jihadists from Saudi figured prominently among leadership goals.

Even when sectarian strife was at a peak, Saudi leadership eschewed interventionist strategies that included funding and equipping Sunni insurgents. This is not to say that there were not discussions about such tactics. Indeed, Saudi leadership paid close attention to violence against its co-religionists. However, Saudi lacked possession of a structure analogous to Iran's lethal al-Quds force and, importantly, did not enjoy well-established links to Sunni militias. Instead, the regime opted to support a host of Sunni political actors, such as

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<sup>20</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, July 26, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Ned Parker, "The Conflict in Iraq: The Saudi Role in Insurgency," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Ned Parker, "The Conflict in Iraq,"

members of Tawafiq, the Iraqi Islamic Party and, like Syria, backed Harith al-Dhari of the Association of Muslim scholars, widely known for his anti-coalition vitriol.

**Jordan.** Turning to Anbar's second neighbor to the West, Jordan, like Saudi, was host to a significant portion of foreign fighters. Fighters were recruited in Jordan and eventually made their way to Anbar and other parts of Iraq. This corps of recruits contributed to bolstering the insurgency in the pre-transition period, 2005 to 2006.

In addition, Jordan—as well as Syria and the United Arab Emirates—became host to a large, wealthy Sunni Anbari expatriate community that fled Iraq after 2003. The exodus of middle-class professionals, technocrats, and the wealthy business class severely stifled economic growth and development in Anbar and throughout the country. An unstable security situation and rampant corruption, symptoms of the general absence of rule of law, were an unfavorable mix for establishing a viable economic and business environment in Anbar.

The loss of the middle-class base and investment opportunity in Anbar was by no means in and of itself a condition that supported the insurgency in Anbar. However, the effect that the losses had on a persistently crippled economy did benefit militants because the Anbari populace blamed coalition forces for abysmal economic circumstances in the province. The insurgents provided services and economic opportunities that traditional actors could not and at the same time exploited popular resentment toward the U.S.-led coalition.

A Jordanian strategy that was more positive in its impact during the pre-transition period involved using its Sunni Iraqi expatriate community to encourage Iraqi Sunnis residing in both countries to engage in Iraq's political process through participation in the 2005 elections. Sunni endorsement of the process was central to creating an alternative to the insurgency in Anbar and elsewhere Iraq.

Otherwise, like Saudi, Jordan's engagement did not include provision of military support to regular or to alternative groups in Iraq.<sup>23</sup> Nor did Jordan send members of its own security forces.

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<sup>23</sup> Scott Lasensky, "Jordan and Iraq: Between Cooperation and Crisis," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 178, December 2006.

Having described the external setting, we now turn to the transition period of 2006 to 2008. This timeframe is characterized by a discernable shift in the direction of the Anbar campaign. However, some of the foundations for that change were laid during the early phases of OIF.

## **Counterinsurgency and Transition, 2006–2008**

Our research indicates that a transition from COIN to stability operations in al-Anbar province can be identified. Although the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) personnel we interviewed did not indicate that an actual “transition” concept existed in USMC doctrine during the 2006–2008 timeframe, some did agree that the term is applicable to what they more generally described as a shift in emphasis during the Anbar campaign. More specifically, the shift was from lines of operation focused on kinetic COIN activity (e.g., aimed at establishing security during 2005–2006), to lines of operation focused more on development (e.g., reconstruction and economic investment during 2007–2008). COIN activity continued through the period to suppress insurgent elements and other threats to stability, but commanders increasingly focused on matters of economics, politics, and sustainable governance. Indeed, a clear indicator of the transition was commanders’ diversion of resources (e.g., manpower and intelligence collection assets) from COIN activities to stability and reconstruction.

### **The Transition in Anbar: Contributing Factors**

Many environmental factors contributed to the transition in Anbar, but it was arguably the confluence of four local factors that helped set the stage for a transition from COIN. These factors included AQI’s violent tactics, harsh population control measures, and severe “shadow” governance; the decisions of key Iraqi tribes and groups’ to collaborate in forceful opposition to AQI the same year; increasing numbers of adequately trained Iraqi Security Forces (ISF); and the revamped strategy and approach widely adopted by U.S. military forces by 2006. This strategy sharply contrasted Multi-National Force–West

(MNF-W) actions with those of AQI and gradually won the trust and confidence of the Anbari populace.

Regional factors also contributed to the transition in Anbar. Specifically, neighboring Syria and Saudi Arabia both saw the specter of instability in Iraq on the doorstep of their own countries. For Saudi Arabia, this would become a catalyst for their support of the tribal Awakening movement.

As mentioned above, the al-Saud regime was deeply concerned about the reemergence of AQI in Saudi Arabia because of the long-standing linkages that existed between AQI and the militant organization's counterpart, al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQP). AQP was responsible for a number of anti-regime activities in Saudi during 2003 to 2007.

From the Saudi perspective, the situation in Iraq, particularly from 2005 through 2006, could replicate the country's 1980 experience, when mujahideen returned from Afghanistan with both enhanced combat skills and an ideological dedication to toppling "apostate" regimes. If renewed, this dynamic could threaten the ruling family by initiating a cycle of disorder that would produce more terrorists whose operations could become increasingly more threatening to the regime and, in turn, attract still more terrorists.<sup>24</sup>

The prospect of such an outcome, first, provided an incentive for Saudi security cooperation with the United States. Second, Saudi leadership understood that support for the U.S.-backed Awakening movement provided an effective means of defeating al Qaeda. Like the United States, the Saudis saw the movement as instrumental for creating a bulwark against jihadism at home. However, Saudi support, mostly through the provision of funding for arms, was cautious. The regime was wary of growing tribalism. Empowering local Anbari tribes might encourage the tribes' compatriots in Saudi to advocate for more power and influence. This being the case, the future integration of the Awakening fighters into formal Iraqi security structures was important to Riyadh.

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<sup>24</sup> Joseph McMillan, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion and an Enduring Rivalry," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 157, January 2006.



For Damascus, concerns about the export of militant jihadism to Syria eventually caused its leadership to stem the flow of foreign fighters to Iraq. Following the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Syrian leaders had seemed to passively support terrorism and the insurgency by allowing fighters passage into Iraq through Western Syria, some of them going to Anbar. However, the rapidly deteriorating security situation in Iraq during 2006 and 2007 produced circumstances that were alarming for Damascus.

In this regard, a key Syrian concern centered on the potential development of Kurdish separatism in northern Iraq and its possible influence on Syria's own Kurdish population.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Syria's Kurds, totaling 10 percent of the population, were already growing restive in the northeast and major cities like Damascus.<sup>26</sup>

Also, any continuation of activities that sustained the insurgency threatened to put Syria in a more direct confrontation with Islamists. Several events offered warning signs. Al Qaeda-backed militants attacked a diplomatic enclave<sup>27</sup> in Damascus, killing four in April 2004.<sup>28</sup> In 2006, Syrian intelligence thwarted an attack on the U.S. embassy.<sup>29</sup> Al Qaeda had also spoken of opening a new front in Syria.

Thus, the stream of jihadists entering Iraq via Syria was beginning to prove detrimental to Syrian interests. The attacks were a "wakeup call" that fighters returning to Syria posed a security threat at home. In addition, Syria began to feel the strain of some 1.5 million Iraqi refugees fleeing the violence in Iraq. The country could no longer with-

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<sup>25</sup> Mona Yacoubian, United States Institute of Peace, interview by authors, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> In March 2004, dozens of Kurds were killed or wounded in al-Qamishli after days of protests also left many injured. Such confrontations, once rare, have become more common and have raised Syrian government concerns about security in Kurdish areas and escalation in the confrontation. See Radwan Ziadeh, "The Kurds in Syria: Fueling Separatist Movements in the Region?" United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 220, April 2009.

<sup>27</sup> The attack, in the Rawda district, was near the British, Canadian, and Iranian embassies.

<sup>28</sup> Ewen MacAskil, "Syria Blames al-Qaida-linked Group for Attacks," *The Guardian*, April 29, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Megan Stack, "Syrians Foil Strike on US Embassy," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 2006.

stand the economic and political challenges of the refugee crisis facing it, a crisis that it had helped to provoke.<sup>30</sup>

In the section entitled “Setting the Stage for and Managing the Transition,” we describe key events related to some of the local factors that contributed to the transition from COIN in Anbar province and we focus on select components of the U.S. approach that are now credited with enabling, launching, and sustaining the transition. However, the U.S. military made a number of attempts to secure Anbar and regain the initiative from AQI before it identified a successful approach. Before offering a detailed discussion of the local factors that contributed to the transition in Anbar province, we provide a few examples of those attempts and assess the external actors’ understanding of the evolving conflict.

### **False Starts and Missed Opportunities on the Road to Transition**

Anbar would eventually be recognized as the birthplace of the U.S. “tribal engagement” initiative, a type of “indirect, irregular warfare” strategy that led to a counterinsurgency alliance between coalition forces and most of the tribes in the province.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, U.S. Special Operations Forces and personnel from other U.S. agencies had made contact with some tribes in western Iraq as early as 2003, during the invasion.<sup>32</sup> Over time, certain tribal engagements evolved into efforts to recruit local national fighters and attach them to CF units, and thereafter to transition the fighters to the ISF.

In April 2005, U.S. Marines began reporting, and it was later confirmed, that local nationals were attacking AQI forces in the Husaybah-Al Qaim region along the Syrian border in western Anbar.<sup>33</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Most of Syria’s refugees are concentrated in Damascus, with some also in Aleppo. Although Syria absorbed diverse refugees, most are thought to be Sunni. Compared to Jordan, and other host-states, Syria had a larger proportion of impoverished refugees.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas R. Searle, “Tribal Engagement in Anbar Province: The Critical Role of Special Operations Forces,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 50, 3rd Quarter, 2008, p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Searle, “Tribal Engagement,” p. 63.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, 2D Marines Division Public Affairs Office, “Operation Steel Curtain Update,” September 8, 2005.

attackers were from the powerful Albu Mahal and Albu Nimr tribes, which had formed the “Hamza Battalion” of some 400 to 1,000 fighters to take on AQI.<sup>34</sup>

The Hamza Battalion was destroyed by AQI in August 2005.<sup>35</sup> However, around the same time, MNF-W began recruiting members of Albu Mahal and other tribes to serve as scouts and intelligence collectors. The scouts were dubbed the “Desert Protectors.”<sup>36</sup> Their first action came in November 2005, when MNF-W and Iraqi Army (IA) soldiers, who were by this time some 15,000 strong in the province, launched “Operation Steel Curtain.” This undertaking was intended to “destroy the al Qaeda in Iraq terrorists operating throughout the al Qaim region.”<sup>37</sup>

Although the Desert Protector program was a promising early example of CF teaming with indigenous forces to fight AQI, it was short-lived. The program had been authorized by Multi-National Corps-Iraq but with the anticipation that local nationals joining the Protectors would ultimately transition to the Iraqi Army. Transitioning the Protectors to the IA would decrease the chance that the force might evolve into a competing militia that could challenge the provincial government. However, CF authorities apparently did not understand the limits of tribal members’ willingness to contribute to securing Iraq. The Albu Mahal and participants from other tribes wanted to serve near their homes; joining the IA could mean deployments anywhere in Iraq.<sup>38</sup>

The Desert Protector program unraveled when many of the local Iraqi participants quit rather than join the Iraqi Army. Some Protectors

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<sup>34</sup> Long, “The Anbar Awakening,” p. 79; Carter Malkasian, “Local Opposition to Al Qaeda in Iraq,” Center for Naval Analyses, slide presentation, February 12, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> Malkasian, “Local Opposition to Al Qaeda.”

<sup>36</sup> Searle, “Tribal Engagement,” pp. 64–65; and Malkasian, “Local Opposition to Al Qaeda.”

<sup>37</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, 2D Marines Division Public Affairs Office, “Operation Steel Curtain Update,” November 8, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Searle, “Tribal Engagement,” p. 65.

did, however, later join Iraqi Police organizations in their local areas.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, following Operation Steel Curtain, the MNF-W and IA improved coordination with the Albu Mahal and effectively partnered with the tribe to provide security in al Qaim.<sup>40</sup>

MNF-W continued to experiment with tribal engagement in late 2005. A notable success came in December when nationalist insurgent groups actually collaborated with coalition forces to provide security during national elections. In the relatively secure environment, Anbar Sunnis turned out in force to cast their votes.<sup>41</sup> During the same period, however, the coalition missed an opportunity to attempt an alliance with the Al Anbar People's Council, a coalition of Sunni sheikhs and nationalist groups that had formed to fight AQI.<sup>42</sup>

In the wake of the 2005 election process, insurgent violence dropped in al Anbar. According to one account, some MNF-W planners had thought an anticipated reinforcement—one replacement brigade, two additional battalions, and a few hundred IA soldiers to join the MNF-W—could build on the positive momentum generated during the elections and assist in any collaboration with the Council. However, the reinforcing units were, in the end, not forthcoming. Some senior MNF-W leaders also continued to have reservations about collaborating with tribal organizations to provide security.<sup>43</sup> Meanwhile, AQI wasted no time in attacking its potential rival. By February 2006, AQI had assassinated the top leadership of the Anbar People's Council and the organization had collapsed. Violence in the province increased dramatically thereafter.<sup>44</sup> From this experience, the Command learned the necessity of protecting the leaders of organizations that might align themselves with the coalition.

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<sup>39</sup> Searle, "Tribal Engagement," p. 65.

<sup>40</sup> Long, "The Anbar Awakening," p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Ellen Knickmeyer and Jonathan Finer, "Iraqi Vote Draws Big Turnout of Sunnis," *Washington Post*, December 16, 2005, p. A1.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, "Anbar Awakens," p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, 1-MEF, 2005–2006, interview by authors, Arlington, Virginia, June 8, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

### **External Actors' Understanding of the Changing Conflict Dynamics**

Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan saw the decline in violence in Anbar as beneficial to their domestic interests, the most important of which was internal stability. For its part, Syria believed that the changing conflict dynamics presented avenues of opportunity. For example, Syria's ability to influence the dynamics in Iraq strengthened its hand with the United States and regional actors on various regional issues. This meant that Damascus could exploit its ties with the United States and Iran to strengthen its regional position politically and economically.

On the economic front, stability in Anbar and Iraq would allow for increased agricultural trade and potentially renewed access to the Kirkuk-Banias pipeline, which had been destroyed during the 2003 invasion and rendered inoperable. Syria anticipated benefits from potential access to Iraq's hydrocarbon sector, its railway lines and other infrastructure, and general trade opportunities as well.<sup>45</sup>

The Saudis, meanwhile, interpreted the drop in violence as an opportunity to further support the integration of Awakening members into the Iraqi security forces. This effort decreased the likelihood that Anbar would fall again to the insurgency.

### **Setting the Stage for and Managing the Transition**

By early-2006 the United States and the Iraqi government were still struggling to get the insurgency under control and move toward stability. U.S. forces were still learning nuances of the area and COIN techniques and tactics were still being perfected.

MNF-W set the stage for the transition to stability operations in Anbar by implementing a new COIN strategy developed over time by planners at the Command. The new strategy enabled MNF-W to increasingly suppress insurgents operating in the province, which in turn enabled the Command to focus on mentoring and oversight initiatives aimed at returning governance to Anbaris. A concerted effort

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<sup>45</sup> Mona Yacoubian, United States Institute of Peace, interview by authors, Washington, D.C., July 26, 2009.

by MNF-W planners to better understand Anbar's dynamic society underpinned the MNF-W approach.

### **Transition Process Components**

In 2004, MNF-W undertook two major operations to secure Fallujah, a large population center in Anbar. The operations were kinetic, aimed primarily at killing and capturing terrorists and insurgents, and featured a largely conventional assault on enemy forces in the city. While many enemy fighters were captured or killed, the Command was not able to assert control of Fallujah during the period, and local national civilians suffered as a result of the infrastructure damage that occurred during the fighting. USMC leaders realized in late 2005 or early 2006 that they needed new methods, not only for the application of military power to the COIN campaign in al Anbar, but also for a better understanding of Anbar's dynamic society. The latter capability would help ensure that military and other instruments of power could be effectively applied to secure the province and to advance its recovery.

**Understanding the Al-Anbar Operational Environment.** The Command's experience in Anbar through 2005 had demonstrated that a focus on targeting terrorists and insurgents would not ultimately wrest provincial areas from enemy control. Indeed, by 2005, threat groups—of which AQI was the most dominant—controlled, intimidated, or otherwise influenced large segments of the Anbari populace. Insurgent groups depended on the support or at least acquiescence of local citizens to maintain their freedom of movement and ability to attack coalition forces. The USMC determined that it would have to divide the insurgents from the populace. To do that, the Marine Corps needed a more detailed understanding of Anbari society. This reasoning prompted the First Marine Expeditionary Force (IMEF) to establish the Economic and Political Intelligence Cell (EPIC) in March 2006.

The new EPIC was initially called the Political Intelligence Cell. It was meant to fill a gap in the USMC's understanding of political power players in Anbar, including the complex relationships among various individuals and organizations, the political/tribal leadership dynamic, and the hierarchy of sheikhs in the province, among other

issues. The organization's portfolio quickly expanded beyond the political focus, however, to include economic intelligence and analysis because economic activity (e.g., legal commerce, barter, black marketing, and money laundering) was understood to be inextricably linked to Anbar's political construct. EPIC analysts also tracked the activities, interests, and relationships of Sunni business leaders (and others in the "leadership diaspora") living in Jordan and Syria.<sup>46</sup>

The USMC had no professional track for training analysts in the skills required to support the EPIC mission. To fill the gap, the USMC brought in specialists from the Reserves to augment the staff.

In 2006, the EPIC increased MNF-W decisionmakers' understanding of commerce (both legal and illegal) in Anbar and the key players in the province. The EPIC team identified, for example, the tribal interests in key business entities as well entities serving as fronts for insurgent groups. The EPIC tracked Syrian military intelligence funding of insurgent and organized crime groups in Anbar. It also revealed the extent of the insurgents' control of black market fuel products. This type of knowledge enabled MNF-W to invest its reconstruction funds in a manner that would advance its objectives for the province while denying or disrupting insurgent financing.<sup>47</sup>

The 2006 EPIC staff was "focused on the enemy"; that is, the cell supported commanders' ability to identify insurgents, criminals, and other threat groups. The cell helped commanders understand the threats that the enemy posed to MNF-W's political and economic lines of operation in Anbar, as well as how to counter those threats. The EPIC's 2006 focus reflected the Command's concentration on establishing security.<sup>48</sup> However, by 2007, MNF-W commanders' requests for information were indicative of the transition away from COIN and the increasing focus on reconstruction and development. For example, the requests sought assessments of commodity supplies and prices, as

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<sup>46</sup> EPIC Officer in Charge (USMC) 2006, email interview by authors on the subject "Your EPIC and JPEC Experience," July 22, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> EPIC Officer in Charge (USMC), 2006.

<sup>48</sup> EPIC Officer in Charge (USMC), 2006.

well as the political affiliations and allegiances of all types of power players.<sup>49</sup>

Another major MNF-W innovation and contributor to understanding the Anbar environment was the Joint Prosecution and Exploitation Center (JPEC), established under the IMEF intelligence section (the G2) in June 2006. The JPEC was launched to fill a key capability gap: The USMC's lack of a process to support law enforcement (LE) in Anbar and its lack of personnel with certain LE skills.

Law enforcement skills and police intelligence techniques can be employed during irregular warfare to understand the insurgent and criminal elements threatening host nation stability, as well as their interaction and collaboration. The Command's LE shortfall made it difficult to develop such understanding *vis-à-vis* Anbar.

MNF-W tactical units typically did not have the policing skills or intelligence capacity needed to conduct evidence collection and investigations and to process detainees. Therefore, when units captured a suspected criminal or insurgent, they were unable to develop a case file that could prove their suspicions to the Combined Review and Release Board (i.e., Task Force 134) or at the Criminal Courts of Iraq; hence, detainees were released back into the civilian population to repeat their crimes and/or attacks. In addition, tactical units typically could not effectively exploit (e.g., through interrogation) the detainees they had in custody to generate new information on the suspects' activities and associates. This capability gap inhibited the units' ability to achieve counterinsurgency objectives in their areas of operation. Finally, MNF-W's process shortfall meant that it could not track detainees as they moved through the detention and judicial systems.<sup>50</sup>

Detainees understood the MNF-W detention process. They knew they would likely be released quickly if they refused to provide evidence during interrogations.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the Command's ineffective

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<sup>49</sup> EPIC Officer in Charge (USMC), 2007, interview by RAND researchers, January 11, 2008.

<sup>50</sup> JPEC Officer in Charge (USMC), 2006, interview by authors, July 27, 2009, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>51</sup> JPEC Officer in Charge (USMC), 2006, interview.



detention process meant that Iraqis who collaborated with CF to send an insurgent to jail would face the accused on the street in the near term. Such circumstances undermined CF efforts to gain the trust of Anbari citizens and acquire tips on insurgent activities.

USMC senior intelligence officers recognized in early 2006 that much of the information and capability needed to provide effective support to law enforcement was already controlled by the Command or available to it. Different organizations with key information, however, focused on their specific missions and did not share their data or findings with other organizations having a need to know. Marine Corps intelligence officers, therefore, sought to organize the disparate LE-related elements into an effective organization and system for law enforcement support.<sup>52</sup> The JPEC they founded employed military and civilian experts, including reservist police officers. The JPEC supported efforts to disrupt criminal and terror networks by performing the all-source intelligence analysis required to track and target network members. It conducted crime scene investigations and criminal case management to support the prosecution and incarceration of captured insurgents and criminals. It also organized the training of coalition and Iraqi forces in case management and crime scene investigation (also known as tactical or sensitive site exploitation, which included such essential functions as taking photographs and finger printing suspects).<sup>53</sup>

According to one of the organization's key architects, the JPEC quickly made an impact on the Anbar operational environment. Criminals and insurgents were effectively prosecuted or held as security threats; intelligence-driven operations increased and detainee recidivism had dropped significantly by fall 2006.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> These elements included, for example, the MNF-W's forensics laboratory and "Detainee Tracker" system; document exploitation teams; information from USMC radio battalions that exploited insurgent equipment such as cell phones; forensics data from the Biometrics Automated Tool Set and the Combined Explosives Exploitation Cell; Reserve and Federal agency law enforcement officials; judge advocates general with specific training in Iraqi rule of law; and liaison officers positioned at Task Force 134 and Iraq's criminal courts.

<sup>53</sup> JPEC Officer in Charge (USMC) 2006, interview.

<sup>54</sup> JPEC Officer in Charge (USMC) 2006, interview.

Because it contributed to the disruption of threat networks, the JPEC contributed to MNF-W's security-focused mission in 2006. Over time, the JPEC's ability to promote the rule of law in Anbar Province—by training the ISF in LE tasks and by supporting the development of Iraq's judicial system—enabled the JPEC to be a significant contributor to the Command's transition from COIN to stability operations in Anbar.

MNF-W's improved understanding of the Anbar operational environment came at a critical time. In Ramadi, Sheikh Sattar al-Rishawi of the Albu Risha tribe initiated a campaign against al Qaeda in September 2006.<sup>55</sup> Sheikh Sattar had founded the Sahawat Al Anbar (Anbar Awakening Council), which eventually grew to include 42 tribes. Having learned from earlier attempts to work with indigenous Iraqi forces, U.S. military forces moved quickly to help protect Anbar Awakening Council leaders and support its operations. By October 2006, MNF-W was working with local leaders to arm and organize the irregular forces (frequently know as "the Sons of Iraq") that were joining the Awakening movement.<sup>56</sup> The fact that tribal leaders supported this effort was of vital importance, because their approval was critical to legitimizing the developing of local forces to supplement the national Iraqi army and police. Young men in Anbar were now encouraged and supported to join the growing security forces. The support of tribal leaders also contributed to the discipline of the local forces, since those locally recruited units were intended to be the protectors of their own people.

The CF-Awakening collaboration would ultimately overwhelm AQI forces, help return governance to local and provincial authorities throughout most of Anbar, and enable many Sunni irregulars in the Awakening movement to later join the ISF, a key component in the transition from COIN to stability operations. Indeed, with support from new organizations, such as the EPIC and JPEC, MNF-W planners achieved an increasingly sophisticated understanding of Anbari society, which enabled coalition forces to influence the environment

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<sup>55</sup> Long, "The Anbar Awakening," p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> Renny McPherson, "Operations in Anbar Province, Iraq," unpublished RAND research.

in a way that supported MNF-W objectives for the province. Such understanding allowed the Command to sustain and propel the transition process that had been made possible by the security initiatives launched in 2006.

**MNF-W's Revamped Counterinsurgency Strategy, 2006.** MNF-W had learned from experience that there were limits to its ability to influence Anbar's development via direct action, at least with the resources it had available. As part of the new approach it adopted in 2006, MNF-W sought to achieve more of its objectives by working with and through Iraqis and local institutions. This was the approach adopted to engage the Awakening movement, as described briefly above.

MNF-W's broader effort in 2006 could be described as the establishment of an environment of trust in Anbar province. The Command would first build trust between its forces and the Anbari populace and then employ mentoring and oversight to generate trust between the Anbaris and themselves.

MNF-W sought to build this relationship of trust by making population security a top priority. To accomplish this, the Command deployed tactical units to live among the people of Anbar and keep them secure. Foot patrols were extensively used to establish contact and relationships with local Iraqis. This approach contrasted with earlier efforts, in which Marines and soldiers lived on huge MNF-W bases and typically patrolled in vehicles.<sup>57</sup>

During this period (mid to late 2006), many Anbaris were growing weary of AQI's violent tactics and harsh approach to governance. When they understood that the coalition forces now living in their neighborhoods would be there around the clock to protect them, they started providing tips on AQI activities.<sup>58</sup> This human intelligence greatly facilitated MNF-W efforts to target or otherwise engage insurgents and secure the province. The importance of AQI's heavy-handed approach toward the local population cannot be overemphasized. The fact that AQI was terrorizing much of the population caused many Anbaris to turn against them and was of decisive importance to the

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<sup>57</sup> McPherson, "Operations in Anbar Province."

<sup>58</sup> McPherson, "Operations in Anbar Province."

efforts of the coalition and the government of Iraq to stabilize Anbar. Perhaps more than any other factor, including the attempts of the coalition and Iraqi security forces to bring order to the region, this error by AQI created an environment where the population turned against the insurgents.

Over time, MNF-W's increasingly sophisticated understanding of the insurgent landscape and Anbar more generally, collaboration with indigenous Iraqi forces (e.g., the Awakening fighters), and efforts to secure the Anbari population created an environment in which Iraqi military and police forces could progressively take the lead in maintaining provincial security.

**Mentoring and Oversight to Foster Governance and Recovery in Anbar, 2007–2008.** As part of the security component of its transition process, MNF-W had made a concerted effort to train and equip Iraqi Army and police forces and to recruit local nationals (including former insurgents) into the police and IA ranks. MNF-W was careful to work closely with local leaders in its recruitment efforts. In addition to generating personnel for the security forces, working with local leaders helped shift the balance of power and influence away from groups such as AQI—which had offered jobs and money to local Anbaris—and back toward traditional leaders, the sheikhs. The sheikhs who had collaborated with MNF-W's recruitment drive delivered thousands of jobs to the local population, an effort that contributed to the restoration of the sheikhs' traditional power.<sup>59</sup>

MNF-W's security force recruitment effort had gained significant momentum by late 2006, as large numbers of former insurgents and other local nationals joined local Iraqi police units in the province.<sup>60</sup> Some tribes took high-profile roles in the ISF:

The Albu Mahal were allowed to effectively take over the Iraqi Army brigade in their region, while the Albu Risha came to dom-

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<sup>59</sup> West and West, "Iraq's Real 'Civil War.'"

<sup>60</sup> Citing Marine Corps History Division sources, McPherson notes that there were just 2,000 police in all of Anbar at the beginning of 2006. By late 2006, the number had increased to 8,500. McPherson, "Operations in Anbar Province."

inate the Ramadi Police. The Iraqi government delegated significant authority to both tribes, along with the Albu Nimr around Hit.<sup>61</sup>

The willingness of local nationals, especially former insurgents, to join government security forces could be seen as a key indicator that MNF-W was turning the tide against the insurgency and was positioned to begin the transition from a COIN focus to one of stability operations and reconstruction. However, it seems likely that the perception of the AQI threat shared by MNF-W, tribal elements and governing institutions in Anbar, and the central government in Baghdad, contributed to early successes in transitioning irregular fighters to the ISF. But by 2008, it was clear that efforts to transition irregulars were encountering significant difficulties.

Developing the ISF's swelling ranks into a professional force was another key component of MNF-W's early transition effort. In fact, MNF-W had initiated both military and police training programs before the Awakening period. Military Transition Teams (MiTTs) were established to provide "day-to-day tactical training on urban combat, cordon and search, checkpoint procedures, and the intelligence cycle" to the Iraqi Army.<sup>62</sup> The MiTTs trained all echelons of the two Iraqi Army divisions stationed in Anbar.

Over time, MNF-W drew down and changed the structure of its MiTT program. The Command gradually decreased the number of U.S. trainers assigned to Iraqi units. It also decreased the rank of MiTT leaders from colonel to lieutenant colonel. These actions had the effect of forcing the developing Iraqi Army units to operate more independently while also clearly establishing that Iraqi general officers were in command.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Long, "The Anbar Awakening," p. 81.

<sup>62</sup> McPherson, "Operations in Anbar Province."

<sup>63</sup> Major General John Kelly, the IMEF/MNF-W commander in 2008, has explained that Iraqi general officers treated U.S. colonels as peers and at times deferred decisions to their U.S. colleagues as a result. When lieutenant colonels led the MiTTs, Iraqi generals were clearly the senior officers in charge of the Iraqi Army divisions. Major General John Kelly,

As MNF-W transitioned from COIN to stability operations, it shifted its relationship with the ISF in Anbar. Early in the mentoring process, MNF-W forces led with the ISF in support. The ISF progressively took the lead as its ranks and proficiency increased, while the MNF-W transitioned to a supporting role. The ISF later achieved the capability to operate independently. Thereafter, in April 2008 and with MNF-W consent, the ISF took over primary responsibility for maintaining security in Anbar.

As Iraq security forces, both local and national, became more competent, U.S. forces increasingly assumed the role of trainers, mentors, and enablers who provided key capabilities that the Iraqi security forces lacked. For example, while the indigenous Iraqi security forces had, of course, a much better ability to interact with the local population, they lacked sophisticated technical intelligence and surveillance capabilities. As the numbers and level of competence of the Iraqi police and military units increased, U.S. forces assisted them with training and equipment and provided them with technical intelligence that was an extremely useful supplement to the human intelligence they generated from interacting with the population.

In September 2008, MNF-W formally transferred security responsibility to the ISF.<sup>64</sup> It could be argued that once MNF-W had transferred security responsibilities to the ISF and was able to achieve a sustained focus on stability and reconstruction, it had achieved the transition from COIN.

MNF-W senior leaders were conscious of the need to prove to Anbaris that life was steadily improving. Moreover, MNF-W realized that, in the long run, peace and stability would be more likely and sustainable if Anbaris had confidence in their own government. In other words, there needed to be an atmosphere of trust and confidence, not only between the coalition forces and the people of Anbar but also between the people and their homegrown governing authorities and between competing groups in the province. Promoting this atmo-

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“Reflections of a Returning Commanding General on Counterinsurgency in Iraq,” presentation at the RAND Corporation, April 24, 2009, Arlington, Virginia.

<sup>64</sup> Filkins, “U.S. Hands Off Pacified Anbar.”

sphere was another key component of the transition process MNF-W pursued.

The ISF's increasing proficiency afforded MNF-W the opportunity to take some high-profile initiatives aimed at improving Anbaris' quality of life and sense of sovereignty. For example, as security improved, MNF-W took steps to reduce the visibility of the coalition forces and the burdens they imposed on average Iraqis. In 2008 MNF-W ordered U.S. military supply convoys to operate overnight (between 9 PM and 5 AM) to reduce traffic congestion. Signs on MNF-W vehicles warning Iraqis to stay back or be shot were replaced with new signs instructing Iraqi vehicles to proceed and pass when signaled by MNF-W personnel. This had the effect of starting to change the population's perceptions: Rather than being thought of as foreign occupiers, coalition forces began to be recognized, along with the increasingly numerous Iraqi police and military, as being there to help the people. For example, coalition forces shared the road with Iraqis instead of taking it over. The Command also removed many checkpoints from major roads in the province; others were transferred to ISF control. Finally, in perhaps the most dramatic signal that the "occupation" was ending and life might get back to normal in the province, MNF-W began closing major operating bases in 2008. According to one senior leader, the closing of the USMC's huge Camp Fallujah base, in particular, had a major, positive impact on Anbaris' perception of the occupation.<sup>65</sup>

In another effort to improve conditions for Anbaris, MNF-W made numerous reconstruction investments in Anbar, starting well before the 2006 strategy change. MNF-W undertook small initiatives that could be completed by local contractors. Examples included general cleanup and trash collection and the painting of mosques before the beginning of Ramadan.<sup>66</sup> Many early investments in Anbar's recovery were made via the Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP), which allowed coalition military commanders to pro-

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<sup>65</sup> Kelly, "Reflections."

<sup>66</sup> Department of Defense civilian member of Al Anbar Provincial Reconstruction Team, May 2007 to April 2008, interview by authors, Arlington, Virginia, May 13, 2009; and Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview by authors, Arlington, Virginia, July 14, 2009.

vide funds to “respond rapidly to urgent humanitarian, relief, and reconstruction needs in their geographic areas of responsibility.”<sup>67</sup> The CERP funds were provided directly to local nationals while local government officials were kept “informed of progress.”<sup>68</sup>

MNF-W’s early investments, however, too often failed to have a lasting, positive impact. Before the Command had achieved a detailed understanding of the Anbar environment, it sponsored some projects that were not useful to the local people, and it often paid contractors who failed to deliver promised work, such as the construction of a new building. MNF-W contracting officers did not speak the local language and did not understand the Anbari business environment well enough to evaluate who they were funding or the likelihood that contracted projects would be completed as agreed.<sup>69</sup> There were even cases of MNF-W funds being diverted from aid projects to the insurgency. According to one USMC intelligence officer,

We discovered early on that MNF was routinely giving money to insurgent front companies for reconstruction contracts that, in turn, went to fill those insurgents’ war chests.<sup>70</sup>

The MNF-W came to understand that many local Iraqi contractors viewed the CF as a temporary phenomenon; thus, there was no need to adhere to contracts because the relationship was short term. Some Iraqis sought only to bilk as much money as possible from MNF-W project managers.<sup>71</sup> These experiences led MNF-W to shift from funding Iraqis directly and coordinating with governing authorities to fund-

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<sup>67</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Leonard J. DeFrancisci, “Money as a Force Multiplier in COIN,” *Military Review*, May–June 2008, p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> DeFrancisci, “Money,” p. 183.

<sup>69</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

<sup>70</sup> EPIC Officer in Charge (USMC) 2006, interview. As we indicated earlier, the EPIC reportedly made a significant impact by helping MNF-W commanders and project managers identify insurgent front companies.

<sup>71</sup> For example, one USMC officer and Anbar veteran related how Marines discovered that some Iraqis contracted by MNF-W to paint buildings actually mixed their paint with so much water that it peeled off the structures not long after the work was completed.



ing projects via governing institutions. Although this approach did not eliminate waste and fraud, it did increase the chance that funded projects would be completed as envisioned and also strengthened the legitimacy of government institutions. This is because local Iraqis understood the business environment they operated in. They understood what level of graft and corruption was to be expected in the course of business activity versus what was excessive and a threat to their business endeavors. Moreover, local contractors understood that governing institutions, their new supervisors, might be in place for the long term. In such cases, local national contractors had incentives to deliver work of adequate quality and meet the terms of their agreements, lest they damage potentially enduring business relationships and be denied opportunities for additional contracts.<sup>72</sup>

Improved contracting was just one element of a larger MNF-W effort to improve money flows into Anbar, convince Anbaris to invest in their own recovery, and, at the same time, reinforce the governing institutions that could contribute to stability. Once again, establishing an atmosphere of trust and confidence and providing mentoring and oversight were essential to the larger effort. Indeed, as one Anbar veteran explained to us, “capitalism requires confidence.” In this regard, the Marines we interviewed indicated that they sought to position the Command as something of an honest broker between the various competing elements in Anbar society. In contrast to previous approaches wherein direct action was typically used to influence developments in Anbar, during the transition period of 2007–2008 the Command sought to use mentoring and oversight to create an environment in which the Iraqis would see the benefit of cooperating among themselves and with MNF-W in order to advance Anbar’s recovery. The Command developed several governance and business processes and forums to reinforce this effort; some were established as early as 2005 but only came to fruition once the security environment had substantially improved after 2006.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

<sup>73</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer interview, June 8, 2009.

Regarding governance, the Marines we interviewed for this case study indicated that MNF-W pursued (perhaps unofficially) a two-track approach. On the one hand, MNF-W undertook initiatives aimed at establishing the provincial government's legitimacy and authority. On the other hand, MNF-W would, as appropriate, work through, or even help establish, traditional governance institutions to stabilize and secure the province. As one senior USMC officer who led engagement efforts explained to us, his goal was to foster "governance" that worked for Iraqis, not necessarily "government" as it is typically envisioned by Americans.<sup>74</sup>

With respect to traditional institutions such as tribal councils, MNF-W used them to establish what one Marine described as an "arc of conversation" among various Iraqi groups and between Iraqis and the MNF-W. For example, MNF-W promoted development of a "Sheikh Shura" where local leaders could meet routinely to discuss issues and resolve disputes. MNF-W felt this initiative had succeeded when the sheikhs started meeting on their own without MNF-W participation.<sup>75</sup>

As they pursued the participation of traditional institutions in recovery efforts, MNF-W officials sought to retain "distance and equanimity" in their dealings with local Anbari leaders. The Command had learned from experience not to pick leaders for the people of Anbar. Such leaders had power because of their relationship to the coalition instead of an indigenous constituency; thus, they might be identified as illegitimate "fake sheikhs" by the populace and perhaps be toppled when their CF benefactors had departed. Instead, MNF-W engagement officials treated every Anbari leader as a potentially useful relationship. They were also careful not to marginalize leaders whose power had declined, understanding that it could take only a few disgruntled sheikhs to disrupt progress toward Anbar's recovery and return to normalcy.<sup>76</sup>

As another part of the governance component of its transition process, MNF-W maintained oversight to ensure that Iraq's central

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<sup>74</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>75</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>76</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

government in Baghdad honored its financial commitments to Anbar province. This effort sought to ensure, for example, that Anbaris who joined the ISF or other government-sanctioned security units stationed in the province were paid for their service.<sup>77</sup> Delivering routine pay for Anbaris who worked for security services was critical to proving the central government's effectiveness. The pay was important to the provincial economy as well and vital for keeping military-age males out of the insurgency and engaged in legitimate work. Nevertheless, the Shi'a-dominated central government often required coaxing from senior CF leaders to meet its obligations to Anbar, a province dominated by Sunnis, including insurgents who had fought central government forces prior to the Awakening movement.

By 2007, reporting by a veteran observer indicated that MNF-W had succeeded in proving its good faith, at least to some tribal elements in Anbar:

The tribes openly acknowledge that it has been the personal behavior, strength of arms and persistence of the American forces that convinced them to join the fight. "The American coalition is the only thing," Sheik Abureeshah of Ramadi said, "that makes the Iraqi government give anything to Anbar."<sup>78</sup>

Regarding reconstruction projects, MNF-W accepted the view in time that projects were more likely to be successful if host nation government institutions served as the conduit for funding, rather than the Command or other U.S. government agencies, whose presence was considered temporary by Iraqi contractors. MNF-W also understood that funding projects and creating jobs via government channels had the effect of strengthening the legitimacy and authority of the provincial government, a development that was judged essential to Anbar's long-term stability. That being the case, MNF-W's mentoring process included working with provincial government authorities to manage funds from various sources (e.g., from Iraq's central government and

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<sup>77</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>78</sup> West and West, "Iraq's Real 'Civil War.'"

U.S. and international donors) and to develop a contracting process that the Anbari business community would recognize as transparent and fairly administered. Once Anbaris shifted from petitioning the MNF-W for contracts and instead routinely approached their government for business, MNF-W officials understood that they had achieved a key step in the transition to stability.<sup>79</sup> (See Figure 6.2.)

MNF-W leaders knew that Iraqi government and international sources would not be able to fully finance Anbar's recovery. Therefore, one of the Command's major goals was to foster what a USMC officer later called a "homegrown recovery" in Anbar; that is, to create an environment in which Anbaris at home and those living abroad would

**Figure 6.2**  
**Launching and Advancing the Transition in Anbar Province**

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**Successful CF Initiatives and Approaches**

- Implemented programs to ensure quality of life improvements for indigenous population
- Supported leader selections by the populace
- Empowered local national leaders to supplant insurgents
- Facilitated recruitment of local nationals for ISF service
- Transitioned security operations to the ISF
- Fostered governance that worked for local nationals
- Helped restore popular confidence in provincial government
- Acted as honest broker to facilitate local national collaboration for recovery
- Helped establish business processes and forums designed to sustain recovery
- Fostered development of governmental processes designed to support long-term recovery
- Convinced local nationals and expatriates to invest in the recovery of their homeland
- Developed rule of law support programs that advanced the development of indigenous police, judicial, and detention systems

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**CF Shortfalls**

- Had insufficient long-term programs and resources for insurgent demobilization and reintegration
  - Misunderstood economic environment, leading to diversion of some reconstruction funding to insurgents during early years of campaign
  - Failed to supply sufficient resources for recovery programs
  - Inadequate rule of law support during early years of campaign
  - Lacked capacity for training local national police during early years of campaign
  - Lacked civil-military affairs capacity
  - Lacked civilian expertise needed to support long-term recovery programs
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<sup>79</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

invest in the province's reconstruction and development. Not only would this approach generate more funds for recovery efforts, it would also give many native Anbaris, some of whom were quite influential, a stake in the recovery effort and its outcome. MNF-W therefore facilitated a number of business forums designed, among other things, to inform Anbaris of the improved climate and processes for investment in the province. A USMC officer was stationed at the U.S. embassy in Amman and charged with engaging the wealthy Anbaris who had fled to Jordan and elsewhere after the 2003 invasion. By 2008, many powerful sheikhs who had fled abroad had agreed to return to Anbar.<sup>80</sup>

MNF-W forces did not undertake the transition from COIN alone. Between 2006 and 2008, Iraqi forces and authorities played an increasingly important role in the endeavor. As described above, thousands of Anbaris participated in various training programs offered by coalition forces and designed to improve security and governance in the province. The government of Iraq authorized the hiring of thousands of police officers and, at times grudgingly, supported efforts to integrate some of the Sons of Iraq into the ISF. In March 2007, Prime Minister Maliki visited Anbar and voiced support for the tribal leaders who were battling AQI.<sup>81</sup>

According to accounts provided by Iraqi authorities, a concerted effort to reestablish police control in key areas of the province began in 2006.<sup>82</sup> This move later proved vital to the transition. Iraqis rebuilt police stations destroyed by AQI fighters and hired thousands of police recruits, sending many of them to Jordan for training as part of a U.S.-sponsored program.<sup>83</sup> Iraqi police were among the first to fight in the

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<sup>80</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009; Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>81</sup> Kirk Semple, "Iraq Premier Meets Leaders in Area Torn by Insurgency," *New York Times*, March 14, 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Colonel Gary W. Montgomery and Chief Warrant Officer-4 Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., "Interview 12: Major General Tariq Yusif Mohammad al-Thiyabi, Provincial Director of Police, Al-Anbar Province," in *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives. From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University Press, 2009, pp. 186–188.

<sup>83</sup> Montgomery and McWilliams, "Interview 12," pp. 184 and 192.

battles that would suppress AQI in Ramadi.<sup>84</sup> In March 2007, some 500 Iraqi police deployed to clear insurgents from part of the city.<sup>85</sup>

Intelligence collection was a key contribution to the transition, according to Iraqi authorities. With MNF-W support, Iraqi police established intelligence organizations throughout Anbar.<sup>86</sup> Clandestine intelligence collection operations conducted by the police supported MNF-W and ISF operations.<sup>87</sup> And the engagement of local nationals by the Iraqi Army and police yielded vital information on insurgent, improvised explosive device (IED), and weapon cache locations.<sup>88</sup>

### Signs the Coalition Forces Were “Winning”

AQI’s objective in Anbar was to establish a pan-Islamic, fundamentalist theocracy, which it referred to as the Islamic State of Iraq. After initially portraying itself as a partner in the people of Anbar’s resistance to occupation, the AQI moved to dominate all aspects of Anbar society and usurp the power of the traditional authorities that had provided governance in the province. AQI had arguably succeeded in its goals, by and large, by 2005.

As described above, MNF-W developed a new strategy for securing Anbar at about the same time many Anbaris had become disillusioned with or violently hostile to AQI’s attempt to develop a new

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<sup>84</sup> Montgomery and McWilliams, “Interview 12,” p. 191.

<sup>85</sup> Kimberly Kagan, “The Anbar Awakening: Displacing al Qaeda from Its Stronghold in Western Iraq,” *Iraq Report*, August 21, 2006–March 30, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> Colonel Gary W. Montgomery and Chief Warrant Officer-4 Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., “Interview 13: Staff Brigadier General (Pilot) Nuri al-Din Abd al-Karim Mukhlif al-Fahadawi, Head, Directorate General of Intelligence and Security, Al-Anbar Province and Colonel Said Muhammed Muad al-Fahadawi, Director General, Iraqi Special Weapons and Tactics,” in *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives. From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University Press, 2009, p. 208.

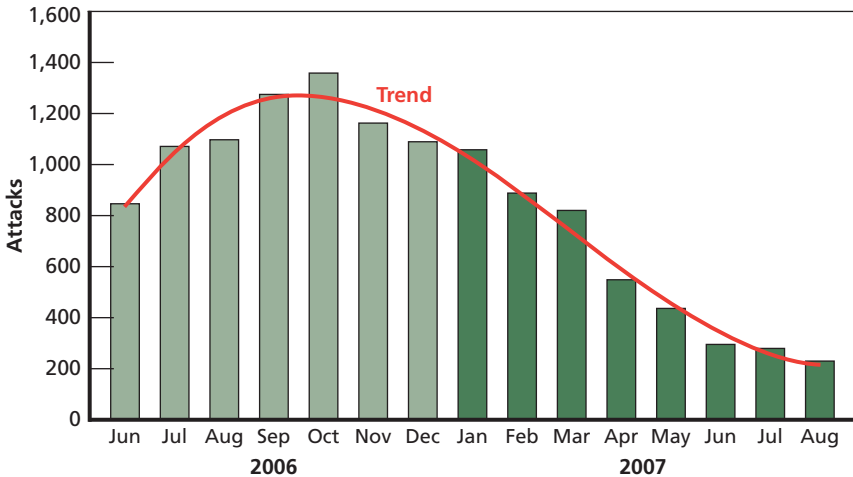
<sup>87</sup> Montgomery and McWilliams, “Interview 13,” p. 206.

<sup>88</sup> Montgomery and McWilliams, “Interview 13,” p. 206; Colonel Gary W. Montgomery and Chief Warrant Officer-4 Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., “Interview 14: Staff Major General Abdullah Mohammad Badir al-Jaburi, Commanding General, 7th Iraqi Army Division,” in *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives. From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004–2009*, Quantico, Va.: Marine Corps University Press, 2009, p. 216; Kagan, “The Anbar Awakening,” p. 9.

kind of society in the province. Veterans of the Anbar campaign told us that by 2008, it was clear that the Command had largely routed the insurgent group and gained the trust and support of many Anbaris. Officials we interviewed pointed to numerous indicators that suggested the Command's approach was working and the transition from COIN was under way.

One obvious sign that coalition forces were "winning" in Anbar was the dramatic decline in levels of violence between 2006 and 2008. Indeed, as indicated in Figure 6.3, the declining trend in attacks was already notable by summer 2007. MNF-W officials also pointed to tribal leaders' and other insurgents' defection from AQI and their decision to join the irregular forces attacking AQI.<sup>89</sup> Another clear sign that the transition was under way was the Anbaris' decision to move from

**Figure 6.3**  
**Anbar Attack Trend, June 2006 to August 2007**



SOURCE: GEN David H. Petraeus, Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq, "Charts to Accompany the Testimony of GEN. David H. Petraeus," September 10–11, 2007.

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<sup>89</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

irregular organizations and join the government-sanctioned ISF, which had expanded to some 37,000 personnel by September 2008.<sup>90</sup>

The overall decrease in violence in Anbar and the shift in allegiances, at least at the popular level, may have also been attributed to significant improvement in economic conditions in the province. According to surveys of Anbari households conducted by the United Nations Development Programme and RAND during 2006 and 2008, respectively,<sup>91</sup> the standard of living of households rose on a number of key measures. Importantly, the survey findings indicated that incomes in Anbar, for example, rose sharply between 2007 and June 2008.

Over time, Anbaris also derived a greater proportion of income from labor, rather than from other economic activity. This is further evidence of greater availability of jobs and increased income among most households. As Anbaris saw greater economic opportunity, fewer were drawn to AQI and the insurgency.

Beyond joining MNF-W in the fight against AQI, Anbari citizens offered still other measures of the Command's success. Once a relatively trusting relationship had been established between coalition forces and Anbari citizens, the latter began to inform on AQI, tipping CF personnel off to the locations of AQI fighters and threats such as IEDs. Local Iraqis voluntarily joined MNF-W efforts to clean up provincial towns, increasing numbers of shops opened, and there were more people on the street in the evenings; all signs that the Command was turning the tide against AQI.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ian Black, "U.S. Hands Back Control of Anbar to Iraqi Forces," *The Guardian*, September 2, 2008.

<sup>91</sup> The RAND findings are based on face-to-face interviews with 1,200 Anbari heads of households ages 18 years and older during May 28 to June 10, 2008. The survey relies on random probability techniques for sample selection. Results can be generalized over the entire population of the Al-Anbar province within a margin of error of  $\pm 3.7$  percent. Local Anbari interviewers were trained over a period of four days after supervisors received separate training conducted by RAND experts.

<sup>92</sup> Department of Defense civilian member of Al Anbar PRT, interview; and USMC captain, task force company commander, Ramadi, March to June 2007, interview by RAND researchers, January 14, 2008.



MNF-W officials believed that average Iraqis were beginning to feel the effects of the transition from COIN because the number of damage claims presented to the Command declined.<sup>93</sup> Iraqis who did approach MNF-W for assistance increasingly asked not for security but instead for food, education, and public health aid.<sup>94</sup>

During the 2007–2008 transition period, tribal governance organizations reemerged and reasserted their authority after having been largely suppressed by AQI.<sup>95</sup> Local leaders began routine meetings to manage issues and resolve disputes (e.g., in the Sheikh Shura), all without prompting from MNF-W.<sup>96</sup> Anbaris increasingly approached their provincial government for business development and contracts, whereas before the transition period they had come to MNF-W seeking contracts. Business transactions increasingly took place within agreed institutional frameworks, and expatriate elites returned to Anbar from Jordan and elsewhere.<sup>97</sup>

Major General John F. Kelly, MNF-W commander, pointed to what he perceived to be a key indicator of Anbaris' restored faith in their governance and future: voter registration. According to Kelly, nearly 100 percent of Anbaris registered to vote in August 2008. Moreover, during the January 2009 provincial election, Anbar was experiencing enough stability that MNF-W felt no need to deploy forces to secure polling places.<sup>98</sup> Finally, a senior MNF-W official who assisted with election preparations told us he knew that Anbar had turned the corner when provincial Governor Mamoon Sami Rashid started per-

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<sup>93</sup> Department of Defense civilian member of Al Anbar PRT, interview.

<sup>94</sup> Kelly, "Reflections."

<sup>95</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009.

<sup>96</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>97</sup> Senior Analyst/All Source Fusion Officer, interview, June 8, 2009; Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>98</sup> MNF-W deployed just 100 Marines during the election. The small force provided security to United Nations election monitors, at their request. Kelly, "Reflections."

sonally promoting the election procedures agreed to by his government and the coalition.<sup>99</sup>

### **The Transition Outcome in Al-Anbar**

By the end of 2008, Anbar was still undergoing the transition from COIN to enduring stability. Although the province had achieved a significant measure of stability, a RAND study of the period indicated that Anbar's stability "seemed hopeful, but fragile" and "all the more uncertain in the face of imminent U.S. withdrawals." Although it maintained a "weak foothold in some areas" of Anbar, the AQI group was largely suppressed by 2008.<sup>100</sup>

As indicated above, Anbar's relative security served as the foundation for significant gains in the standard of living. Surveys administered by RAND during summer 2008, for example, indicated that although Anbaris did not feel broadly affluent, half of them described themselves as relatively comfortable, and they maintained a guarded optimism that circumstances would improve.

Other opinion poll findings among the broader Iraqi population were suggestive of a growing sentiment that security conditions in the country were, likewise, improving.<sup>101</sup> For example, a substantially larger percentage of Iraqis in 2008 rated conditions in their neighborhoods or villages as "good" overall (62 percent). In August 2007, considerably fewer (43 percent) had the same assessment. Asked about their views of security in the country as a whole, more than twice as many concluded that the security situation had "become better" (36 percent), a marked improvement from summer 2007 (11 percent). Most attributed progress to Iraqi institutions, including the Iraqi government (30 percent), Iraqi Army (13 percent), and the Iraqi police (11 percent). Public views of local government performance were consistent with

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<sup>99</sup> Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>100</sup> James B. Bruce and Jeffrey Martini, *Whither Al-Anbar Province: Five Scenarios for 2009–2011*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-278-USMC, 2010, pp. 1, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Survey results are from polls conducted nationwide by KA Research and D3 Systems of Virginia among 2,228 Iraqi adult citizens aged 18 and older during August 2007 and February 2008. The margin of error for these polls is 2.5 percentage points.

these positive evaluations. In spring 2008, 46 percent believed their local government was performing generally well, a slight improvement from August 2007, when 39 percent felt the same way.

### **Major Gaps in Transition Capabilities**

MNF-W faced numerous challenges in its effort to secure Anbar province and to develop an effective transition from COIN to the stability and reconstruction operations required to ensure Anbar's ultimate recovery. MNF-W officials interviewed for this case study indicated that U.S. Marines and soldiers pursued extensive experimentation on the ground as they struggled to find an effective formula for COIN in Anbar during 2005–2006.

A fundamental capability gap the Command dealt with during the 2005–2006 period (and earlier) was its inability to understand Anbar's dynamic society at the level of detail required to effectively influence key actors in that society and events in the province. MNF-W personnel pursued several innovations to fill that gap. Temporary constructs, including the EPIC and JPEC described earlier, were organized during the fight to generate assessments of Anbar's operational environment or key elements of it. Products from these organizations, as well as increasingly sophisticated analytical methods employed by MNF-W staff in other organizations,<sup>102</sup> enabled the Command's decisionmakers to develop and pursue the COIN and reconstruction strategies that largely stabilized the province by 2008.

Over the longer term, however, it remains to be seen whether the EPIC and JPEC constructs, and advanced analytical methods more generally, can be both disseminated to all Service components that might require such capabilities and institutionalized in some way to support future COIN and stability operations. Barring effective institutionalization or some other approach that makes the EPIC/JPEC-

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<sup>102</sup>A senior aide to the MNF-W commander explained to us that he advanced MNF-W analytical methods by using a Complex Adaptive Systems construct to enable holistic analysis of Anbari society. This approach enabled him to understand the key players and interrelationships among business, political, and tribal elites and former members of the Saddam Hussein regime. Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview, 2008.

type capability available, the U.S. could face gaps in its ability to assess operational environments in the future.

Anbar veterans in the Marine Corps explained in personal interviews that support for “rule of law” programs and institutions was a significant capability gap during part of the Anbar campaign. The development of “rule of law intelligence” (e.g., intelligence needed to support development of arrest warrants) was vital to the transition from COIN. The JPEC was established to generate this type of intelligence and to train forces to support the targeting and prosecution of insurgents, terrorists, and criminals.

The JPEC filled a critical capability gap, at least temporarily. Nonetheless, one USMC expert advised us that gaps remain in the dissemination of standard operating procedures for support to law enforcement during COIN and stability operations. He recommended that a field manual be developed to codify procedures as well as standards for training. The manual would provide general guidance that could be tailored by commanders to specific host country environments. This veteran also recommended that the Department of Defense (DoD) evaluate for possible wider adoption the “Detainee Tracker” database system. This database was invented by Marines to manage detainee case files and related information, including forensic evidence from the Biometrics Automated Tool Set. It was critical to ensuring incarceration of Iraqis who threatened stability and security in Anbar and more generally to supporting rule of law development in the province.

Major General Kelly said that during his 2008 command of MNF-W the United U.S. government failed to supply sufficient monetary resources for Anbar’s reconstruction. As a result, MNF-W was unable to fully make good on its commitment to Anbaris who supported the security and recovery efforts. According to Kelly, had the U.S. government supplied adequate reconstruction funds, it could have held Anbar up as a model for security and recovery, an example that other Iraqi provinces could follow.

Kelly remarked that as late as 2008 the USMC lacked sufficient civil-military affairs expertise. As a stopgap, he trained some of his artillery battalions for the civil-military affairs mission.<sup>103</sup>

As noted earlier, a senior aide to Kelly told us the USMC had no “professional track” to train intelligence officers for political and economic intelligence analysis. MNF-W supplemented its staff by calling up reservists who had acquired relevant expertise as part of the civilian workforce in the United States. The aide said Marines in Anbar also lacked the capability to train the Iraqi police to “protect and serve” Anbari communities, rather than focus solely on relatively kinetic security operations.<sup>104</sup>

Marines we interviewed indicated that the most stubborn gap they faced was one they could not control: the lack of U.S. government civilian agency capacity to support Anbar’s recovery. For example, in 2006, a single Department of State (DoS) official was posted to Anbar.<sup>105</sup> A major improvement in civilian capacity was attempted in 2007 when the first provincial reconstruction team (PRT) deployed to Anbar. The PRT concept was developed jointly by DoS and DoD to deliver vital civilian expertise and leadership for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Transitioning key authorities and responsibilities from MNF-W military elements to the civilian-led PRT could be seen as a shift in focus from COIN to stability operations and thus as an indicator of the transition from COIN. However, according to a member of the 2007 PRT in Anbar (a DoD civilian), the initial PRT effort fell short of expectations. According to this official, the “volume and depth” of DoS and USAID expertise on the PRT was inadequate, given the tasks envisioned for the team. In addition, doctrine for PRT operations was not established; thus, PRT staff established key processes and procedures for PRT operations via trial and error. Finally, DoD and DoS had not settled critical issues, such as who would pay for PRT opera-

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<sup>103</sup>Kelly, “Reflections.”

<sup>104</sup>Kelly, “Reflections.”

<sup>105</sup>McPherson, “Operations in Anbar Province.”

tions.<sup>106</sup> These and other shortfalls undermined the PRT's ability to operate to its envisioned capability in 2007.

A senior MNF-W official told us that as late as 2008 the PRT "in theory" had primary responsibility for political engagement in the province; in reality, however, MNF-W military elements still carried the load for political operations.<sup>107</sup> Major General Kelly further confirmed that in 2008 the U.S. government was still largely unable to supply civil servants with the expertise MNF-W needed during the transition from COIN. Kelly compensated by calling up USMC reservists who had the requisite skills. Similarly, from universities in the United States, Kelly recruited civilian specialists in fields such as agriculture and veterinary medicine.<sup>108</sup> A senior advisor to Kelly expressed his view that, generally speaking, the U.S. government needs to develop a cadre of civilians who know how to conceptualize an objective future for a host country, develop a plan to achieve the objective, and then influence the operational environment in the host country so as to achieve the U.S. goals.<sup>109</sup>

Finally, the United States faced serious challenges in its effort to work with Iraq's central government to foster complete integration of the Sons of Iraq (the Iraqi fighters generated by the Awakening movement) into Iraqi military and civilian institutions. This shortfall was widely recognized by 2008; the integration issue has the potential to remain a challenge in Anbar for the foreseeable future, particularly after the agreed U.S. withdrawal in 2011.

It remains to be seen whether Iraq's Shi'a-dominated government will support the integration process amid lingering mistrust of Sunni Iraqis and deep political divisions over how to manage the integration. A number of more specific issues have also arisen to impede the integration process. These issues are largely beyond U.S. control, but they nevertheless have significant bearing on security gains in Anbar.

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<sup>106</sup>Department of Defense civilian member of Al Anbar PRT, interview.

<sup>107</sup>Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

<sup>108</sup>Kelly, "Reflections."

<sup>109</sup>Senior USMC intelligence officer, interview.

In this regard, only a small percentage of Anbar Awakening members have been absorbed into security and civilian bodies. The Iraqi government claimed to take responsibility for some 51,000 Awakening members based in Iraq in October 2008, with expectations that it would take responsibility for the entire group in 2009. Regardless, some members have complained of not receiving pay in a timely fashion or of not receiving sufficient pay for work completed. In response, Sunni Awakening members have launched protests by staging “walkoffs” that have left security checkpoints unmanned.

In 2009, Iraq’s oil revenues fell and its unemployment rate increased. Iraq’s economic downturn may have genuinely constrained the central government’s ability to pay the salaries of the Sons of Iraq (SoI), or it may have been used as an excuse not to compensate the SoI. In the meantime, according to one expert, civilian institutions in Iraq have become so bloated with bureaucrats that it is impossible to absorb more individuals.<sup>110</sup>

Iraq’s central government has demonstrated its resistance to SoI integration by denying some members promised immunity from prosecution. Other members have been detained indefinitely. Awakening leaders, in particular, have been targeted by security forces, ostensibly to prevent consolidation of the entities’ power or at a minimum the reconsolidation of power among Awakening leaders. They have been charged with being associated with al Qaeda and of engaging in acts of terrorism.

## Conclusions

This chapter’s findings are based on numerous interviews with or other accounts offered by participants in CF operations in Anbar province; their experience on the ground covers the period 2003 to 2008. These experts were in general agreement as to the challenges and capability gaps that confronted MNF-W ground forces. Their experiences in Iraq further point to the kinds of capabilities the United States must develop in its civilian and military organizations, or in a host nation

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<sup>110</sup>Telephone interview with RAND expert, August 12, 2009, Washington, D.C.

partner, in order to transition from COIN to stability operations, and perhaps even to a condition of normalcy for the host country.

For U.S. forces, the essential capability underlying all others is the ability to understand the host nation operational environment. This understanding must be of sufficient detail to permit U.S. forces to effectively influence the environment in a manner that will support their objectives for COIN, stability and reconstruction, and so forth.

The United States needs a cadre of experts, preferably civilians, who can provide the needed depth to support COIN and related types of operations, as well as the transition from COIN. This cadre should be capable of providing the full suite of skills needed for COIN and reconstruction tasks—for example, cultural knowledge, governance, trade, policing, economics, agriculture, industry, medicine, and business processes. Table 6.1 indicates how MNF-W's roles and missions emphasis shifted as the Command moved from a focus on COIN (roughly during the 2005–2006 period) to supporting long-term recovery and reconstruction efforts (roughly 2007–2008).

**Table 6.1**  
**MNF-W Roles and Missions Emphasis During COIN and Recovery Periods**

COIN Focus Period	Recovery Focus Period
Place intelligence emphasis on targeting insurgents	Collect intelligence on economics, politics, governance, and to support rule of law
Lead COIN operations	Overwatch to support ISF
Recruit local national fighters to support MNF-W	Support integration of local national fighters in ISF
Conduct business and give contracts to local nationals	Support government role in local commerce
Conduct high-visibility patrols	Reduce forces and close operating bases
Enforce travel restrictions to support security	Accommodate transit by local nationals
Actively shape environment	Promote autonomous local national collaboration to shape environment



U.S. forces should understand the key players in a host country society and their interrelationships. U.S. analysts should understand the players in a host country environment well enough that they will be familiar with leaders picked by the host country populace. U.S. forces should avoid picking leaders for the populace. Otherwise the United States risks picking leaders who will be seen as illegitimate, thereby impeding the development of governance in the host country.

U.S. forces need to further develop techniques and procedures for establishing trust with a host country populace. As MNF-W proved in Anbar, this trust is a key building block in the foundation that first supports successful COIN and later supports transition activities.

MNF-W veterans agree that financial flows were critical to Anbar's recovery and to maintaining stability in the province. This experience suggests that U.S. forces need the capability to understand the legal and illegal economic system in a host country and the sources of finance, both within and outside the country.

U.S. forces should also understand when to work through and reinforce host country government institutions to achieve objectives, and when to utilize traditional governance entities (the tribes, in Anbar's case). Similarly, U.S. forces should be able to work with both government-sanctioned and irregular forces that can contribute to security and stability in a host country. Such efforts require careful coordination. The United States should also consider the development of techniques and procedures that can facilitate future efforts to demobilize irregular forces and reintegrate them into host country military and civilian institutions.

Effective mentoring of security forces can enable the United States to transfer primary responsibility for security to host country forces. Shifting this burden can permit the United States to focus its resources on activities, such as reconstruction, that support the transition from COIN and ultimately, the redeployment of U.S. forces from the host nation. U.S. forces therefore need the capability to train host country security forces. This may in some circumstances include retraining host country police forces to "protect and serve" their communities rather than to act as paramilitary forces designed to defend the host country regime. Similarly, the United States should help host nations promote

the rule of law, an essential element in the transition from COIN. This requires development of not only police forces but also the supporting judicial and detention systems in the host nation.

The United States should help the host nation develop an environment that will attract financial investment. Establishing security is the first step in this process.

Beyond security matters, U.S. analysts can help a host country understand the foreign and domestic financial flows that are vital to its economic development. The United States can also assist host country efforts to develop financial and contracting processes that offer a level playing field and the transparency required to attract foreign and domestic investment in the host country economy.



# Afghanistan

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Map of Afghanistan



SOURCE: CIA World Factbook.

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## Introduction

The inclusion of Afghanistan in a study of transition from successful counterinsurgency to stability operations may be unconventional. Certainly, counterinsurgency in Afghanistan has yet to succeed, much less transition successfully to stabilization. This chapter provides back-

ground for the current situation and examines the reasons that there has not yet been a successful transition from COIN to stability.

Following the Taliban's refusal to turn over Osama bin Laden for his role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with the intention of destroying al Qaeda and its Taliban shield and support structure and preventing continued use of the territory as a safe haven for terrorist activity.<sup>1</sup> On October 7, U.S. and British forces, with the aid of Afghanistan's internal anti-Taliban rebels (the Northern Alliance), began a military campaign against the Taliban to "disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime."<sup>2</sup> In December 2001, after less than three months of fighting, Taliban leaders surrendered the organization's final territory in Afghanistan. For the next several months, U.S. troops, in combination with a multinational coalition and increasing numbers of Afghan forces, launched a series of offensive operations into the southern and eastern provinces of the country in an attempt to remove the remaining presence of Taliban and al Qaeda and establish conditions necessary for stability and reconstruction activities. By early 2002, the Taliban appeared to have been shattered and there was no sign that an insurgency was imminent.

International and local focus then shifted to rebuilding the Afghan nation. At the UN-directed Bonn Conference in 2001, Afghan political factions established a timetable for the creation of a representative and freely elected government.<sup>3</sup> As part of the agreement, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a multistate coalition, was created to provide security and support to the fledgling Afghan government in Kabul. Months later, the United States and other nations met

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<sup>1</sup> Sean Maloney, "Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?" *Parameters*, Spring 2004, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Department of State, Office of the Historian, "The United States and the Global Coalition Against Terrorism, September 2001–December 2003," June 2004. George W. Bush, Speech of President Bush Announcing U.S. Attacks in Afghanistan, *PBS Transcript*, October 7, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "United Nations Talks on Afghanistan," December 6, 2001.

to outline the requirements for Afghanistan's security sector reform. The UK agreed to lead the counternarcotics effort; Italy offered to run the judiciary; the United States volunteered to train the Afghan military and border security service; Germany pledged to train the police force; and Japan agreed to direct the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants.<sup>4</sup>

The clearing campaigns of 2002 and 2003 largely resulted in the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other foreign jihadists resettling in nearby Pakistan, where they were able to rest and regroup. Despite lingering militant activity in the region, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Afghan president Hamid Karzai had declared the end of major OEF combat operations by late 2003; in 2004, several commanders claimed the military campaign and associated reconstruction efforts had succeeded against the Taliban.<sup>5</sup> Attention turned to ensuring political stability and enhancing the capacity of indigenous Afghan forces to establish their own security.

From mid-2002 onward, the Taliban, reinforced by al Qaeda militants, began to reconstitute themselves. Although attempts to destabilize both presidential and parliamentary elections in the fall of 2004 and 2005 were thwarted, the trajectory of insurgent violence was steeply upward. By 2006, the Taliban's overall ability to cause violence on Afghan territory had increased by 400 percent since their defeat in 2001.<sup>6</sup> Throughout 2006, coalition and ANA forces deployed to disrupt insurgents' activities, deny them sanctuary, and prevent their ability to regain strength. Despite high numbers of casualties, the Taliban often resisted in a more coordinated manner than anticipated. Campaigns undertaken by the forces from the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which had assumed command

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Afghanistan Security: Efforts to Establish Army and Police Have Made Progress, but Future Plans Need to Be Better Defined*, Report to the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Accountability Office, GAO-05-575, June 2005, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, Report RL30588, December 3, 2002, pp. 7, 23.

<sup>6</sup> RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents, May 20, 2011.

of ISAF, could not permanently quell the insurgency; attacks continued and intensified in regions where stability and reconstruction operations were slated to commence.

### **Key Domestic, International, and Transnational Actors**

Following the overthrow of the Taliban government, the United States supported the new government and deployed thousands of troops, mainly fulfilling counterterrorism roles in support of OEF, to Afghanistan in order to eradicate insurgent activity as well as to help the political authority exercise and extend its authority.

In addition to brokering dialogue among international and domestic Afghan parties to facilitate agreement on an interim and more permanent Afghan government, the UN, through the Security Council, created the International Security Assistance Force in January 2002. A series of Security Council resolutions also guided NATO's takeover of ISAF and approved its expansion beyond Kabul. Additionally, the UN established the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to direct and integrate humanitarian, relief, recovery, and reconstruction activities in support of the Bonn Agreement.<sup>7</sup> NATO expanded the stabilization force's presence in a series of stages to the northern (October 2004), western (September 2005), southern (July 2006), and eastern (October 2006) regions of the country.

A new constitution, followed by presidential and parliamentary elections in 2004 and 2005, established the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA). GIRoA selected the ministers to direct and build up the leadership capacity of the Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF). One problem that plagued the Afghan government from its earliest days was the lack of capacity and knowledge of effective government process. In their early days, for example, ministries consisted of a few repatriated senior Afghans with almost no employees.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations, *Agreement on Provisional Arrangement in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions* ("Bonn Agreement"), December 2001, Annex II; UN Security Council Resolution 1401, 2002; United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), web site.

Following the dispersal of the Taliban in 2001, a mixed group of insurgents launched a concerted effort to oust the Afghan government and coerce the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces from Afghanistan. Opposition groups included, but were not limited to, the Taliban, Hezb-i-Islami, the Haqqani network, and foreign fighters. This chapter focuses predominantly on the Taliban for three reasons. First, when accurately defined, true Taliban loyalists do have an agenda of state disruption, as well as the ability to compel more transient Taliban sympathizers or intimidated populations to act upon that goal. Second, the Taliban is the only group with a real ability to contest the state. Not only did the Taliban hold power in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, it also maintains a shadow government with provincial- and district-level officials and its own justice system. Finally, the Taliban threat is numerically superior to other threats, both in terms of foot soldiers involved and attacks believed to be perpetrated.

After losing bases in Afghanistan as a result of OEF, the international al Qaeda organization took up residency in Pakistan, where it relied on its extensive support network to regroup and rearm. While efforts to rebuild and stabilize Afghanistan were starting, assistance from al Qaeda and other jihadist networks was enabling the Taliban and other opposition groups to rebuild, amplify, and sustain their operations against coalition forces and the Afghan population.

According to RAND's Seth Jones, "Every successful insurgency in Afghanistan since 1979 enjoyed a sanctuary in Pakistan and assistance from individuals within the Pakistan government, such as the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI)."<sup>8</sup> From Pakistan, opposition groups were able to transport operatives and supplies, recruit and train fighters, and launch and direct operations.

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<sup>8</sup> Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, RAND Counterinsurgency Study—Volume 4*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MG-595-OSD, 2008.



## Stabilization Attempt

### Incumbent Strategy

At its topmost level, coalition strategy has always espoused three basic lines of operation: security, development, and governance.

**Security.** After OEF ousted the Taliban from power, the United States, UN, NATO, and indigenous political factions collaborated to create a national government, with power initially concentrated in Kabul and subsequently extending its influence and control outward. Coalition forces conducted operations with several missions—mainly peacekeeping and to a lesser extent, counterinsurgency—while assisting the reconstruction effort as the government built up the capacity to independently rule and provide stability.

**United States.** The U.S. military contribution began with OEF, a counterterrorism campaign aimed at seeking and destroying Taliban and al Qaeda strongholds in Afghanistan. Upon entering the country, Special Operations Forces (SOF) and CIA operatives blended with members of the Northern Alliance to collect intelligence and support the joint American-British air campaign. The Taliban relinquished its territory in Afghanistan within a few months, possibly more quickly than anticipated.<sup>9</sup> As the focus of the U.S. government turned to planning for an additional conflict in Iraq, debates ensued regarding the most advisable way to stabilize Afghanistan. Some believed an international peacekeeping force deployed throughout the country was imperative to ensuring long-term security; others argued that a continued counterterrorism role superseded the need for the United States to participate in nation-building. They preferred to restrict the peacekeeping mission to Kabul, as part of ISAF's remit.<sup>10</sup>

The United States concluded that the latter strategy, known as a “light footprint,” was most favorable, given its current and pending warfighting commitments. In 2002, the United States deployed three conventional brigades consisting of soldiers, airmen, helicopter

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<sup>9</sup> Maloney, “Afghanistan: From Here to Eternity?” p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009, p. 112.

assault crews, and close air support to Afghanistan. These forces did not serve a direct peacekeeping function; they mainly acted in parallel with the international peacekeeping effort to conduct counterterrorism operations—tracking and engaging Taliban and al Qaeda insurgents. This continued counterterrorism strategy was partly based on historical precedent—the U.S. government wanted to prevent the large-scale resistance that was experienced by the Soviets in the 1980s; it also “ultimately believed that small numbers of ground troops and airpower, working with Afghan forces, would be sufficient to establish security.”<sup>11</sup>

The effect of the initial so-called “light footprint” approach cannot be overstated. By mid-2002, the United States had no more than 8,000 military personnel in Afghanistan; this in a country of some 30 million people whose government and security forces had been shattered the year before. The decisions of 2002 meant that for roughly three years the number of troops (U.S. and later NATO) in Afghanistan would remain low. The low number of troops meant that the ISAF had limited ability to provide security in the region around Kabul. There was very limited ability to provide security elsewhere in the country, except for a modest presence in some of the larger Afghan cities. This inability to properly secure the country was a key factor in the increase in lawlessness and the return of the Taliban.

In 2002 and 2003, as the United States devoted ever more resources to prepare for and wage war in Iraq, equipment and personnel critical to the counterterrorism effort in Afghanistan dwindled, inhibiting the ability to sustain the transition to stability operations. The U.S. failure to properly resource the effort in Afghanistan, however, was not due solely to the demands of the invasion of Iraq. The United States took the same approach to Iraq in 2003. The problem was not limited resources but opposition to conducting stability operations. The focus of U.S. forces remained the same, with the Pentagon continuing to “view the situation in Afghanistan as one of counterterrorism, not counterinsurgency, and conduct operations accordingly.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas H. Johnson, “On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan,” *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2007, p. 97.

In late 2003, the newly designated U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan worked with the commander of U.S. forces to cement an updated, broad U.S. military strategy for its presence in the country. By focusing on the demilitarization of the militias, and weakening the warlords, the strategy proposed a shift from counterterrorism operations to nation-building and COIN.<sup>13</sup> As a result of this new strategy, two regional command centers were established in the south and east of the country, with one brigade assigned an area of operations spanning the territory. U.S. troops were tasked with securing and protecting the population and providing a military presence more integrated with civilians. This new strategy “recast U.S. and other coalition units to fight COIN instead of counterterrorism missions.”<sup>14</sup> However, the small number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan in 2002–2004 made it impossible to provide security for the population outside a few major cities.

**UN/ISAF/NATO.** The notion of a multistate peacekeeping force was developed during the Bonn negotiations as a way to protect the interim government in Kabul and enable reconstruction and stabilization operations, with the understanding that the responsibility to provide security to the nation rested ultimately with the new government, when it could build up an army and a police force. ISAF was officially established in December 2001 to “assist in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas” and “could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centers and other areas.”<sup>15</sup> Details concerning force size, mission, possible expansion or withdrawal timelines were not mentioned.

The United Kingdom led the multistate effort to negotiate ISAF’s duties with Afghan parties, resulting in a Military Technical Agreement (MTA) that “formalized the understanding between the stabilization force and local forces regarding roles and missions, expectations, size of the forces, rules of engagement and other aspects of an international

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<sup>13</sup> Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 141.

<sup>14</sup> Jones, *In the Graveyard*, p. 142.

<sup>15</sup> UN, “Bonn Agreement,” Annex I.

force's presence in a region."<sup>16</sup> The ISAF mission outlined in the MTA was broad: "[T]o assist in the maintenance of the security" in Kabul and its environs, the "area of responsibility."<sup>17</sup> The agreement also listed a nonspecific set of probable tasks "relating to assisting the Interim Government in achieving stability in Kabul by means of creating a security force."<sup>18</sup> References to humanitarian assistance, expansion beyond Kabul, and withdrawal of militias in Kabul (a criterion promised at Bonn) were absent.

As pressure mounted on the Afghan interim administration to expand ISAF, U.S. officials relented. Turkey maintained the force's original strategy when it took control of ISAF in mid-2002; ISAF continued to assist in the development of Afghan security forces and structures while supporting the reconstruction effort. Although ISAF could "conduct local and small-scale relief efforts in its area of operations, the force was not equipped, nor did it have the mandate, for large-scale policing or humanitarian aid operations."<sup>19</sup> After assuming command of ISAF from Turkey, Germany made some clarifications to the MTA. When assisting in the maintenance of security in Kabul, ISAF was now required to "liaise with political, social and religious leaders to ensure that religious, ethnic and cultural sensitivities in Afghanistan are appropriately respected within ISAF operations."<sup>20</sup>

NATO agreed to take over ISAF command in mid-2003. Despite pressure from Karzai and the UN, before the takeover NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson insisted that an extension of the mission beyond the capital was "not on the table."<sup>21</sup> However, a few

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<sup>16</sup> Sean Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force: The Origins of a Stabilization Force," *Canadian Military Journal*, Summer 2003, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> "Military Technical Agreement Between the International Security Assistance Force and the Interim Administration of Afghanistan ('Interim Administration')," December 31, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force," p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force," p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Maloney, "The International Security Assistance Force," p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Annalisa Monaco, "NATO Takes Stock and Keeps Looking Out of Area," *NATO Notes*, in Gerrard Quille, ed., Vol. 5, No. 6a, Centre for European Security and Disarmament, June 6, 2003.

months into NATO's tenure, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution authorizing the peacekeeping force to send troops anywhere in the country. This decision was attributed to several factors. First, the security situation had worsened: NGOs, UN personnel, and others were reporting a rise in armed attacks on humanitarian workers in the Afghan provinces. Second, NATO's prospective ability to lead and recruit more troops from coalition members elicited confidence from donor countries. U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte, then UN Security Council president, explained that the "U.S. had proceeded cautiously . . . about expanding ISAF because of a lack of countries willing to contribute troops for such a mission. 'Now NATO has taken this force over and there is a willingness, at least to a limited extent, to undertake missions outside of Kabul. And in that context we were willing to support such a resolution.'"<sup>22</sup> Third, the resolution was considered critical to disarming factional militias and ensuring safe presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>23</sup>

ISAF incrementally expanded its presence by assuming command of efforts presided over by provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), the primary instrument through which international aid had supported reconstruction projects. By December 2005, the force had extended to the north, the west, and partially the south of Afghanistan, when defense ministers met to revise ISAF's operational plan. Building on ISAF's increased footprint, which now included Regional Area Commands, larger forces and supporting elements were donated to ISAF in anticipation of the more operationally challenging environments in the south and east of the country. Critically, the revised operational plan "outlined clear arrangements for enhanced coordination and deconfliction between ISAF's stabilization mission and OEF counterterrorism mission."<sup>24</sup> This plan created new command arrangements between ISAF and Combined Forces Command Afghanistan,

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<sup>22</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Kabul Welcomes UN Resolution on Expanded ISAF, But Many Questions Unanswered," Radio Free Europe, October 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Synovitz, "Afghanistan."

<sup>24</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Revised Operational Plan for NATO's Expanded Mission in Afghanistan," n.d.

enabling closer coordination and reducing overlap between the two organizations' operations.<sup>25</sup> ISAF and OEF continued to have separate mandates and missions; ISAF was a stabilization and security force while OEF served a counterterrorism role.<sup>26</sup> Having no stabilization expertise outside of Europe, NATO was ill-prepared to take on the stabilization and security mission.

***GIRoA: Internal Reforms and Security Forces.*** Afghanistan does not have a history of strong central government. This reality has certainly had a major impact on the ability of the post-2001 government in Kabul. The centuries-long tradition of weak central government compared to strong alliances to tribes and armed local leaders (“warlords”) undermines the ability of the central government in Kabul to exercise authority and to make policies that have national relevance. Additionally, Afghanistan is a very poor country, with the third-lowest per capita gross domestic product in the world. Therefore, the resources available to the government are at best modest, which in turns limits the government’s ability to develop programs that have significant meaning for the average person’s life, particularly if that person lives far from a major city where the government’s influence is greatest. Corruption and a massive narcotics underground economy further constrain the government’s ability to make needed reforms.

Afghanistan’s indigenous security forces were in need of rehabilitation when the U.S.-backed Karzai administration took power. Various regional, ethnic, and private militias had replaced the professional Afghan army after it disintegrated in 1992, and had since wielded substantial control throughout their associated territories. After the Taliban fell, commanders of the various militias tried to further their independent aims at the expense of the elected government. One such militia leader, Mohammed Qasim Fahim, leveraged the assistance his forces had given U.S. troops during the initial OEF campaign to secure his post as Karzai’s defense minister. He subsequently refused to disarm his forces in Kabul, a criterion set forth in the Bonn Agreement,

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<sup>25</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “International Security Assistance Force: Chronology,” n.d.

<sup>26</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “Revised Operational Plan.”

contending that his private militia would form the core of the future Afghan National Army (ANA).<sup>27</sup> Fighting between rival militias and inertia to demobilize hampered progress of building the ANA.

The Afghan National Police (ANP) had similarly atrophied over the course of two decades. To help the Afghan government rebuild its security sector so that it could eventually provide essential safety services to its people, in April 2002 the United States and other donor nations outlined a five-pillar agenda for Afghanistan's security sector reform. The United States pledged to train the Afghan military and border security service, and Germany agreed to train the police force.

The new ANA was to be ethnically balanced, voluntary, and made up of 70,000 individuals. Command posts were designated for Kabul and other strategic locations. Although defense planners did not set a deadline for the completion of the army, U.S. and Afghan officials collaborated to develop an ANA force structure that included 43,000 ground combat troops based in Kabul and four other cities; 21,000 support staff organized in four sustaining commands (recruiting, education and training, acquisition and logistics, and communications and intelligence); 3,000 Ministry of Defense and general staff personnel; and 3,000 air staff to provide secure transportation for the president of Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> The missions slated for the ANA were to "include providing security for Afghanistan's new central government and political process, replacing all other military forces in Afghanistan, and combating terrorists in cooperation with coalition and peacekeeping forces."<sup>29</sup>

As lead donor, the United States oversaw the development of the ANA force structure, decision processes, and garrisons; provided equipment; and constructed command facilities. Although recruitment and training programs made progress and accelerated, combat troops were regularly underequipped and unsupported following the completion of their training.

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<sup>27</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Afghanistan: Two Years Later, Taliban's Sudden Withdrawal from Kabul Still Affecting Transition," November 12, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> GAO, *Afghanistan Security*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> GAO, *Afghanistan Security*.

The new ANP was to be a multiethnic, sustainable, and countrywide 62,000-member professional police service that extended throughout the provinces and districts outside of Kabul to enhance security and reinforce the rule of law.<sup>30</sup> No deadline was established for completion of this force. Since the United States does not have an in-house capability to train domestic security providers, the U.S. State Department contracted with DynCorp Aerospace Technology to train and equip the police, advise the Ministry of Interior, and provide infrastructure assistance, including constructing several police training centers. The Pentagon also provided infrastructure and equipment to police in border regions. In addition, Germany established a training program for police officers at the Kabul Police Academy.

The effort to rebuild the Afghan security forces was inadequate in the 2002–2006 period, particularly in the case of the police. Initial efforts at rebuilding and reforming the Afghan security forces were overly biased toward the Army, with far less emphasis on the ANP. This was a significant error. Historically, the police have been a critical component in combating insurgents. In many ways the police represent the first line of defense against insurgents because they are closely connected to the population—usually much more so than the military. Additionally, Afghanistan was (and still is) beset with lawlessness and lack of government presence and control. Had more early emphasis been placed on improving the numbers and capabilities of the ANP, it may have been more difficult for the Taliban to regenerate in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

**Development and Governance.** While development and governance have typically been viewed as separate lines of operation in Afghanistan, in practice, good governance has been considered a prerequisite for effective development, and development projects were seen as a way of selling the population on the proposed government. Therefore, in describing Afghan and international strategies in this area, we have chosen to combine the two.

Afghanistan's initial governance plan was the Bonn Agreement of December 2001. The principal part of that document deals with

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<sup>30</sup> GAO, *Afghanistan Security*, p. 8.



governing authority and the power-sharing agreement necessary prior to the first election. UN assistance was to consist of several types of tasks, including peacekeeping in the city of Kabul, assisting as necessary in the setup of the government in Kabul, assisting with reconstruction and development, and reintegrating militia fighters into the Afghan military force. At this conference, the size of the Afghan Army was set at 50,000 and the police set at 62,000.<sup>31</sup>

The Bonn Agreement must be understood as the direct consequence of the combat operations that had been and were still taking place. Rather than settle the major issues of the time, the Bonn Agreement set forth a process that was in theory to lead to settlement. A rush to legitimacy meant that the players to the agreement were hand-picked by the UN, rather than representative of the people. The UN representative to the talks, Lakhdar Brahimi, supposedly stated frequently, “no one would remember how unrepresentative the meeting had been if the participants managed to fashion a process that would lead to a legitimate and representative government.”<sup>32</sup> The principal players in the discussion of Afghanistan’s future were the commanders of the Northern Alliance—warlords and tribal leaders who had opposed the Taliban—and elite Afghan expatriates, particularly the royalist faction of former monarch Zahir Shah.

Having established a process that was intended to install a representative government, the parties next turned to reconstruction of the impoverished and war-ravaged country. One of the earliest actions taken with respect to a strategy for development in Afghanistan was the request for a quick-turnaround needs assessment for the country by the World Bank, the UNDP, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This needs assessment was followed by a multitude of conferences, assessments, and groups. The next major conference in the Bonn Process was the Tokyo International Conference on Reconstruction

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<sup>31</sup> *United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces*, Report to Congress in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1231, Public Law 110-181), June 2008, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Barnett R. Rubin, “Crafting a Constitution for Afghanistan,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2004, p. 3.

Assistance to Afghanistan, held January 21–22, 2002, where donors made pledges of aid to meet the needs assessment's \$2.1 billion high estimate for first-year reconstruction costs, and a total of \$5.2 billion over an unspecified time frame.<sup>33</sup>

During this period, the interim government of Afghanistan wrote and began circulating a National Development Framework, intended to provide a basis for budgeting actions and donor commitments. This paper emphasized the need for Afghan ownership of development, citizen participation, and a development program nested in rule of law and public accountability.<sup>34</sup> This approach was ratified in principle in the UN General Assembly Report, "The Situation in Afghanistan and Its Implications for International Peace And Security," which explained this desire to empower the Afghan government as the logic for the "light footprint" approach.<sup>35</sup>

Strategies for governance in Afghanistan have experienced a rhetorical, if not wholly realized, shift in Afghanistan since 2001. The Bonn process, which focused on the national level, was given mixed reviews. Development documents, such as the National Development Framework, hedged their bets by advocating both a capable national government and direct engagement of the masses in the processes of reconstruction.

By 2003 it was already becoming clear, particularly to aid workers, that the security situation had deteriorated to the point where the provinces had become fairly lawless. There were a number of calls for a focus on subnational governance, inspired by popular reaction to the consolidating but corrupt government and by the expansion of NATO, which had brought international forces face to face with provincial

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Marsden, "Afghanistan: The Reconstruction Process," *International Affairs*, Vol. 79, No. 1, January 2003, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Interim Government of Afghanistan, "National Development Framework" (Draft, version 2), Institute for State Effectiveness, April 2002, pp. 5–6.

<sup>35</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security*, Document A/56/875–S/2002/278, para. 98, March 18, 2002.

realities.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, emphasizing the provincial and district level in some cases resulted in greater direct international involvement, as in the case of the governor of Helmand being replaced at the reported insistence of the British.

The deteriorating security situation in 2003–2005 helped undermine the value and effectiveness of economic aid. While a considerable amount of U.S. and other foreign aid funding was arriving, in many cases it was not effectively used. The poor security situation in the southern and eastern parts of the country, lack of capacity of the Afghan government (whether in Kabul or the local jurisdictions) to manage the funds, and widespread corruption all undermined the reconstruction effort.

### **Anti-Coalition Militant Strategy**

Essentially, the insurgent strategy was to break the political will of the United States and its coalition partners, coerce the withdrawal of their forces, and oust the foreign-backed government from Afghanistan.

From September 2001 to March 2002, the insurgents conducted defensive operations in response to coalition efforts to overthrow the Taliban and to conduct follow-on missions and stability operations. By April 2002, they were regrouping and began to orchestrate a series of offensive operations. Taliban forces deployed in larger numbers over time, especially in such southern provinces as Helmand; however, the guerrillas deployed in smaller units as well. This indicates that the Taliban were progressively able to operate more freely in the south and resist detection by Afghan or coalition forces.<sup>37</sup>

In 2004, the targeting focus of opposition groups seemed to shift from hard targets, such as coalition forces, to soft targets, such as

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, “Assessing Subnational Administration in Afghanistan: Early Observations and Recommendations for Action,” Working Draft, March 13, 2003, p. 5; Isobelle Jaques, “Afghanistan: Beyond Bonn,” report based on Wilton Park Conference, WPS05/28, May 12–14, 2005, on “Afghanistan: Beyond Bonn,” pp. 21–22; Sarah Lister and Andrew Wilder, “Strengthening Subnational Administration In Afghanistan: Technical Reform or State-Building?” *Public Administration and Development*, Vol. 25, 2005, pp. 39–48.

<sup>37</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 51.

Afghan police and personnel reportedly collaborating with the Afghan government or coalition forces. Experts contend that the larger, more viable fighting force that the Taliban faced over time made softer targets more attractive.<sup>38</sup> This targeting strategy helped to discredit those who worked with coalition forces, contributed to the defeat of reconstruction efforts, and forced the evacuation of coalition forces.<sup>39</sup>

The insurgents primarily utilized asymmetric tactics, which included yielding the population centers to U.S. and Afghan forces, operating from rural areas, and distributing propaganda to the local population and opposition forces.<sup>40</sup> They also relied on violence and intimidation to prevent NGOs and aid workers from delivering on reconstruction and humanitarian promises.<sup>41</sup> As the insurgent campaign mounted, jihadist rhetoric and tactics, such as suicide bombings, as well as insurgent methods borrowed from the Iraq war, such as IED attacks, were increasingly used.<sup>42</sup>

The Taliban also received assistance from external actors. They utilized ties to al Qaeda and other jihadist networks to rebuild, sustain, and amplify their operations against coalition forces and the Afghan population. Al Qaeda assisted opposition groups at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels and provided impetus for the use of suicide attacks and sophisticated IEDs.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, some al Qaeda members blended with Taliban units and shared tactics from operations in Iraq and Chechnya.<sup>44</sup>

In line with the Pakistani government's past involvement with various Afghan opposition groups, members of the ISI and other gov-

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<sup>38</sup> Seth G. Jones, "Averting Failure in Afghanistan," *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Spring 2006, p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Collins, "Planning Lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan," *Joint Force Quarterly*, No. 41, 2nd Quarter, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 50.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy," p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, pp. 62–63.

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 66.

ernment agencies provided two main types of assistance to the Taliban. The first form of assistance was resources—medical aid, training, intelligence, financial assistance, arms, ammunition, supplies, and logistics (in crossing the border). The second was the freedom to operate; after insurgents lost their Afghanistan base, they found a reliable, fertile, safe haven from which to recruit, train, fundraise, transport supplies, and stage operations. The adjacency to Pakistan of critical Afghan border towns had serious implications for the Taliban.

Many of the Taliban's strategies vis-à-vis development and governance have been negative: sabotaging development projects, intimidating the population to deter participation in government, and more. But The Taliban have taken some positive actions. One example is the Taliban justice system, an effort by the movement to dispense low-cost, sharia-compliant justice in the villages.<sup>45</sup> Taliban judges run circuits through the country to provide this convenience, in stark contrast to the slow and centralized Afghan courts. And while the country's nascent justice system is seen as corrupt, religious judges are not.

As the Taliban's strategy matures, it has begun to establish a shadow government, with governors and severe penalties for corruption and inefficiency. While the population may live in fear of the Taliban, it also provides a measure of stability and predictability. Imran Gul, a Pakistani NGO worker, believes the Taliban's appeal is in providing "peace, income, a sense of purpose, a social network."<sup>46</sup> These efforts represent an emerging strategy to out-administer the GIRoA, rather than simply disrupt its influence.

### External Powers

**Al Qaeda.** Al Qaeda aimed to spread extremist global ideology to Afghanistan and Pakistan. It utilized its substantial financial resources, influence, and tactics learned in past experiences to act as a force multiplier for the Taliban regime in return for permission to

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<sup>45</sup> Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, "Taliban Courts Filling Justice Vacuum In Afghanistan," *NPR Morning Edition*, December 16, 2008.

<sup>46</sup> David Montero, "Why the Taliban Appeal to Pakistani Youth," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 16, 2006.

train operatives and plan operations on Afghan soil.<sup>47</sup> The organization did have a different point of focus than the Taliban—while most of the opposition groups remained focused on Afghanistan, al Qaeda and its affiliates remained committed to fighting the United States and its global allies, including the Pakistani administration and presence in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas.<sup>48</sup>

**Pakistan.** For two decades, Pakistan has sought to extend its influence in Afghanistan, at times through the support of various armed groups, including the Taliban.<sup>49</sup> Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan has stemmed from its need to protect its territorial integrity on the western flank. The Durand Line, which forms the border between the two countries, is a colonial artifact and creates an artificial division between tribes that are themselves not friendly to the Pakistani nation. Following the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States needed support in the region and enlisted Pakistan as an ally in the war on terror. It was believed that Pakistani forces could address the situation in the North-West Frontier and Baluchistan provinces, areas from which insurgents have staged offensive operations in Afghanistan in the past. Early efforts by President Pervez Musharraf to curb militant groups, enforce order, and reform the radical madrassas that had served as extremist recruiting centers at first appeared successful; unprecedented counterterrorism campaigns were conducted by thousands of Pakistani regular and paramilitary troops deployed to the country's border region.<sup>50</sup> Although these operations were somewhat effective against al Qaeda and non-Pakistani militants, they did not accomplish much toward containing the Taliban.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*.

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy," p. 118.

<sup>49</sup> Barnett R. Rubin and Andrea Armstrong, "Regional Issues in the Reconstruction of Afghanistan," *World Policy Journal*, Spring 2003, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> K. Alan Kronstadt and Kenneth Katzman, *Islamic Militancy in the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Region and US Policy Relations*, Congressional Research Service Report, RL34763, November 21, 2008, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Ali A. Jalali, "The Future of Afghanistan," *Parameters*, Spring 2006, p. 8.

Although top U.S. officials praised Pakistan for its cooperation, doubts regarding Islamabad's core interests persisted. Pakistan's mixed record on battling Islamist extremism included a tolerance of Taliban elements operating from its territory.<sup>52</sup> The Taliban continued to control training camps, staging areas, recruiting centers, and safe havens in Pakistan. The significant portion of the Afghan insurgency's political and military leadership living in the border regions benefited from technical and operational assistance provided by transnational extremists also located there, as well as ethnic and political support from Pakistan's Pashtun population.<sup>53</sup>

Some attributed Pakistan's lack of decisiveness in containing the Taliban to political unrest in the country, claiming it had forced Islamabad to scale back its operations against the militants. However, reports continued to indicate that elements of Pakistan's major intelligence agency and military forces were aiding the Taliban and other extremist forces as a matter of policy; such support may even have included the provision of training and fire support for Taliban offensives.<sup>54</sup> State backing of the Afghan insurgency was suggested to have both ideological and geostrategic motivations; some in the Pakistani government may have sympathized with the jihad against U.S. and other Western forces; others may have wished to preserve a Pakistani foothold in Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup>

Pakistan's ineffectuality against insurgents using its territory as a sanctuary in which to regroup and expand their influence across borders has directly contributed to the instability in Afghanistan and continues to be the primary external barrier to defeating the insurgents in Afghanistan.

**Iran.** Despite harsh rhetoric between Washington and Tehran, Iran's policy toward Afghanistan—funding reconstruction projects, providing aid to various warlords—did not change as result of the “axis

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<sup>52</sup> Kronstadt and Katzman, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, “Averting Failure in Afghanistan,” p. 121.

<sup>54</sup> Kronstadt and Katzman, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 7; Rubin and Armstrong, “Regional Issues,” p. 33.

<sup>55</sup> Jones, “Averting Failure in Afghanistan,” p. 121.

of evil speech” or the Ahmadinejad presidency.<sup>56</sup> However, Iran has viewed its involvement in Afghanistan as a hedge against a possible deterioration of U.S.-Iranian relations.<sup>57</sup> There was some evidence that individuals from the Iranian government provided arms and training to Taliban commanders and other insurgents, and several experts have speculated that Iran harbored members of al Qaeda. But these claims have been denied by both the Iranian and Afghan governments, and Iran’s historically poor relations with the Taliban support this repudiation.<sup>58</sup> In any case, if there was Iranian support for opposition groups in Afghanistan during this time period, it was insignificant compared with that provided by the other external state and nonstate actions mentioned thus far.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Initial Stabilization Attempt**

In the wake of the apparent banishment of the Taliban, the international community’s primary concerns were adjudicating between warlords and crafting the advanced institutions of a modern state. The anti-Taliban faction that had helped to achieve victory had become fractious; each warlord and militia leader sought Kabul as a feather in his cap. With many thousands of militia forces underemployed, fostering a neutral government in Kabul seemed a productive objective. For their part, Afghan expatriates supported the use of the 1964 constitution of King Zahir Shah’s reign as an interim constitution, but that document treated Afghanistan as though it were a cohesive state, which it plainly was not. The mismatch among the foundational documents of the republic, the preoccupations of international parties, and the competition between the factions in the government proved disastrous in terms of creating strong beginnings for the Afghan rehabilitation effort.

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<sup>56</sup> Mohsen M. Milani, “Iran’s Policy Toward Afghanistan,” *Middle East Journal*, Volume 60, No. 2, Spring 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Milani, “Iran’s Policy Toward Afghanistan”; Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> Milani, “Iran’s Policy Toward Afghanistan”; Douglas Jehl and Eric Schmitt, “U.S. Suggests a Qaeda Cell in Iran Directed Saudi Bombings,” *New York Times*, May 21, 2003; Rubin and Armstrong, “Regional Issues.”



Reviewing the multilateral needs assessment, it is obviously naïve in places—resting on rapid growth and “modernism” and relying on the Afghan government budget to set guiding principles for recovery.<sup>59</sup> This, despite the fact that surging economic growth and a government capable of setting such budget priorities were far from assured. The capacity-building and community involvement strategies envisioned by the document certainly never came to pass, but they may have been buried under a hodgepodge of suggested “immediate actions” that ranged from establishing a police force to providing limbs for the disabled, creating a civil air traffic control system, and appointing gender advisors.<sup>60</sup> One major mistaken assumption was that there would be a distinction between the end of combat operations and the beginning of reconstruction, but in practice the former coexisted with, rather than gave way to, the latter. There was no distinct post-conflict phase.

While the focus on Kabul and on Afghanistan’s expatriate, often technocratic, elite may have seemed reasonable at the time, it reflected a deep misunderstanding of power structure in the country. This misapprehension resulted in a sense of disillusionment about the capabilities of Afghanistan’s government, and was one of the reasons that the Afghan government was largely circumvented in the delivery of assistance.

Had donor nations used their funding authorities to develop sustainable programs for the bulk of the population, the negative effects of short-circuiting the legitimate government might have been mitigated. Instead, a great deal of focus was given to the process of delivery on pledges, which was complicated by the different budgetary cycles of the partners and a multitude of funding vehicles. While the international community concentrated on meeting these initial pledges, it didn’t allocate them for projects according to the vision of the multilaterals’ needs assessment. Nor did donor nations subscribe to the strategic plan for Afghanistan drafted by the interim government in early

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<sup>59</sup> Asian Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, “Afghanistan: Preliminary Needs Assessment for Recovery and Reconstruction,” January 2002, pp. 3–5.

<sup>60</sup> Asian Development Bank, Appendix: Immediate Actions, p. 56.

2002; instead, the bulk of aid, some 60 percent, went to humanitarian activities rather than the reconstruction projects recommended in strategy documents.<sup>61</sup> This was due to a continuing drought and the higher than expected numbers of returning refugees. While the money was nobly given, it was no substitute for long-term reconstruction aid. What money did go to reconstruction efforts was predominantly spent on education, support for internally displaced people and support to refugee return, rather than on programs that would develop institutions more broadly.<sup>62</sup> As mentioned earlier, much of the aid that was provided was lost due to corruption and the inability of the Afghan government—and the coalition—to adequately manage those resources.

The interim government's strategy seems to have been flawed in a number of respects. First, the constitution and government established during the Loya Jirga process favored centralized authority, rather than a parliamentary system or one with more distributed authority. Though the early government was derived from factions handpicked by the U.S. and other coalition members, the two-stage Bonn process did nothing to increase the representative nature of the government or move it from the path of heavy centralization. Instead, it was a contest of wills between Pashtuns and other factions, and between resident and expatriate elites.

The second major weakness of the government strategy was the lack of bureaucratic capacity in the ministries and in sub-national positions. When the government was reestablished, ministries were created on paper and quickly staffed with former bureaucrats from previous regimes. Those who were brought back in were typically senior officials, while the rank-and-file positions were either unfilled or staffed with those who had no capacity.<sup>63</sup> Although the National Development Framework specifies a need for capacity-building assistance, it presumed a fully capable state in the goals it laid out, namely a state that would

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<sup>61</sup> Marsden, "Afghanistan: The Reconstruction Process," p. 94.

<sup>62</sup> Marsden, "Afghanistan: The Reconstruction Process," p. 94.

<sup>63</sup> Author interview with M. Ashraf Haidari, August 25, 2009.

Provide security, invest in human capital, and articulate and implement a social policy focused on assistance to the vulnerable and excluded and the elimination of poverty. [The government] must create an enabling environment for the activities of the private sector, make effective use of aid to attract trade and investment, and put the economy on a sustainable path to growth.<sup>64</sup>

With respect to governance at the provincial level and below, Afghanistan's premier think tank has said simply, "subnational state-building in Afghanistan has been characterized by a lack of a subnational governance policy."<sup>65</sup>

### **Defining Victory**

One of the most serious problems with the international effort in Afghanistan was the almost total lack of criteria for defining victory in the context of this study—establishing lasting stability. In the areas of governance and development, no attainable vision for a viable state was ever arrived at. In a 2005 campaign plan, Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan defined its endstate as

- Moderate, stable and representative, though understanding that Afghans will not copy U.S.-style institutions
- Representative of all responsible elements in Afghanistan and formed through the political participation of the Afghan people
- Capable of effectively controlling and governing its territory
- Capable of implementing policies to stimulate economic development
- Willing to contribute to a continuing partnership with the U.S.-led coalition in the global war on terror.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Interim Government of Afghanistan, "National Development Framework," p. 14.

<sup>65</sup> Martine van Bijlert, "Between Discipline and Discretion: Polices Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments," Afghanistan Research And Evaluation Unit Briefing Paper Series, May 2009, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, "Campaign Plan Briefing in Support of Operation Enduring Freedom," unpublished briefing, October 5, 2005, p. 16.

Such an explicit statement of U.S. objectives is rare, most documents have simply tended to speak about indefinitely continuing lines of operation. But this document still lacks qualifications: what constitutes representative? How much of the population needs to be involved to be representative? How effectively does it have to control its territory? Is this country more like Switzerland, or Bangladesh?

## **Reasons the Initial Attempt to Transition Toward Stability Failed**

### **Factors That Resulted in Failure**

In this section, we move from symptoms to disease, aggregating the various apparent weaknesses of the coalition effort to attempt to understand at a higher level why these failures occurred. In assessing the recent history of the country it becomes clear that any perceptions of stability were illusory. The plan put forward by coalition partners in the wake of the Taliban's ouster collapsed from within, encouraged along by insurgents who capitalized on disarray.

When the Taliban regime collapsed in late 2001 and early 2002, it appeared that the main objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom had been achieved. Indeed during much of 2002 it appeared that there would not be an insurgency. It appears that the U.S. and its coalition partners believed that with relatively limited effort stability would return to a still-poor Afghanistan.

By late 2002, however, it was clear that the Taliban was returning and starting to threaten the new, still very weak, U.S.-backed government in Kabul. The assumptions of a swift move to stability in Afghanistan were shown to have been overly optimistic. By mid-2003 an increasingly serious insurgency was underway.<sup>67</sup>

That U.S. and coalition forces will eventually achieve a transition from insurgency to stability is not a foregone conclusion. The initial mission for ISAF forces was certainly conceived as a stabilization mission, committing ISAF forces to conduct all five of what the

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<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, pp. 27–32.

U.S. considers to be the key tasks of stabilization: establish civil security, establish civil control, restore essential services, provide support to governance, and provide support to infrastructure and economic development.<sup>68</sup>

Operation Enduring Freedom was conducting counterinsurgency operations at least as early as 2005, although the strategy is attributed to 2003.<sup>69</sup> The ISAF mission in its initial stages was conducted entirely at the national level, with forces stationed only in Kabul. While still in a dangerous environment, there were neither offensive nor defensive operations conducted. The decision to expand ISAF's mandate throughout Afghanistan likely had more to do with the counterinsurgency in Iraq and the need to fully resource the conflict there than with any desire to conduct counterinsurgency in the Afghan hinterland.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, that expansion did involve both offensive and defensive operations in addition to the stabilization tasks already in the mandate.

The failure to transition toward stability occurred because of three major oversights in the coalition approach. These oversights are interlocking and reinforcing, and some operational level evidence of instability may have multiple strategic antecedents.

**Inappropriate Strategy.** In the case of Afghanistan, strategic-level decisions were made to use a "light footprint," but although the avowed reason to do so was to empower the Afghan people to take charge of their futures, realistically much of the choice was driven by the desire of the international community for a labor and resource lean approach.<sup>71</sup>

In the absence of a robust stabilization strategy, the focus of the conflict devolved to operations, where each operational authority was

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<sup>68</sup> U.S. Department of the Army, Headquarters, Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, October 2008, p. 2-5; United Nations Security Council, "Letter Dated 5 December 2001 from the Secretary-General Addressed to the President of the Security Council," S/2001/1154, December 5, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, "Campaign Plan Briefing," p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Amin Tarzi, "Afghanistan: NATO Expansion Demands Common Approach," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, October 6, 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Chesterman, "Walking Softly in Afghanistan: The Future of UN State-Building," *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 3, Autumn 2002, pp. 37–46.

left to its own devices. Performance was patchy across the country, with many military commanders focused on direct action, rather than population-centric measures. This is true for both the initial, special forces-led effort and the expanded conventional U.S. and NATO role: seeking to engage the enemy, rather than the population in an attempt to stamp out Taliban and al Qaeda members.

The proclivity for direct action had an analog in development. While the international community paid lip service to the idea of the Afghan-led development strategy, what money was turned into actual projects went directly to international actors, rather than to the Afghans. Having thus bypassed any strategic plans for aid, the money went primarily for quick impact projects (QIP), CERP funds, and other quick fixes. These programs have generally failed in their goal to increase support for a pro-government and coalition status quo. As USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID/OTI), the U.S. government's premier organization for the conduct of aid in emergency situations, found in its 2005 report:

There is no evidence that relationships between citizens or between citizens and local authorities have been significantly affected by attempts to promote participatory democratic processes in local project selection, implementation, and monitoring. Afghan communities have a long tradition of local control by landowners and strongmen that are not easily affected by governmental service provision. This is especially true if projects remain focused on quick-impact infrastructure, in which traditional elites can easily speak for the community as a whole.<sup>72</sup>

Rather, development professionals have found that

The tactical deployment of aid risks undermining the higher policy goal of state-building, overstates the transformative potential of

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<sup>72</sup> Social Impact, Inc., "U.S.AID/OTI Afghanistan Program Final Evaluation," prepared for the Office of Transition Initiatives, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, United States Agency for International Development, August 15, 2005, pp. 9–10.

development, and fails to appreciate the processes through which legitimacy is constructed in the Afghan context.<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, governance-related assistance below the national level generally fell to military commanders in the field to execute. One hotly debated decision was the replacement of the governor of Helmand in 2006 just as the British were taking charge of the NATO mission there. The national government blamed the British forces for insisting on the governor's removal on grounds of corruption, an act that ultimately had a critically destabilizing effect on the province's security.<sup>74</sup>

There was also no way to clearly gauge progress. Although we can measure performance—schools opened, wells dug—we cannot measure effects and where those effects put us on the path to an end-state. Even today, this type of benchmarking is not common, as a recent article by a British commander in Afghanistan noted: “ISAF should be measuring the success of a PRT in terms of what it had achieved for its province, not in accomplishments or milestones for the PRT itself.”<sup>75</sup>

**Poor Understanding of Power Dynamics in the Population.** Many of the failures of the stabilization strategy can be attributed to a misapprehension of the complexities of Afghanistan. This failure extends from the top of the bureaucratic structure to the smallest village, and accounts for why many coalition efforts produced unexpected results.

At the national level, coalition forces failed to understand the power plays between high-level players in Kabul; the divisions among technocrats, Pashtun royalists, and minority warlords; and the bargaining mechanisms between them. Overestimating the capability and stability of the national government produced the disillusionment that was compounded by a misunderstanding of the balance between center and periphery in power relations that is now well documented. Coalition forces coped by assuming greater authority and responsibil-

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<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra, “Who Owns the Peace? Aid, Reconstruction, and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan,” *Disasters, Early View*, March 27, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> van Bijlert, “Between Discipline and Discretion,” p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ian Westerman, “Pacifying Afghanistan,” *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 153, No. 5, October 2008, p. 19.

ity and cutting out the Afghan government at all levels, while simultaneously trying to build the idea of a legitimate nation-state by putting an “Afghan face” on coalition efforts. But Afghans are acutely aware of who really authorizes and executes the work, no matter which entity is given credit for it. As one Afghan shura member said, “We know the PRT people from their uniforms. If they come and visit a project it means that the project is funded by the PRT.”<sup>76</sup> A Kabul-based journalist added,

The PRT built a bridge in Mohammad Agha district, Logar province and people refrained from using it until a group of religious elders were organized to go and preach to the community that using the bridge built by the PRT is not a sin.<sup>77</sup>

Unable to predict how Afghans would respond to any of their efforts and unsure who was friend or foe, foreign personnel made decisions about employment of force or funds based on beliefs about what ought to work, rather than real experience. This further explains the persistence of quick-impact development projects, despite evidence that they failed to secure support for the legitimate government. Even today, funding for this type of project outstrips other sources of funding.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, coalition forces failed to correctly gauge the level of resistance that they would face in the hinterland. They believed that most Afghans saw the Taliban regime as bad, and therefore thought they would encounter few difficulties in rooting out remaining militants. But as a recent report of the British government concluded, “Most analysts believe that the initial UK strategy failed primarily because of a

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<sup>76</sup> Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Mirwais Wardak, Idrees Zaman, and Annabel Taylor, “Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds: Exploring Afghan Perceptions of Civil-Military Relations,” research conducted for the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA) and the British and Irish Agencies Afghanistan Group (BAAG), 2008, p. 39.

<sup>77</sup> Azarbaijani-Moghaddam et al., “Afghan Hearts, Afghan Minds,” p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2010. See Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds relative to other funds.



lack of manpower, and a poor understanding of the local situation and the level of resistance that would emerge.”<sup>79</sup>

**Lack of a Sustained Focus.** A third overarching cause of failure of the stabilization effort was the lack of sustained focus on Afghanistan. As described throughout this case study, officials in charge of the UN and U.S. efforts said that a more robust presence was “not necessary and not possible.”<sup>80</sup> The first of these has already been dealt with in the preceding section, but the idea that resourcing the stabilization campaign was impossible referred to the lack of political will to focus on Afghanistan. The UN was already involved in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Burundi, and the United States was already looking forward to getting Saddam Hussein out of Iraq.<sup>81</sup> So the international community set in motion the establishment of an underdeveloped government in Kabul and then promptly turned its attention to other things.

## Recommended Strategy for the Future

The first requirement for stabilization is security, and the first task in any transition will be to sustain whatever level of security has been achieved. Coalition partners, particularly the United States, have devoted considerable attention and resources to achieving an acceptable level of safety and security for the Afghan people. Of the three lines of operation, security is frequently viewed as an enabler for development and governance directives; a relatively stable security environment increases the chances that such projects can gain sufficient

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<sup>79</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, “Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan,” Eighth Report of Session 2008–09, July 21, 2009, p. 86. According to an expert’s view, while efforts at promoting local development upset local power balances and met with resistance, the real deficiency was not to complement the top-down effort to build national level governance capacity with a complementary effort to strengthen local, largely informal institutions. (Comment by Ambassador James Dobbins, May 2011.)

<sup>80</sup> Lakhdar Brahimi, quoted in Chesterman, “Walking Softly in Afghanistan,” p. 38.

<sup>81</sup> Marina Ottaway, “Nation Building,” *Foreign Policy*, No. 132, September–October 2002, p. 20.

momentum. After OEF drove the Taliban and al Qaeda from their strongholds in the southern and eastern provinces, it appeared that the counterterrorism focus of operations had succeeded, but it is now clear that these initial victories were only temporary. When the Taliban returned to Afghanistan, regrouped and restocked by supporters from neighboring Pakistan, an insufficiently resourced international presence and underdeveloped indigenous security institutions yielded little for the insurgency to contend with.

At the outset, donor nations placed a great deal of emphasis on the creation of the Afghan National Security Forces, a priority that was not misplaced even if it was poorly executed upon. At present, the mechanisms for creating the army and police are fairly well developed; there are regional training centers and an increasing emphasis on mentoring and partnering. But making these forces effective will require a further increase in resources, with emphasis on ministerial-level capacity development, and a further extension of mentoring and partnership to ensure that all police and army units are capably tasked and executing operations to the best of their ability. This will require additional troops to ensure that ANSF have daily partners, not simply partners for major combat operations.

Despite its shortcomings, the ANA is increasingly viewed as a source of stability in the country and can handle some major aspects of operations. Although efforts to rehabilitate the ANP have not met with the same measure of success, a credible and capable police force is at least as important as an effective army. Consequently the same, if not greater, effort must be made to ensure ANP advancement. One possible avenue for improvement could be an effort to reform the doctrine and mission of the police to ensure that mission, training and tasking are all aligned.

At the very least, the missions of the different components of the ANSF should be better defined. There is no current rationale behind the range of operations to which the ANP is assigned; this results in an overlap with ANA directives, for which the police have not been trained or equipped. Appropriate mission statements for the ANA and ANP must be defined in order to distinguish the strategic and operational focus for each line of the country's defense. This includes defin-

ing which forces contribute to which campaigns in what capacity—infantry versus COIN, defensive versus offensive clearing operations, among others.

The ANP mentor system is in need of improvement. Mentoring is critical to the success of the ANP reconstitution effort because it allows trainers to build on classroom instruction and provide a more systematic basis for evaluating performance.<sup>82</sup> As lead donor nation for the ANP, the United States could encourage vested interest on the part of the Afghans by developing Afghan-to-Afghan mentoring teams. Such a mechanism would offer a different approach from the current one of using an outside contractor, one that binds the indigenous police force more closely to their fellow countrymen. This would also prevent the problem of indefinite mentoring: Although the mentoring program is supposed to be term limited, in reality mentored units rarely “graduate” from that status.<sup>83</sup>

The advent of new, even more local, programs such as the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), involve applying concepts of village-based defense to problems of security. In parts of the country, the village-level citizens’ defense force is an indigenous concept and ISAF efforts to that point are likely to succeed. But rather than take from this the lesson that the APPF should be applied more broadly, we should instead derive the principle that understanding local definitions of security is key to propagating a belief of security. In some locations, the ANP may fulfill this role most closely, and in others it may be that as-yet-unknown methods should prevail.

Finally, calls for larger contributions of manpower and resources can be focused on ways to increase the chances of achieving the “clear-hold-build” objective. The current coalition basing structure does not disperse forces far enough into the parts of the country where the insurgency originated: rural areas. The United States should rethink its basing structure to increase its presence in these areas. This would likely require a reduced dependence on logistics and supply. The ANA has an opportunity to play a key role in such deployments. U.S. and

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<sup>82</sup> GAO, *Afghanistan Security*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>83</sup> Author interview, COL Thomas Staton, October 6, 2009.

coalition forces could share more bases with the ANA and transfer the majority or the entirety of the responsibility for logistics and supply to those who know the country best.

**Rethink Development.** To be successful in a development strategy, we must rethink the proposition that charitable gifts of infrastructure are a viable means to placate the population. Certain projects work but others do not, and we need to invest research into finding out why. Programs that are firmly rooted in the local context, that constructively address their impact on local power structures, that are truly Afghan—not merely with an “Afghan face”—are more likely to succeed. These programs should also be paired with a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to assess success project by project, rather than the unhelpful national-level metrics currently favored. National indicators tell us virtually nothing about the strategic-level effects of our stabilization policies.

**Understand the Population Better.** If poor understanding of the population is part of the problem, then the solution must necessarily entail developing a means to better understand the various communities of interest. Modern counterinsurgency theory and practice are predicated on gaining the support of the people for the counterinsurgency effort, yet we have a poor understanding of what the Afghan people actually need or desire.

From the American and European point of view, government institutions exist to identify and meet the needs and desires of the people. This makes it difficult for us to understand an environment that is resistant to institutions, such as Afghanistan. We have no institutional mechanism for systematically gaining an understanding of the people’s needs and desires, and our efforts to build such a mechanism have been frustrated at every turn by that very same poor understanding. This conundrum exists broadly across the security, development, and governance spheres. The tools we attempt to employ to break through this “fog of COIN,” such as public opinion surveys or key leader engagements, often say more about our own beliefs than they do about those of the Afghans. For example, after a brief introduction to the overall security section, The Asia Foundation’s most recent countrywide survey presents the results of a series of questions based on the

level of fear for one's personal safety felt by the population.<sup>84</sup> Not only does the survey not ask who the respondents are afraid of, it assumes that security itself is defined best by the frequency of fears for personal safety. But this may not be accurate. When journalist James Holland asked why villagers would support a regime that made them fear for their personal safety, he reported,

The Taliban may operate an extremely harsh sharia-based rule of law, heavily dependent on intimidation and violence, but . . . under the Taliban, a person could leave his wallet on a wall in Musa Qala and find it there two days later.<sup>85</sup>

Other factors, such as the level of predictability of the environment or the provision of higher-paying jobs may be more important to the people's sense of well-being.

So how can we understand how to ask the right questions? One possibility is to construct a phased process of social science research. Ethnography and other tools of cultural anthropology are increasingly used by the government through programs such as the Human Terrain System, but these efforts usually end with normative recommendations to service members—the advisory “angel on the shoulder.” Perhaps it would be more constructive to use ethnographic knowledge to inform later-stage data collection efforts, such as public opinion polls, to increase the accuracy of our metrics.<sup>86</sup> Such a structured field research process could result in more accurate diagnosis of local attitudes.

**Maintain a Sustained Commitment.** Above all, the effort to create a durable transition from counterinsurgency to stability operations in Afghanistan rests on the sustained commitment of U.S. and coalition forces. Rather than indulge in the strategic narcolepsy that has defined U.S. intervention in Afghanistan for the past 30 years, we must exhibit a sustained interest in that country's future. The depth of Afghani-

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<sup>84</sup> Ruth Rennie, Sudhindra Sharma, and Pawan Kumar Sen, *Afghanistan in 2008: A Survey of the Afghan People*, The Asia Foundation, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>85</sup> James Holland, “Dispatches: Musa Qala, Afghanistan,” *Granta*, April 15, 2008.

<sup>86</sup> Author interview, Andrea Jackson, October 13, 2009.

stan's instability demonstrated in this case study will require significant presence, resources, and attention at the strategic and policy level to remediate. If there is a key lesson to be gleaned from both the U.S. experience in Afghanistan during the time of the Soviet invasion and the "false dawn" of the immediate rout of the Taliban in 2002, it is that losing interest in Afghanistan before the transition to stability has been solidly achieved creates unpredictable and dangerous results.

In summary, it can be said that the situation in Afghanistan is, as of this writing, still in the counterinsurgency stage, and that a transition to protracted stability has not yet taken place. Indeed, as we pointed out earlier in the chapter, the "transition" that took place in Afghanistan was the move from early stability efforts toward COIN, which is the phase that is still under way today. The suggested shifts in U.S. and Afghan government policy listed above could contribute to an eventual move back toward stability.



## Conclusion

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This volume has examined a number of different insurgencies to determine what was required to end them and to transition to more stable conditions. In some of the cases included in this study, there was considerable American involvement (Iraq, Afghanistan); in others, U.S. participation was limited (Colombia, El Salvador). In the Philippines, the United States has assisted the government, but not specifically in suppressing the NPA, while in the case of Mali there was no American involvement of consequence.

In some of the examples we studied, the government conducting the counterinsurgency campaign developed effective and appropriate policies and techniques to transition from insurgency into sustained normalcy. In other cases, there was only partial success, and in the case of Afghanistan the insurgency is clearly not yet at the point of reaching a transition (indeed, some argue that the anti-Taliban coalition is struggling merely to maintain the present situation). In all these varied situations, we have seen examples of both effective and ineffective policies and techniques, as governments attempted to defeat the insurgency and move toward stability. Therefore, U.S. policymakers and COIN practitioners have much to learn from these experiences.

It should be noted that there were some similarities in the cases but also important differences. It is thus difficult to assess whether a more “military” or more “economic/political” approach was the most significant reason why a particular insurgency started to transition toward stability. It is, however, safe to say that in each case an approach



was needed that balanced security needs as against important reforms in other areas.

## Overarching Insights

There were important differences in each of the cases that we examined. They range from small insurgencies with little U.S. participation (Mali) to major conflicts where the United States has been deeply involved (Iraq and Afghanistan). Other cases are in the middle of the spectrum in terms of size, complexity, and the level of American participation. As we examined what appeared to work and what did not in the six cases included in the study, all or a majority of them seemed to have several important factors in common.

*Successfully transitioning from COIN to relative stability requires an interagency approach.* As insurgencies start to transition toward stability, there is a reduction in violence and a gradual increase in normal economic and political activity. Interagency cooperation is needed during all phases of an insurgency. During the transition period, this need may be particularly important, as the primary responsibility moves away from the military toward the police and as economic development and political reforms take effect and are refined.

Although the military is best suited for providing protection and security while the insurgency is at its worst, the military is usually not the optimal agency, to say the least, to ensure that political and economic reforms are properly executed. Multiple agencies, both within the incumbent government and from the third party nation(s) that are helping to combat the insurgency, must work together during the critical transition period to ensure that economic and political reforms are implemented in order to prevent a reignition of the insurgency.

In the case of Colombia, the 2004 creation of the Center for Coordinated Integrated Action (CCAI) was a key step in integrating the overall efforts of the Colombian government (military, police, political, and economic) to consolidate gains made in the COIN effort against the FARC. Placing the CCAI at the cabinet level ensured participation and awareness of the Colombian president and his key advisors. Next,

the CCAI empowered representatives at the state level to coordinate security, economic development, and political reforms. Although this concept was not without problems, it has been instrumental in accelerating the reestablishment of Colombian government authority in an ever-growing portion of the country. With the FARC already showing signs of weakness by the early part of the decade, this coordinated, intragovernmental approach has proved to be very effective. Today, it appears that Colombia is well along in the process of transitioning from a decades-long COIN campaign to relative stability in most of the country.

Similarly, in the Philippines the government adopted (as of 2006) an “all of government” approach to counterinsurgency. While most people agree that the NPA was not completely defeated by the end of 2010, there is general consensus that the government has made significant gains over the communist movement and that the influence of the NPA will continue to diminish over the next several years—so long as the Philippine government can continue the present level of effort. Overall, the Peace and Order Councils that coordinate the government’s approach to the insurgency at the national, regional, provincial, city, and lower levels of government have proved effective in rationalizing the overall strategy and operations on the security and civil reform fronts. The POCs brought together all the key government agencies that were critical to the counterinsurgency effort.

In other cases, increased cooperation between the security and political/economic COIN efforts paid off, even though a formal high-level interagency coordinating body was not created. In El Salvador, the initial approach to dealing with the insurgents was overly biased toward direct military action. While this certainly resulted in insurgent casualties, military and police actions alone were not enough to undermine the support that the insurgents enjoyed within significant portions of the population. Once El Salvador adopted a more balanced approach, maintaining military pressure on the insurgents while simultaneously placing much greater emphasis on political and economic reform, the support for the insurgents declined. This required a coordinated, interagency approach by the governments.

In contrast, in Iraq and Afghanistan there was a distinct lack of a unified interagency effort for the first several years of conflict. In both cases, the Department of Defense had to perform most of the security and reconstruction tasks. DoD was not well suited for the reconstruction mission, since it lacked significant recent experience in nation-building (or rebuilding) and the reform of civil institutions. The initial U.S.-led COIN effort suffered badly in both countries as a result. To this day, U.S. involvement in Afghanistan still lacks adequate interagency coordination at the cabinet level. For example, even though the United States has been involved in Afghanistan for over eight years, the percentage of nonmilitary personnel in the PRTs that are so critical to capacity-building remains small, and military personnel are still performing most development tasks despite their relative lack of training and expertise in that area. It should be noted that from roughly 2002 to 2005, the United States was not really conducting a counterinsurgency operation in the classic sense of the term. Rather, it was engaging in a counterterrorism effort using the limited number of troops that were available during those years and initially trying to stabilize the country.

*It is important to develop an in-depth understanding of the participants in the insurgency, including what issues are driving a portion of the population into the hands of the insurgents.* This appears to be, in general, easier for the local government and its security forces than for external actors. For example, in the case of Iraq's Anbar province, it took U.S. forces several years to develop sufficient knowledge of the key local personalities, economy, power hierarchies, and tribal structures. Additionally, in both Afghanistan and Iraq it took considerable time—years—for the United States and other outside forces to develop a good understanding of the real needs of the local population. This resulted in many well-intentioned, but inappropriate, aid programs that were of marginal benefit to the local population. Unfortunately, developing in-depth knowledge of the local situation took years because of an almost total prewar lack of familiarity on the part of the Americans.

Perhaps one of the most important factors in understanding the nature of an insurgency is the need to recognize that the movement has a degree of popular support, even though support for the insurgents

might be limited, in some cases, to a small portion of the population. Often, armed forces see the insurgency as a strictly military “target set” and limit their approach to locating and destroying or capturing the insurgents. For the insurgency to be truly defeated, militaries—both those of the local country as well as any foreign forces that are there to assist—must recognize that the insurgency arose for a reason and that a multifaceted approach is almost always required to overcome it.

The Anbar case provides an excellent contrast of the difference between a situation when foreign forces understand the local issues and when they do not. As Chapter Six makes clear, for the first several years of the U.S. occupation of Anbar province there was far more emphasis placed on direct military operations than on identifying the underlying causes of Sunni resentment and the needs of the population. Once the approach to COIN changed, which occurred roughly at the same time that the Iraqi branch of al Qaeda was making major miscalculations in its dealings with the local population, the level of violence dropped significantly.

Once U.S. forces in Anbar had developed a better understanding of the local political, security, and economic issues, they could focus their efforts in a much more appropriate way. Trust started to build between the Americans and the local population, who began to view the U.S. forces as being on their side and able to help them. Once the relationship between U.S. forces and the population had developed—due to better understanding of the local environment on the part of the Americans—the process of starting the transition from COIN to a more peaceful and stable situation really began.

Government officials and security forces of the nation being threatened by the insurgency should have an advantage over foreign forces—after all, it is their country. While this theoretical advantage appears obvious, even the military and police of the country in question can badly misinterpret the nature of the insurgency and the needs of the local population. For years, the indigenous governments of the Philippines and their security forces were oblivious to the grievances of their own populations. When the government and its military and police are seen as “not getting it” by disaffected elements of the population, increased support for the insurgents is almost inevitable.

Once participants in the counterinsurgency (in the local government as well as that of any external participants such as the United States) become well versed in the issues that the insurgency is attempting to exploit, the key personalities involved, and the grievances and needs of the local population, meaningful efforts at reform become possible. For example, in the Philippines special operations teams were particularly useful in helping to ensure that nonkinetic measures were meaningful and relevant: The people in the conflict areas came to understand that they themselves had a direct stake in the effort to move toward stability. However, the longer the process of learning the nature of the insurgency takes, the greater the risk that support for the insurgents will increase, possibly to unmanageable levels.

Mali represents a case where the government apparently correctly determined what the key issues were and acted accordingly, albeit within its limited resources. Because the essence of the insurgency was determined rather quickly, appropriate actions could be taken to prevent the insurgency from becoming a major threat.

*There is a clear need to manage the demobilization of the various militia groups, which may number many thousands of armed men.* Reintegration of fighters into society is a key requirement for ending lawlessness and widespread violence. In many insurgencies, militias fight alongside regular government forces. In some cases, these militias are sponsored by the government; in others, such as Colombia, they develop and operate independently. In yet other cases, they might respond to local powerholders. Counterinsurgency theory has long stressed the contribution of militias and other self-defense forces. Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi usefully distinguish between what they term “home guards,” locally recruited forces that provide static defense at the village or neighborhood level, and militias, larger forces aligned with the state that are typically raised from within an indigenous ethnic or tribal grouping.<sup>1</sup> These forces can serve a number of important purposes. At the most basic level, what Frank Kitson

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<sup>1</sup> Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi, “Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2009, p. 4.

terms “auxiliary forces” can carry out “less skilled functions, particularly those related to guarding.”<sup>2</sup> Counterinsurgency is a manpower-intensive activity. Ideally, the employment of what Hughes and Tripodi term “surrogates” frees up the police and military forces for offensive operations—in other words, these irregulars function as force-multipliers. But militias and other self-defense forces can serve broader political and operational objectives as well. Members of locally based forces will necessarily have an intimate knowledge of local conditions that surpasses that of government security forces. Individuals recruited into auxiliaries become less available as a recruitment pool for insurgents and thus help deny a critical resource to the armed opposition. Moreover, participation in surrogate forces can reinforce a population’s sense of common cause against the insurgency and, in so doing, foster popular allegiance to the incumbent government.

All the cases we examined reinforce the claims of counterinsurgency theory regarding the contribution of local self-defense forces. In these cases, auxiliaries helped to “tip” the conflict in favor of the counterinsurgents and, in so doing, paved the way for significant transitions.

At the same time, these cases suggest some major pitfalls regarding the employment of self-defense forces for counterinsurgency purposes. The first-order challenge involves questions of command and control. Auxiliaries operate in an administrative and political shadow zone. Some are organized, trained, equipped and paid by the state, while others (typically militias) are essentially self-organizing and self-sustaining. Although the intention behind the use of auxiliaries for counterinsurgency is to build popular allegiance to the state, this goal is not always achieved. Accountability remains a major challenge. Given the fluid nature of allegiance, and the often vague command-and-control arrangements, surrogate forces can commit serious human rights abuses with virtual impunity. In addition to the human cost, such abuses can create major political problems for the incumbent power and for any external power that is supporting the incumbent government.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Kitson, *Bunch of Five*, London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1977, p. 295.

If militia groups that have developed during the insurgency are not properly managed during the transition phase, serious problems can arise. In the case of El Salvador, for example, although a political settlement was reached with the insurgents to bring about transition to “normalcy,” tens of thousands of former combatants were not properly dealt with in terms of postwar employment, including possible integration into the security forces. Therefore, although the insurgency ended, lawlessness and violent criminal activity rose dramatically, to the point that more people were dying due to violent crime in the years immediately after the end of the insurgency than were being killed during the actual COIN effort.

In the Philippines, the growth of militia groups over a period of several decades has complicated the government’s efforts to transition from COIN to stability. In large part, this has been due to human rights abuses—overt war crimes in some cases—on the part of poorly supervised militia groups.

Anbar province is a current, and very important, example of this issue. The Sons of Iraq, the local Sunni self-defense forces that arose to defend communities against al Qaeda extremists, were a key element in moving the province from a difficult insurgency to transition. For several years, the U.S. military paid the wages of thousands of SoI fighters. Today, however, it appears that the Iraqi government in Baghdad is much less concerned with managing the SoI. Already there have been indications that disillusioned, unemployed—and armed—SoI fighters are becoming increasingly restless, possibly to the point of armed opposition to the Baghdad regime.

Colombia provides a good example of the management of militia groups as an insurgency starts to transition into the end game and stability. For years, self-defense groups popularly known as paramilitaries were responsible for murders and other criminal activity in the name of opposing the FARC. The excessive, heavy-handed, tactics of these groups obstructed the Colombian government’s effort to reestablish its authority in conflict zones and—because of accusations that these units operated in collaboration with sectors of the Colombian military—complicated the Bogota government’s relationship with its allies. The Uribe government devoted considerable attention to disarm-

ing these groups and providing alternative means of making a living to former members.

The handling of former militia members is related but distinct from the general challenges of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former combatants, which are discussed in more detail in the first volume of this study. The overall number of combatants must be drastically reduced (for budgetary reasons, if no other); in most cases, some of the insurgents will have to be integrated into the official security establishment (assuming the war did not end in a clear-cut victory). The important point is that, as an insurgency transitions toward stability, there is a clear need to manage the demobilization and reintegration of all of these groups, which are composed mostly of young men who all too often have no other skills than carrying a weapon—whether they did it on behalf of the government or the insurgents.

*Gaining cooperation from nearby nations to end or minimize support for the insurgents is essential.* Numerous studies of counterinsurgency have noted that if an insurgent group is receiving aid and sanctuary from a nation or nations adjacent to the country threatened by the insurgency, the COIN effort will be far more difficult, if not impossible. The cases we examined in this study reinforce that viewpoint. To facilitate the transition from COIN to a more stable situation, some degree of cooperation from adjacent countries is necessary. In some cases, the cooperation of nearby states could be as simple as their neutrality (including denial of sanctuary for the insurgents); in other cases, more overt assistance from nearby nations might be required, such as helping to monitor border areas, sharing the burden of dealing with refugees, denying political legitimacy to the insurgency, or providing economic assistance to the neighbor that is in the process of transition.

In Mali and Iraq, gaining the cooperation of neighboring nations was key to defeating the insurgents and starting the transition process. In Mali's case, obtaining cooperation from Algeria was critical, not only in preventing insurgents from using southern Algeria as a sanctuary, but also as a mediator and facilitator of the peace process.

Iraq is an even better example. Once Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia recognized that a destabilized, possibly radicalized, Iraq was certainly not in their best interests, they began to crack down on



insurgent activity emanating from within their borders. When combined with the serious missteps by al Qaeda in Anbar province and the improved COIN techniques that the U.S. forces were employing (notably, the improved understanding of the situation in Anbar; see the section above on developing an in-depth understanding of the participants in the insurgency), this was a decisive step in transitioning from a difficult counterinsurgency situation toward stability.

In the Philippines, the inability of the insurgents to obtain foreign sanctuary is certainly aiding the transition efforts of the government. Geography helps—the Philippines is a group of islands with no common land border with another nation. So, while the insurgents can try to hide and find sanctuary within remote areas of the Philippines, they do not have the ability to run across a border to avoid pursuit by government forces. Now that the entire Philippine government is conducting the COIN effort in a more integrated, interagency manner, the decreasing ability to find an internal sanctuary within the country is hurting the NPA.

On the other hand, in Colombia the single most important factor in the potential resurgence of the much-weakened FARC is its ability to use Venezuela as a sanctuary and source of support. As the chapter on Colombia made clear, there is no doubt that the Chavez government in Venezuela has provided considerable assistance to the FARC, including sanctuary. As the Colombian government strives to transition toward a sustainable peace and normalcy, the situation could deteriorate—again—if the FARC is able to regroup and rebuild inside Venezuela and possibly Ecuador. Despite occasional pronouncements from President Chavez that his government is not supporting the FARC, the evidence is overwhelming that the Venezuelans are indeed helping the leftist insurgents. Should that support continue, the Colombian government's COIN transition efforts could be gravely undermined.

Afghanistan provides an even starker case. As with the Russian experience in the 1980s, the present Afghan government and the coalition that is helping it are at somewhat of a loss as to what to do about the insurgent sanctuary in Pakistan. In the northwest provinces of Pakistan the Taliban (and al Qaeda) enjoy considerable support among the population. For various reasons, the Afghan government

and the coalition are unwilling to take dramatic action either to close the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (which would probably be an impossible task given the terrain and the sheer length of the border) or to attack insurgent strong points inside the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) other than occasional strikes by armed unmanned aerial vehicles. As of this writing in late 2009, the Pakistani government is starting to take a more direct approach toward the extremists in FATA. It remains to be seen how effective this effort will be and how long it will last.

Until and unless some solution for the Taliban's sanctuary inside northwest Pakistan can be devised, it is highly unlikely that the level of violence in southern Afghanistan will be reduced to the point that a meaningful transition effort can get under way. It is clear that at the present time the situation in eastern and southern Afghanistan is far from transitioning from COIN to lower intensity stability operations.

*There must be sufficient resources and time for meaningful transition efforts.* This issue came up in most of the cases. Even if the security portion of the COIN effort is doing well (i.e., the host nation's army and police have scored major successes against the insurgents and are generally able to protect the local population), the effort to transition from COIN to a more stable situation could still last years and require considerable resources. If resources are lacking or are used ineffectively to adequately address economic, political, and other nonsecurity issues and convince the disaffected elements in society to side with the government, the attempt to transition from COIN could be compromised.

Several examples came out in the case studies. In Anbar province, resources for development projects were insufficient for several years. Most people were impoverished and had little prospect for a better future. This situation, of course, contributed to support for the insurgents. Once the U.S. and Iraqi governments reprioritized their countrywide efforts and began to use their resources in Anbar more effectively, the economic situation of the local population started to improve and, together with improvements in the security situation and major errors by al Qaeda, contributed to the transition to stability.

In El Salvador, there was an initial lack of resources to make the economic improvements needed to convince the people that the government was taking actions to better their lives. The steps taken by the government were initially half-hearted due to resistance from the wealthy classes (for example, opposition to land reform) and lack of resources to make meaningful reforms.

The Philippines has, unfortunately, a long history of insurgencies ever since the last few years of Spanish rule in the late 19th century. In the post-independence period, from 1946 to today, the Philippine government has on several occasions thought that it had defeated the insurgents (who were usually communists, although some in the south were Muslim separatists). Although The Philippine Army, constabulary, and police have on several occasions gravely weakened the insurgents to the point that the insurgency appeared to be broken, the inability to sustain meaningful economic and political reforms has always provided a breeding ground for the eventual restart of the insurgency. While political corruption has been a large contributor to the inability to fully suppress insurgency in the Philippines, the lack of resources to institute, manage, and sustain needed economic reforms has been a major reason why insurgency has flared back over the decades. Today the Philippine government is hopeful that it can finally defeat the communist insurgency through an integrated intragovernmental effort. Whether this results in only short-term success, as has been the case in past insurgencies in the Philippines, or lasting stability will depend to a large extent on whether the Filipinos can muster the resources to sustain long-term reforms.

Importantly, the need for sufficient resources (and time) during the transition to stability also means that there must be a proper allocation and correct use of those resources. Every case in this study includes glaring examples of misapplication of resources, waste through corruption, and well-intended projects that were often the wrong thing in the wrong place. As was highlighted above, there is a critical need to develop an in-depth understanding of the insurgency and the needs and wants of the local population. This is related directly to the requirement to properly and judiciously apply resources, over time, to

change the conditions of the population, thus correcting problems that may have been key to the rise of the insurgency in the first place.

## **Insights and Implications for U.S. Policy in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Beyond**

The issues raised in the previous section can apply to the host nation, other countries (such as the United States or the UK) that are attempting to assist the host nation's COIN effort, or both. There are, however, some insights derived from the cases that apply primarily to "external participants," such as the United States. Ideally, a counterinsurgency effort should be overwhelmingly in the control of the host nation that is threatened by the insurgency. Although other countries can offer important help, it is ultimately the effectiveness and legitimacy of their own governments that will cause the local population to side either with that government—or with the insurgents. In situations where the host nation's government and its security forces are so weak that considerable direct involvement by foreign forces is needed, the goal should be to strengthen the COIN capacity of the host nation as rapidly as possible and pass most of the effort to it as soon as it is capable of performing adequately.

That said, there are some issues that primarily apply to "outside" parties—such as the United States. Several of these are highlighted below.

### **Intelligence Support to the Host Nation**

In several of the cases, intelligence support to the host nation was a key capability provided by outside external powers. In the broadest terms, modes of intelligence collection fall into two categories: Technical intelligence collection includes the interception of electronic communications, telemetry from missile tests, and electromagnetic emanations from military equipment such as radar transmitters (known collectively as signals intelligence, or SIGINT) and the gathering of photographic imagery. Human intelligence collection (HUMINT) is, in essence, the use of agents by an intelligence organization to col-

lect information. As demonstrated in the cases of El Salvador, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Colombia, the United States provided important technical intelligence to host nation governments and their security forces that often gave them significant advantages over the insurgents. This can, of course, help improve the security situation, thus facilitating the transition from COIN to a more stable, less violent situation.

In general terms, HUMINT should be an area where the host nation's security forces have an advantage over foreign forces—at least in theory. The incumbent's security forces are, after all, operating among their own people, and it seems unlikely that foreign forces would ever be able to develop the same degree of knowledge and detailed cultural insights as the local forces will. That said, it is certainly the case that in many instances the incumbent power badly misreads the nature, scope, and motivations of armed opposition groups. Typically, insurgents (particularly in the early stages of a given conflict) are dismissed as mere “bandits,” “criminals,” or “terrorists.” This may make good sense at the political level, since labeling the armed opposition as something other than criminal may provide them with a measure of legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> But such labeling is seldom the result of a prudent political calculation. More often, it reflects a profound lack of understanding of the insurgent challenge. Indeed, the emergence of a full-blown insurgency is in part a product of the incumbent's inability and unwillingness to understand and take appropriate steps to thwart its growth and development.<sup>4</sup> This appears to have been the case in Iraq in 2003–2004, when the incumbent regime (effectively the United States, in this instance) branded the insurgents as mere malcontents and Baathist “dead-enders.”<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, some of the most threatened regimes are often in a state of self-denial. Acknowledging the full scope of an insurgent challenge would

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this point, see Philip Deery, “The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948–52,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 2, June 2003, pp. 231–247.

<sup>4</sup> For more on thwarting “proto-insurgencies,” see Daniel Byman, *Understanding Proto-Insurgencies*, *RAND Counterinsurgency Study, Paper 3*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, OP-178-OSD, 2007, particularly pp. 21–30.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, remarks delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Veterans of Foreign Wars, San Antonio, Tex., Monday, August 25, 2003.

be a tacit (or perhaps even explicit) acknowledgment that the regime in question is facing a profound crisis that it is unable or unwilling to prevent, and for which it may be deemed responsible. Such an admission could further erode whatever standing and legitimacy the incumbent regime possessed.

This all suggests that threatened “host nations” may not always be the most competent or reliable intelligence partners. The U.S. government is likely to be tempted to rely heavily on intelligence provided by the so-called “liaison services” of threatened regimes. Politically, such reliance can help reinforce the notion that the threatened government is a full counterinsurgency partner; in economic terms, depending on the host nation for intelligence on the insurgency is likely to be far cheaper than mounting “unilateral” U.S. collection operations. But for the reasons suggested above, such dependency can have potentially dangerous consequences for U.S. policy. Of course, the United States can ill-afford to ignore intelligence provided by a supported government. However, such intelligence (as with any intelligence provided by another government) must be evaluated and considered along with other sources of information, including unilateral U.S. sources.

### **Managing Militias Toward the End Game**

American policymakers must be alert to the challenges surrounding the use of militia forces. Self-defense units “clearly need support, or else the guerrillas will overwhelm them one village at a time,” as Anthony James Jones concludes.<sup>6</sup> But in many instances, host nations underequip, undertrain, and underpay—and fail to protect—auxiliary forces such as militia groups. The incumbent government is often reluctant to provide modern arms to villagers, fearing that such weapons will “bleed out” and find their way into insurgent hands. Conventional military forces typically view self-defense militia forces with disdain and as a distraction from the “real business” of fighting guerrillas. Conventional forces also tend to regard militias as potential “little soldiers” and as low-cost light infantrymen who should be deployed to

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony James Jones, *Resisting Rebellion; The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency*, Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004, p. 121.

fight insurgents rather than guard villages.<sup>7</sup> Recognizing their potential utility as a counterinsurgency instrument, insurgents will typically make major efforts to infiltrate and otherwise disrupt auxiliary units. Insurgents are often successful in this regard—and this success serves to reinforce suspicions that surrogate forces are unreliable.

In addition to understanding how self-defense forces can be neglected and misused by the host nation, US policymakers need to ask three questions before beginning any program of support to militias and home guards: (1) How will these forces contribute to broader political and military objectives? (2) How will they be organized, trained, equipped, and resourced, and by whom? (3) As the insurgency starts to transition toward stability, what is the “end game” plan for militia groups (i.e. will they be integrated into the host nation’s police and military, will they be “paid off” with money or jobs, etc). The answers to these questions are not usually self-evident early in an insurgency. Local conditions, culture, resources, and the nature of the insurgency should play a major part in determining the roles, missions, and functions of the auxiliaries. These factors should also shape the program for raising, training, and sustaining these forces.

U.S. policymakers need to consider how such forces might upset local power balances in ways that undercut wider counterinsurgency objectives. For example, “[i]n states whose societies are divided by ethnic, racial, tribal or confessional strife, the use of surrogates from one particular group . . . can exacerbate internal tensions and encourage civil war,” as Hughes and Tripodi have observed.<sup>8</sup> Iraq and Afghanistan clearly fit these criteria, and so any program of support to auxiliary forces in those countries should be carefully crafted to avoid aggravating communal tensions and grievances. Finally, the issue of the post-conflict role of self-defense forces (if any) requires careful consideration, ideally during early stages of planning and execution. As cases such as El Salvador demonstrate, the failure to properly plan and implement

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<sup>7</sup> William Rosenau, *“Low-Cost Trigger Pullers”: The Politics of Policing in the Context of Contemporary “State Building” and Counterinsurgency*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, WR-620-USCA, 2008, pp. 9–13.

<sup>8</sup> Hughes and Tripodi, “Anatomy of a Surrogate,” p. 25.

disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) can undercut the prospects for long-term peace and security. Given the prominent role played by auxiliaries in many counterinsurgency campaigns, it is essential that these forces be included in any comprehensive program of DDR.

### **Providing the Resources and Management Structure for a Protracted Transition Phase**

In all of the cases that had either successfully transitioned from COIN to stability (El Salvador) or were apparently well along in that process (Colombia, Iraq, the Philippines), the transition period lasted for years. The local government's resources might be greatly strained following a multiyear COIN effort. For the transition period to be truly successful, economic, political, and other reforms will usually need to be carried through to completion. A considerable portion of these resources might have to come from the external power(s) that were assisting the incumbent government during the COIN phase.

Not only is the sheer level of resources an issue, the management of their delivery is also critical for the external power. As COIN transitions toward stability, there will probably be a change in roles and responsibility between, for example, the Department of Defense and the Department of State as the long-term assistance effort to ensure success unfolds. Volume I of this study examines this issue in greater detail, but we highlight it here because it became apparent in some of the cases we examined.

For the United States, the implications are clear. As an insurgency begins to transition to stability, U.S. policymakers should understand that despite the fact that an important corner has been turned in combating the insurgency, the transition period could last for years. The country that the United States has been helping might be gravely weakened by the time the transition phase begins. Therefore, there could be a need for continuing assistance for a considerable amount of time into the future.





## Indicators of Transition

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What are the key indicators that an insurgency is transitioning toward stability? Four broad categories of metrics seem particularly appropriate: (1) popular perceptions of security; (2) insurgent operations; (3) economics; and (4) intelligence.

1. Popular perceptions of security
  - Increasingly favorable views on personal safety and on the government’s capabilities to protect the population
  - Growing rates of security force enlistment (and reenlistment)
  - Increasing local political engagement, e.g., participation in city councils, political parties, provision of public services
  - Growing numbers of returnees to conflict area
  - Rates of return to the country by the political and economic elite (particularly significant).
2. Insurgent operations
  - A significant drop in “open” operations—e.g., public displays, posters and other propaganda, overt recruitment
  - Diminishing control of the population by insurgents
  - Shrinking scale of operations—e.g., cell-size rather than battalion-size
  - Types of operations—e.g., growing frequency of attacks on “soft” civilian targets versus “hard” security force targets
  - Fewer areas under insurgent control
  - Improved ratio of government-initiated attacks, as opposed to insurgent control of operational tempo.

3. Economics

- Growth of private-sector investment. Ultimately this indicator may be more significant than GDP or public-sector spending, because individuals are risking their own funds
- Commercial economic activity, e.g., new housing, shops
- Intercity commerce. Are business owners (and drivers) willing to travel over significant distances? Are people willing to travel to markets?

4. Intelligence

- More high-quality, actionable intelligence provided by the local population, e.g., information on activities of the insurgent underground, IEDs, weapons caches.

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NOTE: All CIA World Factbook maps may be found at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

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