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**CORDS: DRAWING LESSONS FROM THE AMERICAN COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH  
IN THE VIETNAM WAR**

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## **Abstract**

During the Vietnam War, the United States adopted a comprehensive approach in confronting the Viet Cong insurgency. Through an organisation known as CORDS (Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support), a civilian-military hybrid, the US consolidated the pacification efforts of multiple civilian agencies and military units, placing it within the military chain of command. CORDS achieved an unprecedented level of integration of US and South Vietnamese efforts towards the pacification of the countryside, largely nullifying the effectiveness of the communist insurgency in the overall conflict.

Five key lessons can be derived from the CORDS experience: unity of effort, the importance of devising an organisation appropriate to the security challenge, the value of civilian leadership, the necessity of political will to bring forth the unity of effort, and the need for governance assistance for the target nation.

In light of the CORDS lessons, Canada's efforts in Afghanistan continue to fall short. Canada has not achieved unity of effort on security and development assistance, these two key elements remaining largely divorced from each other. Until the necessary political will to bridge this gap comes forth, Canada will not achieve the synergy that a proper comprehensive approach could achieve.

## Introduction

As a participant in the Afghanistan Compact,<sup>1</sup> Canada has committed to assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in its rebuilding effort. The Government of Canada has adopted a comprehensive approach<sup>2</sup> to providing this assistance, seeking to coordinate all the relevant elements of national power in order to maximise the impact of the resources devoted. In this case the effect sought is that the Afghans will succeed in rebuilding their country “as a stable, democratic and self-sufficient society.”<sup>3</sup> To this end Canada has contributed over 2,500 military personnel to provide security in the province of Kandahar, significant development assistance (more than \$179 million in fiscal year 2006-2007)<sup>4</sup>, and support from other Government departments, such as the RCMP and Corrections Canada.

Integrating these different departments of the federal government into a coherent strategy has proven to be a challenge. The Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan pointedly remarked on the “inadequate coordination between military and civilian programs for security, stabilization, reconstruction and development.”<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> “The Afghanistan Compact,” available from [http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/contrib\\_and-en.asp](http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/contrib_and-en.asp); Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Government has adopted the term “3D” because of the emphasis on development, defence and diplomacy. Other common terms for this approach are “Whole-of-Government,” integrated and “effects-based,” amongst others. The term “comprehensive” will be used in this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada, “Canada’s Approach in Afghanistan,” <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/mission-en.asp>; Internet, accessed 13 February 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Canadian International Development Agency, “Funding: Canada’s Commitment to Afghanistan,” <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-12514411-QD6>; Internet; accessed 12 February 2008.

<sup>5</sup> “Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan,” 13, available from <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/menu-en.asp>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

reviewing the current comprehensive approach, a review of relevant historical precedent may provide some guidance in identifying areas for improvements.

One such historical precedent for a comprehensive approach in time of war is CORDS, short for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support. Initiated by the United States in May 1967 during the Vietnam War, CORDS was a truly unique organisation: a civilian-military hybrid that was directly responsible for virtually all US government efforts towards the pacification<sup>6</sup> of the South Vietnamese countryside. CORDS represented a seldom seen example of unity of effort in a largely successful counter-insurgency campaign.

This essay will demonstrate that Canada's recent evolution in developing an integrated approach in Afghanistan has many parallels with the US progression in the early stages of the Vietnam War. Canada has still not achieved the level of integration that proved successful with the CORDS strategy. This essay will review the circumstances of the Viet Cong insurgency and the early efforts to achieve a comprehensive approach to pacification. This will be followed by a description of the CORDS organisation, the main lessons to be drawn from this approach, and discuss some parallels with the current Canadian approach in Afghanistan.

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<sup>6</sup> US agencies generally used the term 'pacification' to refer to the strategy of reduction and eventual elimination of communist insurrection and subversion in the South Vietnamese countryside. This is the context in which this expression will be used in this essay.

## **CORDS and the US Pacification Strategy**

### **The Viet Cong Insurgency and South Vietnam**

The First Indochina War formally ended in July 1954, with France formally conceding at the Geneva Conference to the dissolution of its former colony and the formation of three new countries: Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference further stipulated that Vietnam would be separated into a northern and a southern zone, with national elections to be held two years later, in July 1956. These elections would bring a formal end to the temporary division.<sup>7</sup> The northern region became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The southern zone eventually became the Republic of Vietnam, headed by President Ngo Dinh Diem.<sup>8</sup> In July 1956, President Diem cancelled the nationwide elections intended to pave the way for reunification, arguing that they would not be sufficiently free.<sup>9</sup>

North Vietnam countered by directing communist sympathisers in South Vietnam to begin organising armed companies in October 1957. In 1959, faced with repressive measures from the South Vietnam government, the communist insurgents, later known as Viet Cong, began a limited “armed struggle” in the South.<sup>10</sup> The National Liberation Front (NLF) was established in December 1960, providing an umbrella organisation under North Vietnamese control to unify all elements opposed to the regime of President

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<sup>7</sup> United States, Department of State, *The Department of State Bulletin*, Vol XXXI, No. 788 (2 August 1954): 162-164.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 223.

<sup>9</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam...*, 224.

<sup>10</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam...*, 237-238.

Diem.<sup>11</sup> The insurgency would continue to grow and threaten the survival of the Republic of Vietnam.

Politically, the NLF pursued the unequivocal goal of displacing the South Vietnam regime and establishing itself as the *de facto* government. NLF operatives aggressively sought to achieve their goal by setting up local councils within hamlets, recruiting new adherents and working with the existing village leadership. The NLF also sought to ruthlessly remove the central government presence by forcing local officials to confess to their “crimes”, banishing popular officials or publicly executing detested ones.<sup>12</sup> In this way the NLF would gradually put in place its own political infrastructure, ensuring continued indoctrination, taxation and recruitment.

The NLF also built up a military wing. Full-time regulars were formed into regiments and divisions, and would take on the South Vietnamese Army. Part-time forces would operate at the local level in platoons, squads or even small cells. Finally, guerrillas would operate in a wide-ranging fashion, supporting main units on their assaults, or assisting local forces in eliminating or resisting government army personnel in the villages and hamlets. The mutually supporting fashion in which these three forces operated posed an enormous challenge to the Government of South Vietnam.<sup>13</sup>

The Republic of Vietnam was not up to this challenge. In 1954 its government was weak, with little bureaucracy, no army to speak of, and minimal presence outside of

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<sup>11</sup> Richard A. Hunt, *Pacification: The American Struggle for Vietnam's Hearts and Minds* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1995), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 6-7.

South Vietnam's cities and large towns.<sup>14</sup> President Diem's inability to develop the armed forces to counter the NLF threat, his failure to broaden his government and his growing unpopularity helped expedite his doom.<sup>15</sup> His government was overthrown in 1963, ushering in a period of political instability.

The United States was thus confronted with a dual challenge: a determined communist insurgency on the one hand, a weak and unstable ally on the other. The United States eventually recognised that the root causes of the insurgency had to be addressed, or South Vietnam would not survive. The next section details some of the early efforts.

### **Early Attempts at a Comprehensive Approach**

Up until the early days of the Kennedy administration<sup>16</sup>, the US government had concentrated its advisory efforts in South Vietnam on countering the conventional threat. In January 1962 an ad hoc special group for counterinsurgency was formed, composed of the Secretaries of State and Defence, and the heads of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the United States Information Agency (USIA), the National Security Council and the Agency for International Development (AID).<sup>17</sup> The purpose was to foster an interagency process to productively deal with insurgencies. Although the committee generated some useful recommendations it did not succeed in advancing a comprehensive approach. In March 1962 the US Ambassador to South Vietnam formed an Inter-Agency

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<sup>13</sup> Hung P Nguyen, "Communist Offensive Strategy and the Defense of South Vietnam" in *Assessing the Vietnam War: A Collection from the Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, edited by Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown, 101-121 (New York: Pergammon-Brassey's, 1987), 104.

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Karnow, *Vietnam...*, 277.

<sup>16</sup> The administration was headed by John Fitzgerald Kennedy, US President from January 1961 to November 1963.



Committee for Province Rehabilitation, bringing together the recently formed Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) and other agencies operating in that country.<sup>18</sup>

Again no central manager was appointed and little progress was accomplished.

In 1964 the new fledgling government of South Vietnam brought forth the *Hop Tac* (“Victory”) program, intended to be “a balanced civil-military effort,”<sup>19</sup> combined with a joint Vietnamese-US oversight committee. Unfortunately this more promising approach did not provide encouraging results through 1964 and 1965 due to differences between the two governments and the lack of central direction.<sup>20</sup>

In July 1964, the US Ambassador formed a Mission Council, “comprising the ambassador, his deputy, the embassy’s political and economic counsellors, and the heads of other American agencies, including the military commander...”<sup>21</sup> Meeting weekly, the council coordinated programs, although each agency head was allowed to appeal any decision to superiors in Washington, thus ensuring that challenging policies would not be implemented. In the spring of 1965, a single manager was appointed to oversee American programs in three Vietnamese provinces. Once again, agencies jealously guarded their areas of concern, dooming effective coordination. The embassy terminated the experiment in September 1965, finding the results inconclusive.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder, Co: Westview Press, 1986), 117.

<sup>21</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 65.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

The interest in pacification receded temporarily with the deployment of US combat troops in 1965. US formations intervened forcefully against the NLF conventional forces, staving off the seemingly imminent defeat of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN).<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, there was growing recognition within the Johnson Administration<sup>24</sup> and the military hierarchy that pacification required greater resources and centralised management.

This realisation led to a flurry of efforts in 1966 and 1967. In early 1966 President Johnson made two key appointments: the Deputy Ambassador to South Vietnam became the field coordinator for American support programs in February 1966,<sup>25</sup> whilst a “Special Assistant for Peaceful Construction in Vietnam”, working directly for the President, was appointed in March 1966.<sup>26</sup> A report prepared by the Special Assistant contended that pacification needed three key ingredients to succeed, namely: security in Vietnamese rural areas, involvement of the peasantry in breaking the hold of the NLF, and finally the resources to ensure success.<sup>27</sup> At this point the Commander of MACV stated that his headquarters would accept responsibility for pacification if ordered.<sup>28</sup> Having decided to give the civilian agencies one more chance to improve their overall

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<sup>23</sup> Dale Andrade and Lieutenant Colonel James H. Willbanks, “CORDS/Phoenix: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Vietnam for the Future,” *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 10.

<sup>24</sup> Lyndon Baynes Johnson became US president upon the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963. He was elected in 1964 and served until January 1969.

<sup>25</sup> Komer, *Bureaucracy at War...*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Frank L. Jones, “Blowtorch: Robert Komer and the Making of Vietnam Pacification Policy,” *Parameters* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 106.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, “Blowtorch...”, 110.

coordination, President Johnson created the Office of Civil Operations (OCO) in November 1966, to be headed by the Deputy Ambassador. This organisation centralised the efforts of civilian agencies involved with pacification in South Vietnam, although individual agencies still retained a degree of autonomy, such as in allocating funding.<sup>29</sup>

President Johnson nevertheless remained convinced that the creation of a single chain of command for all pacification activities was imperative, and that it should be placed within MACV. This would ensure that all pacification strategies, military and civilian would be fully integrated and provided with plentiful resources. In May 1967, barely six months after the creation of OCO, President Johnson established a new entity, Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, to provide the centralised direction he felt was essential.<sup>30</sup> The next section will examine the unique attributes of CORDS which were instrumental in revitalising the pacification campaign.

### **The Birth of CORDS: Characteristics of a Comprehensive Pacification Strategy**

The reorganisation placed all pacification efforts firmly within the military chain of command. The civilian head of CORDS was made a deputy to the Commander of MACV with full ambassadorial status, granting him the equivalent rank of Lieutenant-General. Each of the four US Corps Commanders was also assigned a civilian deputy for CORDS to oversee pacification efforts within the Corps area of responsibility. Senior advisers were assigned to the South Vietnamese military chiefs at the provincial and district levels. These advisers also formed part of the CORDS organisation, managing all

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<sup>28</sup> Andrade and Willbanks, "CORDS/ Phoenix...", 13.

<sup>29</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 82-83.

<sup>30</sup> Andrade and Willbanks, "CORDS/ Phoenix...", 14.

pacification efforts at their levels; they were either civilian or military, depending on the level of security in their area. CORDS achieved unprecedented integration of military and civilian personnel.<sup>31</sup>

Pacification required two key elements to be successful. Firstly, Vietnamese villagers had to be provided with security from insurgent activities and reprisals; secondly, these same villagers were to be given a stake in the existing political order through civic actions and reforms.<sup>32</sup> Addressing these key requirements would ensure that the US and South Vietnam were winning the “heart and minds” of the local population. CORDS’s efforts reflected these two priorities of security and development.

To improve security, CORDS developed and strengthened paramilitary security forces, known as the Regional Forces and Popular Forces (RF/PF). These units bore a disproportionate share of the military effort against the NLF, whilst only receiving paltry support in terms of supply, armaments and training.<sup>33</sup> CORDS created Mobile Advisory Teams intended to provide training in basic tactics as well as on the use of new weapons, such as M-16s to replace their WW II rifles. The RF/PF, despite continued shortcomings, proved increasingly effective in improving security throughout the countryside.<sup>34</sup>

The other main priority for CORDS was to help win the allegiance of South Vietnamese villagers to the government of the Republic of Vietnam. The six key

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<sup>31</sup> “Civilians wrote the performance reports of their military subordinates, and Army officers evaluated the Foreign Service officers under them.” From Hunt, *Pacification...*, 90.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 215-216.

<sup>33</sup> Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 220.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

divisions within the CORDS central staff help illustrate the full range of activities. They were: *Chieu Hoi* (“Open Arms” in Vietnamese), intended to induce current members of the NLF to defect and provide them with re-education and re-training; New Life, aimed at providing rural development and improvements; Revolutionary Development Cadre, aimed at training young South Vietnamese personnel to establish the government’s presence in all hamlets; Refugees, to assist in re-settling civilians displaced by military operations; Psychological Operations; and Public Safety, with its emphasis on developing a police force capable of earning the population’s respect while maintaining security in the absence of regular army formations.<sup>35</sup>

CORDS thus provided an unprecedented coordination of programs previously administered by AID (New Life, refugees, National Police and *Chieu Hoi*), the CIA (Revolutionary Development cadre), MACV (US Army civil affairs companies and the civic action program), and the Joint US Public Affairs Office (Psychological Operations).<sup>36</sup> Centralisation within a *military* chain of command brought additional benefits, most important being access to military personnel and greater resources. As an example, the advisory effort in pacification went from 1,000 advisers in early 1966 to 7,601 advisers in September 1969, 6,464 being military personnel. In terms of resources, expenditures on pacification rose from \$582M in 1966 to \$1,500M in 1970. The augmented effort drove a 100% increase in the number of personnel in the National Police and a 50% increase for the RF/PF in 4 years.<sup>37</sup> Finally, placing CORDS within

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<sup>35</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 92-93.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>37</sup> Andrade and Willbanks, “CORDS/ Phoenix...”, 16.

the military chain of command also ensured that pacification was closely aligned with the overall strategy to defeat the challenge posed by the NLF, occupying an equal place alongside conventional operations, as per the “one war” approach espoused by the US in the latter stages of the Vietnamese conflict.<sup>38</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, CORDS can be considered a qualified success. By 1972, the NLF insurgency had been practically eliminated in large portions of South Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> North Vietnam relied on a large-scale invasion using conventional forces to finally subdue South Vietnam, with little emphasis on the NLF.<sup>40</sup> But a program such as CORDS had one major limitation: it could not substitute itself for the government of South Vietnam. In the end, CORDS was unable to

...compensate for the flawed execution of pacification plans and programs [by the South Vietnamese government], the ubiquitous corruption, and the failure of the South Vietnamese government to build a broad, self-sustaining political base.<sup>41</sup>

From the successes and failures of CORDS can be derived key lessons for a successful counter-insurgency strategy.

### **Key Lessons from CORDS**

In examining the effectiveness of the CORDS comprehensive approach to pacification, five principal points stand out.

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999), 18.

<sup>39</sup> Sorley, *A Better War...*, 305.

<sup>40</sup> Major Ross Coffey, , “Revisiting CORDS: The Need for Unity of Effort to Secure Victory in Iraq,” *Military Review* 86, no. 2 (March-April 2006): 31.

<sup>41</sup> Hunt,

Firstly, the critical importance of unity of effort. Unity of effort is essential in ensuring that all elements of national power are harnessed. Earlier efforts that had focussed on increased coordination between civilian agencies had eventually failed. One obvious reason is that project funding and administrative processes still followed normal peacetime procedures, whose slow pace could not adapt to wartime emergencies.<sup>42</sup> But the main impediment derived from the very nature of civilian government agencies. These agencies responded to war in a manner consistent with their established procedures and in-house cultures; in other words, they “played out their institutional repertoire.”<sup>43</sup> Establishing unity of effort within a military chain of command ensured that civilian agencies reacted rapidly to the exigencies of an ongoing conflict, as well as integrating their contribution within the overall strategy.

Secondly, a corollary from the previous point is that CORDS was a task-tailored entity. CORDS developed specific structures and arrangements to address the requirements of pacification in the Vietnam War. This adaptability was further reflected at provincial and district level, where the size and composition of the advisory teams depended on the specific area requirements in terms of development, and the local security characteristics. Thus whereas the *principles* driving CORDS strategies deserve study, its organisation should only be taken as a guide, to be adapted to governing circumstances.

Thirdly, civilian leadership for this unique organisation proved extremely important. Although civilian personnel were always a minority within the entire CORDS organisation, civilians always occupied the key positions of Deputy for CORDS at both

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<sup>42</sup> Komer, *Bureaucracy at War...*, 64.

national and Corps-level Headquarters. This important distinction reassured civilian personnel and contributing agencies that the overall effort had not become excessively militarised.<sup>44</sup>

The fourth point is that determined political will is essential in overcoming bureaucratic inertia for the development of a novel organisation. In the case of CORDS President Johnson himself took a sustained interest in the issue of pacification and forced several federal agencies to submit to a centralised organisation in a theatre of war. Without this determined leadership the Vietnam pacification effort would have continued to depend on the successes and failures of coordinating committees and *ad hoc* bodies.

The final point is that an organisation such as CORDS can only have a limited impact on a sovereign ally. The US effort in Vietnam was, from beginning to end, an *advisory* one. The US government always emphasised the independence of South Vietnam, refusing to seriously contemplate a unified and integrated military chain of command for American and South Vietnamese forces. The success of the US intervention in Vietnam thus ultimately rested on the ability of the South Vietnamese government to sustain itself as a legitimate and functioning entity. That this government eventually foundered was a stark reminder of the limits of a comprehensive approach, which sometimes cannot be overcome by massive resources.

The next part of this essay will examine Canada's current strategy in confronting an insurgency in southern Afghanistan and the potential applicability of lessons derived from the CORDS experience.

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Hunt, *Pacification...*, 88-89.



## Canada in Afghanistan

### The Insurgent Challenge

The security challenge confronting Canada in Kandahar is both markedly different and strikingly similar to the Viet Cong operations in South Vietnam of the 1960s and 1970s.

The main difference lies in the centralisation of the armed struggle. The NLF, under North Vietnamese direction, provided clear and unequivocal leadership to the drive to unite North and South Vietnam under communist rule. The Afghan insurgency is far more diffuse, comprising remnants from the former Taliban regime, Pashtun tribesmen angered by their tribe's seeming marginalisation, drug traffickers and former warlords.<sup>45</sup> Other elements involved in the insurgency are criminals, Afghans disaffected by the corruption endemic in Kandahar and Kabul, as well as men being paid by the Taliban to take up arms.<sup>46</sup> This variety of elements also bespeaks a variety of motivations, in sharp contrast to the ideological unity that underlined the NLF's drive for power.

In furthering their resistance, the Afghan insurgents have followed tactics used by the NLF, namely to install their own political infrastructure at the local level, whilst ruthlessly eliminating that of the central government. Afghan insurgents, specifically the Taliban, resort to "intimidation, such as posting "night letter" leaflets on doors, beheading schoolteachers, and torching schools...."<sup>47</sup> The intent is also to marginalise alternative leadership, such as "...the moderate mullahs, the local Afghan leaders who are

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<sup>45</sup> Janice Gross Stein and Eugene Lang, *The Unexpected War: Canada in Kandahar* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 217.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan: the war so far* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007), 169.

<sup>47</sup> Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan...*, 170.

most difficult to corrupt...”<sup>48</sup> This process of marginalisation also extends to the economic sphere, where the Taliban have forced local farmers to grow opium as opposed to other crops, further detaching these farmers from the mainstream economy and the legal government.<sup>49</sup>

Canada is thus confronted with a shadowy uprising, whose composition fluctuates and

Kandahar Airfield. The largest element of JTF-Afg is a mechanised Battle Group, whose primary mission is the provision of security in Kandahar province. Another key element in the provision of security is the Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (OMLT). The OMLT has two main tasks. Firstly, developing Kandahar elements of the fledgling Afghanistan National Army (ANA) in order to gradually improve operational capabilities and supply liaison with other NATO forces on combined missions. Secondly, the OMLT provides mentoring to local Afghan National Police (ANP) detachments, in order to accelerate their training and assist in their daily tasks. JTF-Afg is also responsible for the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT). The KPRT represents a microcosm of the “3D” approach, as it is constituted of a large military component with additional personnel from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Corrections Canada, and civilian law enforcement agents under the direction of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) personnel. The KPRT’s role is to foster stability with medium- and long-term development as well as through quick impact projects (QIPs).<sup>53,54</sup> KPRT personnel also assist in providing police training and strengthening local governance. Funding for KPRT projects is provided by CIDA, DFAIT and JTF-Afg Contingency Funds.<sup>55</sup> Finally, Joint Task Force Afghanistan has the Strategic Advisory Team (SAT), a group of

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<sup>53</sup> Canadian Expeditionary Force Command, “Backgrounder: Rotation 5 of Operation ATHENA,” [http://www.cefcom.forces.gc.ca/site/nr-sp/view\\_news\\_e.asp?id=2596](http://www.cefcom.forces.gc.ca/site/nr-sp/view_news_e.asp?id=2596); Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>54</sup> Protecting Canadians – Rebuilding Afghanistan, “The Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team,” <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/kprt-en.asp>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Gordon Smith, *Canada in Afghanistan: Is it Working?* (Calgary: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, 2007), 17-18.

senior military officers located in Kabul, whose mission is to assist various Afghan government ministries in developing more effective governance and strategies. The annual cost of the Defence portion of “3D” is estimated at \$1.2 billion dollars.<sup>56</sup>

*Development.* CIDA has been responsible for advancing Canadian-funded development in Afghanistan. The Canadian Government has pledged to invest \$1.2 billion in the decade following 2001, with \$179 million spent in fiscal year 2006/2007.<sup>57</sup> Of that \$179 million, nearly \$141 million was devoted to national programs, of which there are three components. The first component is for community-based development, helping to fund the Afghan government’s National Solidarity Fund as well as supporting the World Food Program and the United Nations Development Program. The second component is for democratic development and effective governance, mostly by funding the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, established to help support Afghanistan’s representative government. The third component supports programs aimed at increasing the role of women in society, with the main element being micro-financing intended to assist women in starting small businesses. The remaining \$37 million was devoted to addressing basic human needs in Kandahar, with over \$15 million budgeted for the proposed Spin Boldak-Kandahar highway.<sup>58</sup> Less than \$5 million was devoted to projects to be managed by the KPRT, although CIDA personnel

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<sup>56</sup> Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War...*, 187.

<sup>57</sup> Canadian International Development Agency, “Funding: Canada’s Commitment to Afghanistan,” <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/JUD-12514411-QD6>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Canadian International Development Agency, “Fiscal Year 2006-2007: Nationwide Disbursements”, <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/NAT-13193133-K2S#kandahar>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

attached to the KPRT will have some oversight on proposed expenditures for Kandahar province.

*Diplomacy.* DFAIT has played a more subordinate role within Afghanistan itself. The Canadian Embassy in Kabul has endeavoured to support defence and development efforts in Afghanistan. Canadian diplomats have sought to provide similar support within the United Nations, NATO and the G8.<sup>59</sup> A senior DFAIT official, Mr David Mulroney, was appointed in 2007 to head the Afghan Task Force, whose role was to ensure improved coordination on the Afghanistan file across all Canadian Government departments. Mr Mulroney sent an experienced diplomat to Kandahar to serve as a “senior civilian coordinator” to improve coordination within the province.<sup>60</sup>

### **Developments following the Release of Report from the Independent Panel on Canada’s Future Role in Afghanistan**

With the publication of the Independent Panel’s report in January 2008, Prime Minister Harper announced the formation of a Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan, constituted to review any issues relevant to the Canadian mission. The Committee will be chaired by the Minister of International Trade, and will consist of the Ministers of National Defence, Public Safety, International Cooperation and Foreign Affairs.

Further, the Afghanistan Task Force was moved to the Privy Council Office, with Mr Mulroney remaining at its head as Deputy Minister.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Protecting Canadians – Rebuilding Afghanistan, “Canada-Afghanistan Relations,” <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/relations-en.asp>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War...*, 282.

## Comparing Key CORDS Lessons with the Canadian Comprehensive Approach

The previous examination of CORDS had highlighted five key lessons from its brief history. Comparing these lessons with the current Canadian approach will highlight where it may still be falling short:

*Unity of Effort.* The CORDS organisation had focussed on two vital elements in containing an insurgency: firstly, providing security to the local population, and secondly, giving the local population a stake in the existing order through governance and development. JTF-Afg appears to provide both these elements, with OMLT addressing the long-term security concerns through mentoring of the ANA and ANP, whilst the KPRT seeks to redress the backwardness of the infrastructure and the governance deficit at the provincial level. Unfortunately, whereas in South Vietnam CORDS also centralised all development activities formerly provided by US AID, only a very small proportion of CIDA expenditures are going through the KPRT. Not only have CIDA expenditures been channelled through Afghan and international agencies, they have also focussed on longer term projects.<sup>62</sup>

The failure to reprioritise CIDA funds to assist in containing the insurgency in Kandahar province is compounded by the seeming inability of Canadian military officers and development officials to even understand one another. The military priority has been to concentrate on containing the insurgency through increased security and reconstruction

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<sup>61</sup> Protecting Canadians – Rebuilding Afghanistan, “8 February 2008 News Release: Prime Minister announces decisive action on Afghanistan Panel recommendations,” [http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/nr\\_2008\\_02\\_08-en.asp](http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/nr_2008_02_08-en.asp); Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>62</sup> “CIDA simply does not do “quick impact reconstruction”, projects that are visible and that are likely to have an impact on Afghan “hearts and minds.” It does not help villagers to dig a well or repair a road or build a school. These kinds of projects are not within its mandate, CIDA officials insist.” From Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War...*, 271.

of infrastructure. Development officials have focused on a longer term strategy to build up and legitimise the Afghan state.<sup>63</sup> Unity of effort is essential to reconcile these differences and ensure that a common strategy is followed by all elements of the Canadian Government. The newly established Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan and the Afghanistan Task Force may yet force this long-overdue realignment; but it has yet to take place.

*Counterinsurgency Response must be task tailored.* CORDS demonstrated that a unique situation such as the conflict in South Vietnam required new mechanisms that transcended the normal bureaucratic procedures. The Department of National Defence has demonstrated some adaptability to the challenges of the Kandahar insurgency through the adoption of the OMLT, KPRT and SAT. Whereas CIDA's lack of flexibility has already been noted, other government components have been similarly slow. When the RCMP superintendent attached to the KPRT proposed a project to put in place a new police academy for middle level police officers, six months elapsed before a positive response was received from Ottawa.<sup>64</sup> The KPRT has been successful in coordinating various government departments,<sup>65</sup> but bureaucratic mechanisms have simply not been adapted to meet the requirements of counterinsurgency operations.

*The Value of Civilian Leadership.* Canada's operations in Afghanistan remain overwhelmingly military in character, both in terms of expenditures and personnel deployed. This fact will likely fuel continued resistance for increased cooperation and

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>65</sup> Pigott, *Canada in Afghanistan...*, 136-164.

coordination from CIDA and other key players. There are no high-profile civilian personnel involved in reconstruction and development in Kandahar province, either within or outside of JTF-Afg. With the Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan recommending an increased emphasis on training and a revamping of Canadian development,<sup>66</sup> the need for a civilian presence will likely grow more pronounced.

*Sustained Political Will.* The establishment of CORDS in South Vietnam was only possible through the direct intervention of the US President. The current Canadian Government has demonstrated a clear commitment to the mission in Afghanistan, as evidenced by the 13 Mar 2008 Parliamentary approval for extending the mission mandate to February 2011,<sup>67</sup> and with the establishment of the Cabinet Committee on Afghanistan and the upgrading of the Afghanistan Task Force to the Privy Council Office. Nevertheless, no steps have yet been taken to address the serious bureaucratic impediments to achieving centralised unity of effort. Recent efforts remain firmly within the realm of increased coordination of the various branches of government, similar to the steps taken by the US Government prior to the establishment of CORDS in 1967. So long as the current minority government remains in place, it is unlikely to force greater centralisation in the counterinsurgency effort.

*The Importance of Governance Development.* CORDS, and ultimately South Vietnam itself, failed due to the inability of the regime to rise to the challenge posed by the

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<sup>66</sup> "Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan," 37-38, available from <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/menu-en.asp>; Internet; accessed 13 February 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Tiffany Crawford, "Parliament extends Afghan mission," *Times-Colonist*, 14 March 2008, A9.



communist insurgency. The Canadian Government appears to have realised the fragility of the current Afghanistan government and the vital requirement to ensure its long-term survival.<sup>68</sup> The KPRT thus devotes some of its efforts towards enhancing the governance capability at the Afghan government in Kandahar, whilst the SAT is assisting the central government in Kabul in strengthening its institutions.<sup>69</sup> In addition, CIDA is also funding programs aimed at underpinning the central government and putting an “Afghan face” on development.<sup>70</sup> Canada cannot be faulted for its efforts in this area, although once again overall coordination has been lacking.

### **Canada’s Efforts in Light of CORDS**

When judged against the CORDS yardstick, Canada’s efforts in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan are still found wanting. Unity of effort remains woefully inadequate, with the concomitant that the incentive to adapt existing policies and procedures has been weak, and no civilian leadership has emerged to help de-emphasise the military character of the counterinsurgency effort. The missing ingredient has been a determined political effort to overcome bureaucratic lethargy and resistance.

### **Conclusion**

CORDS became the spearhead for the US counterinsurgency effort in South Vietnam in the later stages of the Vietnam War. Created in 1967 through the direct intervention of the US President, CORDS enjoyed a measure of success in containing and largely

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<sup>68</sup> Smith, *Afghanistan...*, 19.

<sup>69</sup> Protecting Canadians – Rebuilding Afghanistan, “Governance”, <http://www.canada-afghanistan.gc.ca/cip-pic/afghanistan/library/governance-en.asp>; Internet, accessed 19 March 2008.

<sup>70</sup> Stein and Lang, *The Unexpected War...*, 273.

marginalising the NLF. This success was based on the unprecedented unity of effort it fostered, bringing together all pacification elements within a single organisation. This organisation was adaptable, being tailored for the specific purpose of defeating the communist insurgency. Its civilian leadership demonstrated that civilian personnel would not be forgotten amidst the overall military effort. Finally, the US President's determined backing ensured that any and all bureaucratic inertia would be overcome. South Vietnam's final defeat also laid bare the necessity to develop and strengthen the government institutions of the supported state.

The lessons from CORDS indicate that the Canadian government needs to move beyond coordination and strive for an integrated approach in countering the insurgency in Kandahar province. The two key components of the Canadian effort, defence and development, have not been following a common strategy, thus ensuring that Canada's resources have not been brought effectively to bear. A determined political effort will be necessary to achieve this unity of effort, developing policies and procedures adapted to the unique circumstances faced in developing a successful counterinsurgency campaign.

Canada has made a commendable effort to strengthen Afghan government institutions, striving to give the current government a fighting chance to stand on its own and make a difference to the Afghan population. Nevertheless, Canada must do better in unifying the competing strands of national power when fighting the Taliban insurgency in Kandahar. Otherwise, more Canadian military personnel will die than need be, whilst more resources will be wasted.

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