



**SIMULTANEOUSLY CLEARING,  
HOLDING, AND BUILDING:  
*A RURAL DEVELOPMENT TEAM PROGRAM***

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## Simultaneously Clearing, Holding, and Building: *A Rural Development Team Program*



*Asia is not going to be civilized after the methods of the West.  
There is too much Asia and she is too old.*

*- Rudyard Kipling*

One of the obvious lessons learned in decades of counterinsurgency operations involves the need to hold terrain and “build” upon it as it is cleared of insurgent forces. This requirement has been seen in both Iraq and Afghanistan over the best part of a decade, and the problem was partially – or perhaps temporarily – resolved with the “surge” of additional brigades into Iraq. But, this thorny factor remains to bedevil counterinsurgency planners within allied governments seeking to resolve this problem “on the cheap,” committing only limited numbers of combat troops instead of engaging the indigenous population in their own defense. Filling the gap with civilian contractors and non-governmental organizations (NGO) has done little to resolve the basic problem and in many cases their use has worsened the overall situation.

Part of the problem, beyond trying to accomplish too much with too few resources, has been the constant desire to develop democratic institutions while trying to end an insurgency. Worse, the model for the form of democracy selected for the Afghan population that has few, if any, democratic traditions and generally confuses democracy with “capitalism,” is always based on a strong central government. This approach has been chosen in spite of the fact that a strong central government is generally the institution that created the very conditions that allowed the insurgency in Afghanistan to develop in the first place. Under these conditions, the insurgency may easily be defined in “urban vs. rural” terms where the besieged – or overthrown – central government used heavy-handed tactics to force the rural population to accept central control. Additionally, this current and unique form of “democracy” elects only a president who then appoints all other officials in a system that is predisposed toward corruption through its very design.

In the case of Afghanistan, generations of weak central governments in the midst of strong ethnic and tribal groups was abruptly replaced by a series of leaders seeking to impose central control over their rural cousins. The list of failures is long – and bloody: Daud, Taraki, Amin, Karmal, Najibullah, Rabbani, Omar, and now Karzai as the United States Government and its Coalition allies attempt to accomplish what all the rest failed to do. At some point, it should be noted that centralized control over the fractious Afghans may be imposed only in urban areas where large garrisons can be maintained as they resist rule from Kabul. And they have good reasons for their resistance. Every time there is a powerful government in Kabul, the tribes suffer. And the list of outrages is long and predates the current thirty years of violence in which Kabul played a considerable role. The Hotak and Tokhi tribes remember well the “Ghilzai massacres” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and even the Durrani tribes remember the repression and forced migrations of the “Iron Amir” during the 1880’s.

A large part of the reasons for repeated failures in the development of a modern “nation-state” in Afghanistan has resulted from the approach chosen. Invariably, the allies of the “centralizing Afghans,” whether Imperial British, Russians, Soviets, Americans, or the “Coalition,” will begin with attempts to develop a strong urban elite in Kabul and the other major urban areas into a government. Once this is accomplished, follow-on efforts are always made to impose this new form of governance downward to the tribes. This approach works tolerably well with the non-Pashtun ethnic groups that have a tradition of accepting “top-down” governance – the Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazara, Baluch, Brahui, Pashai, Qizilbash, and Ismailis generally tend to accept centralized control. Unfortunately for those trying this approach, there are the Pashtun tribes that comprise approximately half of the nation’s population, a number that is swelled considerably if the Pashtuns of Pakistan, who also have an interest in Afghanistan’s governance, are included. The rural portion of this huge ethnic group rejects the concept of top-down government and participates in their own rule. This is the reason that caused two centuries of attempts – often violent – to rule Afghanistan from Kabul to fail completely. Urbanized Pashtuns, and there are many of them, are generally willing to help build a modern nation-state, but many of them were also the communists who killed so many of their rural cousins in their failed turn at this continuing fool’s errand.

The problem is not in the goal, the creation of a modern nation-state, but it lies in the means chosen to reach this goal. Any attempt to clear, hold, and build from Kabul down to the village level will continue to fail. This is abundantly clear. Graft, corruption, patronage, NGO overhead, Christians seeking converts, collateral damage, contractor costs, shifting American politics, and a multitude of other cross-purpose factors will combine with Pashtun intransigence to complicate all efforts to create a modern Afghanistan from the top down. Possibly, the only chance for success with the Pashtun tribes involves in building a nation from the opposite direction. Traditional programs within the other ethnic groups should be continued, but Pashtun tribes should be engaged in the process of creating loyalty upward rather than downward. This approach requires a major shift in thinking – and tactics.

### **The New Approach: Rural Development Teams**

There is nothing new about this concept. It was created decades ago as a part of the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) program. And it was large. By the end of 1966 more than 20,000 trained individuals were deployed into Vietnam’s provinces as Revolutionary Development Teams and a huge infrastructure supported them. A substantial training program having thousands of students was created and maintained to provide new teams and replacement individuals. Teams took casualties. This approach to stabilization was attempted in the face of the huge North Vietnamese and Viet Cong commitment in their effort to win the Vietnam War, and it was generally successful in many areas.

One report provided the following:

“The program is seen as an operation conducted in three steps. The first is ‘clearing,’ which consists of expelling or destroying any sizeable enemy units in the area. This is basically a military responsibility with parapolitical and paramilitary forces in a support role. It is during this first phase that the cadres attempt to eliminate the enemy infrastructure and begin to implement civic action projects. The second step is one of rural ‘development,’ employing the cadres who have already been sent into the area. Organized into 59-man teams, the[y] promote self-help reorganization, defense and rehabilitation projects while simultaneously gathering intelligence and ferreting out the enemy. The final step is the establishment of local self-government in conformance with democratic principles to try to insure that a firm administrative structure will be left to withstand outside pressures.”

This 1967 model program closely fits the needs of rural Afghanistan. Cleared of the Taliban by military forces, teams with their own organic protection forces are able to conduct development projects. Interestingly, the third stage, the establishment of democratic principles, is already present within the Pashtun tribes who generally govern themselves through the participation of all adult males. The goal of the projects conducted by these 59-man teams was designed to provide a link between the government and the rural population while denying enemy support this same population. All of the component parts are present in southern Afghanistan and these only need to be coordinated to begin this program.

In the case of Vietnam, the effort was decidedly top-down. A Ministry of Revolutionary Development was created within the national government to coordinate and manage the program. If this is considered in Afghanistan, the program will develop a government image, probably making the teams into legitimate Taliban targets from the perspective of the insurgent's target audience, the rural Pashtuns. This happened in the case of Kandahar's Council of Scholars who worked openly against the insurgents in relative safety until they were incorporated into Kabul's National Mullah Program and received a government stipend. Once they were viewed as part of the national government, the Taliban were able to start murdering them with impunity and without a negative reaction out of the rural Pashtun community, even though some of the assassinated clerics were among the most prestigious religious leaders in southern Afghanistan. Maintaining a clear separation between Kabul and any teams created within this potential program is mandatory.

Rather than work downward under Kabul's writ, the teams should be deployed only after coordinating closely with a regional or provincial tribal jirga or shura. In the case of southern Afghanistan, there is a 600-man jirga that meets in Kandahar and they are positioned to be the point of departure for Rural Development team activity in the region where their tribes are present. Similar tribal jirgas may exist – or can be created – in adjacent provinces where teams might be deployed. By placing the development teams directly under the authority of tribal jirgas they are not directly connected to the national government and avoid being cast as a legitimate target in Taliban propaganda.

The point of entry into the provincial tribal jirga should be the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The PRT can provide the funding required for the projects to be implemented by the Rural Development Teams and are also well positioned to monitor project progress and evaluate project success, but without appearing to be responsible for the team's activities. Rural Development teams should not have any American or Coalition presence and should be solely staffed by indigenous personnel recruited specifically from the districts in which their team will operate. Ideally, teams will be composed of members of the dominant tribes in the districts they serve. This will also serve to ensure their general immunity to insurgent attack. The tribal elders will be made to appear responsible for the PRT funding program, not the central government, and the Taliban has shown a general reluctance to create animosity with the tribes.

Through the close coordination through the "provincial" jirga, the tribal elders responsible for a particular district would be responsible for selecting the neediest village in their area of responsibility as the team's deployment location. Those elders will be responsible for coordinating the team's deployment and arranging for its activities in the selected village. Village elders must agree to ensure the safety of the entire team during the time they are working there. At the end of a 30-day period, the team would move on to another village within their district.

While the team members are to be trained in four development specialties – construction, medicine, agriculture, and education – as well as being cross-trained in a second specialty, much of the actual work should be performed by locally hired contractors and subcontractors in a job creation effort. Team leaders will be responsible for developing short-term contractual agreements, monitoring work as it is done, and paying for work as it is completed. In this manner, the team can use local contractors and local labor as "force multipliers" in village development and reconstruction. Hired locals will benefit from the newly created jobs and their income will benefit the entire village.

Village elders are positioned best to determine their prioritized project requirements in coordination with the provincial jirga and all public works completed must be deeded to the village and the tribe, not any government entity. By making the improvements into tribal property, the tribe's elders and their militia will defend the improvements against possible attack by the insurgents, something they wouldn't automatically do if the new facilities belonged to the government. Monthly stipends to maintain the newly constructed facilities should also be provided in a form of "endowment", but this financial support can be withdrawn if the village fails to oppose the insurgents.

The specific goal of the Rural Development Team is to become the first link between the villages and its tribal membership with the Provincial Jirga, also composed of tribal members, and from the jirga upward to the government of Afghanistan. Early "connections" will be done through "propaganda by the deed" of improving the lives of rural villagers, something the Taliban never did nor could ever do. The contrast will be readily apparent to the village elders and the villagers they govern.

### *Team Specifics*

The original teams developed for operations in Vietnam were quite complex. The 59-man team was divided into the following: group leader, deputy group leader (also political officer), intelligence officer, two radio operators, two medics, reconstruction team leader, civil affairs leader (with three census grievance, three administration, and three motivation), a new life development leader, education and culture person, land reform person, cooperative person, one hygiene and sanitation, one agriculture/animal husbandry/cottage industry person, and one public works construction. Security was provided by a militia team leader and three 11-man squads.

This arrangement was designed to hold and build in villages in areas newly cleared of North Vietnamese or Viet Cong forces while developing intelligence and creating democratic institutions. This was a tall order for any organization of any size or duration in the target village. Fortunately, this level of sophistication isn't required in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, the location of most of the actual combat that is occurring.

For operations in Afghanistan, far less complexity is required to accomplish the same general goals. Pashtuns, by their tribal nature and Pashtunwali customs, are very democratic and individuals select their elders who govern them. Democracy will emerge as the villager's security improves and the very dictatorial form of Shari'a, or Islamic law, under the Taliban is discredited. The goals of the any newly instituted Rural Development teams involve essentially five areas, security, construction, medicine, agriculture, and education.

Generally adequate security can be provided by a team leader and three squads of approximately 12 men each. All should be trained and drawn from combat-experienced Pashtuns recruited from the districts where they will eventually serve. Ideally, one squad would provide local security while a second patrols aggressively in the vicinity of the village. The third squad could be involved in training village militia members and resting while the other squads are on full duty. The squads should rotate responsibilities periodically.

The construction team can be relatively small with their primary responsibilities involving locating local contractors, facilitating hiring, and inspecting work as it is completed. Construction should be done according to village elder priorities and completed facilities should be deeded to tribal authorities, such as the village jirga or shura. Most tribal property will be defended by the tribe's militia and the Taliban will generally be reluctant to antagonize tribal defense forces.

An agricultural team can be responsible for contracting with local groups to repair collapsed irrigation systems, prepare fields, suggest new crops, and develop village marketing cooperatives. Efforts in crop substitution may be considered and innovations such as aquaculture and new varieties of animal husbandry could be suggested. Any specialists needed with skills beyond those of the team could be requested through the local PRT.

The medical team is responsible for training village health workers and providing preventive medicine services, such as sanitation and anti-malaria efforts. They also provide for the medical care of the Rural Development Team. At least one village health worker should receive training and a medical evacuation system will be developed to ensure that ill villagers whose conditions are beyond the capability of the local health worker will be properly diagnosed and evacuated before becoming too seriously ill to travel.

An educational team is responsible for developing a school, providing instruction, and implementing training for teacher's aides who can conduct classes in the absence of a school teacher. This team can repair or renovate a school building. The school's deed should be given to the village elders, rather than remain a government building – a legitimate target. Tribal elders and their village militia are more prone to defend their own property than facilities belonging to the government.

The key to Rural Development Team success is the induced involvement of the village's tribal elders and its defensive militia from the onset of the projects. Once the provincial tribal jirga or shura negotiates village elder, and their militia, agreement to provide security for the team, the elders are normally honor-bound through Pashtunwali to provide security. The village's volunteer militia, combined with the military capability of the development team – all of whom are trained in the use of weapons – should be active deterrence against any Taliban attack. Communications organic to the team could also be used to request an army or police reaction force and larger US military and Coalition forces could be deployed to destroy any large Taliban incursion.

Some teams will take casualties and some entire teams may be lost, but attacks against the Rural Development Teams should be uncommon occurrences, if a clear separation is maintained between the team and the central government. Those attacks that do happen will generally serve to alienate the rural population against the Taliban.

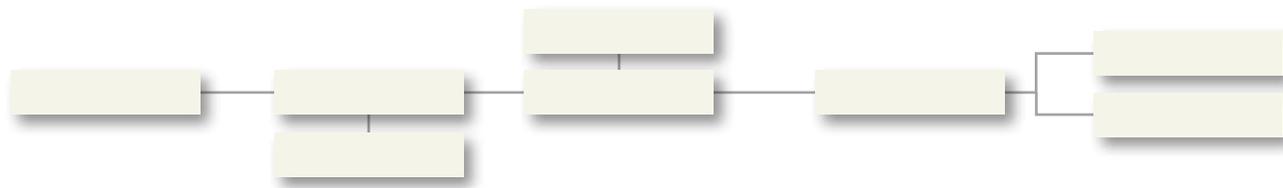
This potential initiative is not a “silver bullet” that will resolve all of the problems of rural Afghanistan, but it will have a very significant impact and can be expanded dramatically into additional areas following positive measures of effectiveness are collected. Jobs can be created by training key locals as contractors where none exist. Corruption can be reduced by delivering funding to the lowest level possible – instead of providing funds at the national level only to have it “taxed” by officials taking their cut at the provincial and district levels. Incentives to encourage fast, accurate contractor work by maintaining a “list” of approved contractors who will gain additional contracts while poor work would also be recorded and poorly performing contractors would not receive additional projects.

The connections between tribal villages and the national government will develop gradually, but this must come from within the tribes and not be imposed through direct connections to the central government in Kabul. Any external change that is imposed from Kabul will be resisted – as has happened on multiple occasions in the past. But positive connections to the national government will probably develop as local job creation results in salaries that are spent in local markets in villages that are renewed with funding that passes through the elders managing the creation of local development projects through their governing jirgas.

# TRIBAL ANALYSIS CENTER

Traditional anthropological research conducted among tribes inhabiting remote areas where insurgents and criminals operate has become increasingly difficult to implement. Studies carried out among people living in small-scale societies now are nearly impossible due to the physical dangers associated with the civil and religious unrest found in those areas. Swat, for example, has become so dangerous that Frederick Barth's studies only could be repeated at the risk of the investigator's life. Similar research is not feasible among Burma's Rohingya tribes located on both sides of the border with Bangladesh, as well as with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan's interior and within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where even Pakistan's army enters with reluctance.

Given the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in conflictive areas, the Tribal Analysis Center utilizes an indirect approach. Using multidisciplinary research, we seek to collect and analyze data obtained from a wide variety of sources, both current and historical. In the absence of new ethnographic fieldwork to update our base of knowledge, the Tribal Analysis Center compiles and summarizes existing research and documents on tribal societies, combining this material with contemporary press reports and articles. We assume that much can be gleaned from well-informed observers who are not anthropologists, ranging from journalists and travelers to government officials.



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