(Mis)use of Weapons
CERP in the Afghan Surge

Rebecca Jensen

Abstract: The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) was initially a mechanism for spending captured Iraqi funds to relieve urgent humanitarian need in the early phase of the Iraq War. It evolved to include American funding and a broader mandate to assist the emerging counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. Empowering frontline military forces to distribute money in an attempt to shape the environment was an innovation, but the absence of best practices and guidelines until much later in the wars, as well as a widespread lack of understanding of the economics of development, continuity, or useful metrics, hampered CERP in achieving its goals. Increased CERP funds were an element of the new strategy for Afghanistan advanced by the Barack H. Obama administration. The flawed premise of the surge, combined with a lack of military expertise in economic aid and Afghan culture, led to an outcome in which billions of dollars, spent with the best of intentions, hampered development and in some cases strengthened the insurgency.

Keywords: counterinsurgency, Commander's Emergency Response Program, CERP, military change, stabilization, pacification, development, hearts-and-minds counterinsurgency.

The Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) was from its inception a product of contingency designed to use funds to assist the military in its interactions with Iraqis. During the initial phase of the invasion of Iraq, a cache of funds worth almost $1 billion was found on the

Rebecca Jensen is a Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr. Memorial Dissertation Fellow at Marine Corps University and a doctoral candidate at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Canada. This article is excerpted from a chapter of the author's forthcoming dissertation.

property of an official in the just-toppled government. At the same time, it rapidly became clear that the occupying army was in the midst of a population that was somewhat hostile to it and sliding into anarchy, in which even basic services such as garbage removal and infrastructure were crumbling.[1] CERP evolved as a way to use these funds to support the fight against the nascent insurgency, indirectly through meeting urgent local needs, and directly through using funds and programs to isolate insurgents and win popular support. The program persisted with the support of U.S. funds. During the Afghan surge, CERP was widely implemented in Afghanistan, where a few isolated successes were outweighed by instances in which CERP increased violence and prevented other, better-qualified agencies than the military from implementing development programs. A flawed understanding of Afghan culture, the local economy, and the nature of the conflict combined with perverse incentives for the local commanders who administered the funds, lack of expertise in the military for economic development, and an absence of continuity that led to an outcome in which billions of dollars, spent with the best of intentions, hampered development and strengthened the insurgency.

Origins of CERP

On 30 April 2003, President George W. Bush provided guidance in a memorandum to the secretary of defense that formerly state- or regime-owned property could be seized and either held, sold, or reallocated for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Further clarification from Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz advised L. Paul Bremer, the administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), that the authority to use such property was to be delegated to the Department of Defense (DOD) "to assist the Iraqi people and support the reconstruction of Iraq."[2] From the very beginning of the CERP program, it was designed to use resources—originally from within Iraq itself—to help Iraqis and the reconstruction effort, and this role was explicitly delegated to the military, rather than the civilian-led Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA).

On 19 June 2003, *Fragmentary Order 89 to Combined Joint Task Force 7 (CJTF-7) OPORD 03-036* provided more specific guidance for how seized property could be used, translating the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) decision through the Joint Staff and United States Central Command (USCENTCOM), to the formation directing U.S. military efforts in Iraq at the time. It identified CERP funds for financial management improvements, restoration in the rule of law, investment in governance initiatives, and the purchase and repair of equipment necessary for infrastructure. More broadly, it noted that humanitarian assistance was a tool for increasing security cooperation, enhancing military access and influence, and generating goodwill. Also

in this memorandum was the first official use of the term *Commander's Emergency Response Program*.[3] The program was designed to minimize bureaucratic obstacles to the rapid funding of small projects to meet humanitarian needs and support the counterinsurgency at the most local level possible. Because the security environment limited the ability of civilian U.S. government and nongovernmental organization (NGO) aid personnel to operate outside of secured areas, decision making for CERP began, and remained, in the military's hands.[4]

The use of money for postwar development is neither new nor particular to Iraq and Afghanistan. Similarly, the use of money, security- and infrastructure-enhancing projects, and public works for the sake of employment in a counterinsurgency was not particularly innovative. The major shift that took place, sparked by the presidential memorandum of 30 April 2003, was the assignment of very granular development and humanitarian spending efforts to the military, and the responsibility CERP gave to military officers in theater.

Development and Pacification in History

Writing in 1965, Charles Wolf points out that even half a century ago, the conventional wisdom on guerrilla movements and insurgencies was that international politics, military capability, and external assistance were permissive but not sufficient factors in a successful action against the government. The essential element, rather, was considered to be hostility toward and mistrust of the government, combined with support for and commitment to the insurgents. Governments could therefore achieve success by winning the support of the population. Wolf's crucial point is "to connect a particular program with the kind of behavior the government wants to promote among the people."[5] Rewarding villages that support the government, while providing protection for cooperating rural areas, is essential for creating the right incentives, but it should be done in a manner that reduces the ability of the insurgent to secure the inputs they need at acceptable cost. Additionally, the best projects are those that "strengthen or expand the instruments available to the government for obtaining information and controlling insurgent logistics."[6] This includes infrastructure and agricultural development but also the creation of relationships that will provide information about insurgents, their supporters, and their enemies.

When adjusted for inflation, the dollar cost of reconstruction and assistance activities in Iraq until 2006 was comparable to the cost of such activities in postwar Germany and Japan. There were, however, major differences in the scope and nature of the activities in the 1940s compared to those in Iraq after the invasion. First, CERP funds, in particular the resources that were directly allocated in relatively small amounts by soldiers working with Iraqi locals, made up on average 5 percent of all U.S. assistance in Iraq prior to the surge.[7] The

remainder of the funds, as with all assistance for Germany and Japan, was allocated at a much higher level, either theater command centers or Washington, DC. Another significant difference, and relevant to the degree of interaction between U.S. forces and the population, was that in postwar Germany and Japan, funding was provided by occupying forces, but administration and contracting were done by locals. In Iraq, however, where civil society was nowhere near the level of Germany and Japan in the immediate postwar phase, U.S. personnel were more closely involved at every level.[8]

In the 2002 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), development was for the first time enshrined as a coequal element of American security as part of the "3 Ds" of development, defense, and diplomacy.[9] The unclassified 2003 *Joint Operations Concepts* paper, following on the 2002 NSS, made reference to the importance of opening societies to make them less hospitable to threats to the United States by developing their democratic infrastructure as well as their economies.[10] It also emphasizes the importance of developing a holistic understanding of the "area of interest," which includes their economy.[11] The emphasis of the document remains on military operations, though, with economic activity the domain of interagency relationships. In 2005, *DOD Directive 3000.05* developed guidelines on how to conduct "Department of Defense activities that support U.S. Government plans for stabilization, security, reconstruction and transition operations, which lead to sustainable peace while advancing U.S. interests."[12] This document puts the development of infrastructure, the promotion of the rule of law and civil society, and the development of a market economy on par with security force assistance and combat operations in support of a COIN.

The 2008 edition of *Stability Operations*, Field Manual (FM) 3-07, encoded the relationship between economic development and the military's support for such development as a tool of warfighting. *Stability Operations* links the legitimacy of the host nation (the cornerstone of stability operations) with its ability to exercise sovereignty and limit the reach of government: meeting the infrastructure, governance, and social service needs of the population without inhibiting a market economy and the health of private property and businesses.[13] The 2008 NSS also makes a glancing mention of economic development, emphasizing that both the killing of terrorists and the training of local security forces will amount to little without addressing local grievances and creating government and development programs.[14] The *National Military Strategy* published in 2011 draws only marginally closer to the question of how the military should concern itself with economic development in zones of conflict, stating that counterterror is unproductive by itself in the long term, and it must be complemented by the development of local government legitimacy, including economic development, governance, and rule of law—which the U.S. military must support.[15] While economic development as a complement to political and

irregular warfare had long been supported by some members of the national security community, its administration—as compared with support for its administration—had remained since the John F. Kennedy administration the concern of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), rather than the military.[16]

Development and CERP after 11 September 2001

The use of financial assistance to shape the fight in Afghanistan began almost immediately after the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (9/11), and it had earlier antecedents. In an adumbration of the events of the twenty-first century, U.S. policy in the 1980s was to put pressure on the major ideological threat of the age by providing money and arms to local actors who would advance American interests in Afghanistan. In another parallel to subsequent wars, when the Soviet Union fell and the immediate goal of the policy had been achieved, the United States withdrew its funding and attention from Afghanistan, with little concern for the eventual consequences of the mujahideen they had empowered there.[17] During the preparation for the initial invasion and the invasion itself, the CIA and U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) funneled cash directly to the Northern Alliance warlords who were considered reliable opponents of the Taliban, both to act as a U.S. proxy and to provide local knowledge.[18] While the distribution of resources in this phase was carried out by the military and paramilitary CIA, rather than out of the Department of State at a higher level as in the past, the emphasis was not on development or capacity building but rather on equipping or more blatantly purchasing allies, with minimal concern for long-term governance or stability.[19]

From its inception, the CERP program—originally disbursing seized assets in Iraq only—represented a new activity for U.S. military personnel. Previously, commanders in theater had no discretionary funds to apply to their missions. Resources, whether in the form of personnel, equipment, or logistics, are the responsibility of higher headquarters, the DOD, and in some cases Congress. Further, most officers, unless they have at some point been assigned to billets involving acquisitions and procurement, have almost no background in the investment of capital to achieve short- or long-term results, beyond the extent to which they are responsible for administering budgets associated with their units or commands, which typically involves less decision making about spending and more oversight. This was a new sphere of responsibility for which the great majority of U.S. military personnel had no formal training or experience.[20]

Initially, CERP was perceived as a political and military success in Iraq.[21] From the summer of 2003, the dichotomy between the nominal purpose of the program—emergency response—and its activities, which increasingly included

development of security forces and industrial investment, grew. Nonetheless, when then-Major General David H. Petraeus, who at the time was commander of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, told Ambassador L. Paul Bremer that "money is ammunition and . . . we didn't have much."[22] Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) funds began to flow to supplement CERP. As the rules and goals for spending CPA funds, which were provided by the U.S. government, were different from those around disbursing captured Iraqi funds, this resulted in a certain blurring of lines and responsibilities. Nonetheless, by October, Congress had authorized an additional $180 million for CERP.[23] This level of funding would increase to a peak of almost $1.3 billion in 2008.[24]

The Results of CERP in Iraq

The validity of the concept underlying CERP—that military officers in daily contact with Iraqis could rapidly and appropriately provide cash assistance to meet urgent, humanitarian, or development needs, and that doing so would pacify the region—was questioned early on, despite political popularity of the program. An analysis of classified data on SIGACTS (significant actions, which include action against U.S. and Coalition forces, as well as against Iraqi civilians and Iraqi security forces) found that there was no meaningful correlation between SIGACTS and either the number of CERP initiatives or the dollars spent under CERP in a given region.[25] A more granular study found that while CERP spending had a slight negative correlation with violence for small dollar projects, overall the correlation was slightly positive, and strongly so in regions with more active conflict. The different effects of small and large CERP investments has been attributed both to the more immediate nature of small investments (a villager may not immediately see or benefit from a bridge being rebuilt at great expense but will immediately notice less sewage in the streets) as well as the tendency of large projects to become a kind of spoils over which local factions will fight.[26]

A study published in 2009 on CERP in al-Tameem Province, in northeastern Iraq, showed that between early 2004 and mid-2009, the effects of CERP were at best mixed with respect to pacification, violence, and crime. An Army officer involved in administering the program in 2006 drew upon several data sets to look for relationships between the number and size of CERP reconstruction disbursements only (not other forms of CERP spending) and COIN outcomes. The results—albeit limited to one province—were in some ways contradictory. The best predictor for successful use of CERP funds, the study found, was to allocate funds according to the metrics deserve—in which villages were more likely to hold positive attitudes toward the host government and intervening power, and were more likely to provide information to the counterinsurgents, scored higher—and message resonance—in which village/project combinations

that were more likely to be noticed by villagers, more likely to be communicated to nearby villages due to proximity and traffic patterns, and more likely to be communicated more broadly through the province due to media presence and activity, scored higher. This runs counter to the conventional wisdom of the role of development aid in a COIN, and counter to much practice, in which need (the degree to which the lives of Iraqis would be improved, and the number of Iraqis whose lives would be improved) guided much of the decision making about development spending.[27]

This suggests that the name of the program under which CERP was grouped—money as a weapons system—was particularly apt. However, the dual purposes for which CERP was initially authorized—to relieve urgent humanitarian need and to support the tactical and campaign level needs of the counterinsurgency—might in fact be in tension with each other. Within the parameters of the al-Tameem study, spending to reward and incentivize support for and cooperation with the counterinsurgency yielded less violence, while spending to meet humanitarian need increased violence to a small degree.

In Iraq, the attempt to use CERP and other forms of military-led investment in developing the market and supporting the creation of new businesses had at best mixed results. While even CERP proponents understood that the military was not designed to carry out economic development, the security situation prohibited much involvement by the civilian agencies that were better suited to the mission. This dependence on the military, however, came with a built-in problem: the lack of partnerships and funding sources for the transition to the end of the U.S. mission. To the extent that CERP and other programs achieved their desired goals in the short term, the fact that they were intrinsically military meant that successes rarely lasted longer than the active engagement of U.S. forces, and were sometimes limited to the duration of a unit rotation.[28]

The ability of CERP spending to contribute to the stability and legitimacy of a government that reflected general Western mores about accountability and transparency was also fundamentally flawed, according to an Army lawyer who oversaw elements of the program in Baghdad in 2008:

> CERP should not be used in cultures already fraught with corruption. While using U.S. appropriated funds as "mad money" to essentially buy the loyalty of local populations may work in some situations, it may also simply add to the corruption in countries where fraud is deeply imbedded in the culture. If a country is already susceptible to corruption, loyalty payments made in exchange for a cessation of violence may have limited effectiveness. Both Iraq and Afghanistan already rely on international assistance to combat fraud: CERP is inconsistent with these efforts.[29]

As to the significant issue of whether CERP was of immediate utility to the counterinsurgency as a tool for reducing violence, the evidence from Iraq prior to the Afghan surge was at best mixed. A quantitative analysis of CERP spending and SIGACTs concluded that a reduction in violence was most clear during the surge, when it was impossible to attribute this decrease with any clarity to the CERP program or for that matter to any other single factor. The study also noted that the reduction in violence was greatest in regions that had been the most violent and were therefore the focus of disproportionate attention from many programs, including CERP. It also concluded that some of the reduction in violence was the result of reclassifying some incidents as "criminal violence" as locals fought over CERP resources.[30] This study also found that any analysis that used SIGACTs as the dependent variable was useful only to the degree that the datasets used were complete, and that reporting of SIGACTs dropped as hostilities increased, due to increased operational tempo.[31]

Another study that applied an epidemiological model to the effects of CERP on SIGACTs found that no meaningful conclusions could be drawn without first determining if the region in question had a high or low propensity toward violence prior to the initiation of CERP project funding.[32] A survey of battalion commanders who had disbursed CERP funds in Iraq showed that between 30 and 40 percent viewed reductions in violence as the prime measure of effectiveness of a CERP project, and showed no consensus as to whether the program was generally successful by this metric, with one respondent calling the idea "nonsensical."[33] Additionally, the employment of CERP funds by commanders changed with the increased troop levels of the surge, as an increasing proportion of units chose to limit their use of money as a weapons system (MAAWS).[34] The very mixed results from CERP and MAAWS spending in Iraq, though, did little to shape the use of these programs in the Afghan surge.

CERP Accelerates in Afghanistan

Much of the difficulty intrinsic to CERP was known and discussed before the Afghan surge. Work published more recently was not available to decision makers then, but it is even more pessimistic about the possibility that heavily resourcing and expanding the CERP program in Afghanistan could yield the desired results. A study examining CERP and violence in 227 Afghan districts between 2005 and 2009 found that, after accounting for annual, seasonal, and district-specific variation, there was no significant relationship between CERP projects and violence. Where smaller studies have found relationships between project size and the social climate of the district—and the ability of CERP to influence violence—this larger study points out that the "averaging out" effect of projects when the whole is considered suggests "either that reconstruction work is unrelated to violence or that programming bears on the insurgency in

ways unaccounted for by the hearts and minds perspective, such that an ambiguous average masks underlying opposing causal forces."[35]

By the end of 2009, more than $1.6 billion in CERP funds had been allocated to Afghanistan, increasing almost every year from the $30 million of funding in 2004 to more than $550 million in 2009.[36] Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) were the primary organization through which CERP funding flowed in Afghanistan, and civilians made up just 3 percent of U.S. PRT personnel.[37] Auditors noted a range of concerns in the execution of the program there, and in the summer of 2009 representatives from the Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), and the Department of the Army met to agree to stricter oversight and coordination of CERP projects, as well as the addition of project managers to PRTs to reduce the burden of administering the program.[38]

The Afghan Surge and a New Strategy for Afghanistan

At the end of 2009, change was coming to the war in Afghanistan. In opposition to the Republican candidate for president, Senator John McCain (R-AZ), who believed the United States could fight and win in both Iraq and Afghanistan, then-candidate Barack Obama (D-IL) believed that continued involvement in Iraq was something of a sunk cost fallacy, and that by drawing down efforts in Iraq, the United States could do what was necessary in Afghanistan. He said, "[A]s President, I will make the fight against al Qaeda and the Taliban the top priority that it should be. This is a war that we have to win."[39] To that end, he pledged in July 2008 that he would send two more U.S. brigades to Afghanistan, seek increased NATO participation both in quantity and quality, and direct an additional $1 billion in annual assistance for nonmilitary purposes, particularly for creating a viable economy in Afghanistan.

Much of the first year of Obama's administration, with respect to national security, was dedicated to reviewing the war in Afghanistan. This phase was characterized by increasing tensions between the military and the administration in which the president suspected the military of leaking information to manipulate his policies, and the military suspected the president of disregarding their advice.[40] During 2009, Obama's initial distrust of General Stanley A. McChrystal's request for 40,000 more troops softened, and he considered a steep increase in troop levels and resourcing for a short but intense effort. President Hamid Karzai won the August 2009 election, but the process was tainted by fraud, and his credibility with the Afghan public was low. As the Taliban made steady gains during the 2009 fighting season, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates increasingly made the case for an Afghan surge, similar to the Iraqi surge then seen as the high point of the U.S. war in Iraq.[41]

Despite Obama's initial reluctance to buy in to the conclusions and recommendations in McChrystal's strategic review, this document, and the president's reaction to it, helped shape the official strategy for the Afghan surge and what followed. In May 2009, Secretary of Defense Gates and Obama replaced General David D. McKiernan, an armor officer who had played an integral role in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, with General McChrystal.[42] His strategic review, appropriately enough given its purpose and issuing body, was mostly concerned with military issues, and primarily the shift to a population-centric model of fighting over the attrition-based model whose remnants still lingered when he replaced McKiernan. The body count as a metric of effectiveness was formally revoked by General McChrystal.[43] The overwhelming emphasis of the review was the risk of not allocating enough resources and misunderstanding the Afghanistan fight. From the opening pages, McChrystal warns that "the overall situation is deteriorating," and that while increased resources would not by themselves ensure victory, "under-resourcing could lose it."[44] Using the language of resources and risk familiar to operational art and campaign planning, McChrystal emphasized that the risk of losing Afghanistan was greater than had been appreciated.

During 2009, the Obama administration shaped a strategy informed in many ways by McChrystal's review, as well as the politics of the moment. While the Iraq surge had been initiated by an unpopular president in the context of an unpopular war, Obama enjoyed broad support early in his first term, and Afghanistan was still widely perceived as a war of self-defense, and the more legitimate part of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Obama's primary political challenge was navigating between the two main camps within his administration, who advocated for different and incompatible strategies. Secretary of Defense Gates, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were broadly in favor of a strategy that emphasized the defeat of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, in the context of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that would lead to a stable Afghanistan. This strategy required a substantial troop commitment, and a conclusion tied to the achievement of these goals, rather than a set timetable for withdrawal. The competing approach was advocated by Vice President Joe Biden, Special Representative to the President for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard C. Holbrooke, and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry. This camp sought the destruction of al-Qaeda but not necessarily the Taliban, were skeptical about both the possibility of stabilizing Afghanistan and sustained American support for such an effort, and argued for a counterterrorism effort limited in scope, time, and troop levels.[45]

The strategy adopted by the Obama administration in late 2009 attempted in some ways to split the difference between population-centric counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. Where COIN in Iraq had become abbreviated as

"clear, hold, build," the Afghan strategy was to "clear, hold, build, transfer."[46] In a somewhat contradictory fashion, the plan both tied the withdrawal of U.S. troops to the accomplishment of goals, while also declaring a drawdown beginning in July 2011.[47] The rapid increase in troop levels designed to defeat al-Qaeda while disrupting the Taliban would pave the way for a more civilian-intensive effort to develop the country's social and economic infrastructure alongside a training mission designed to expand Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) capacity. In this understanding, the provision of security and governance was both the means and the end of counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.[48]

The strategy also promised particular attention to the role of Pakistan in the insurgency in Afghanistan, acknowledging the criticism made by the Government Accounting Office (inter alia) that there had yet to be a comprehensive plan to address the role played by Pakistan in permitting a safe haven for al-Qaeda in the frontier region Pakistan shared with Afghanistan.[49] The pacification and reconstruction, with paired military and civilian surges, were the principal pillars of a counterinsurgency, although the result would be to deny terrorists a safe haven in Afghanistan. The increased pressure on Pakistan to crack down on the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the North-West Frontier Province, as well as targeting killings by U.S. forces in those regions, were pillars of a counterterrorism mission, although the result would be to deny supplies, reinforcements, and support to the insurgency within Afghanistan.[50] Inasmuch as the strategy Obama announced in December 2009 was an attempt to reconcile two largely separate approaches to the problem, it was possible for the counterinsurgency and counterterrorism missions to reinforce each other. In this sense, the selection of General McChrystal was apt. While endorsing counterinsurgency, he had established himself by transforming the use of SOF in counterterrorism in Iraq, although he was characterized by one observer as seeing effective COIN in Afghanistan largely "as a route to effective counterterrorism."[51]

While the rhetoric of COIN had been in use in Afghanistan prior to 2009, the review requested by Obama made clear that in practice, the operational culture of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) had not embraced it, in part due to the intrinsic difficulty of developing cultural fluency in a place with such different (and diverse) languages and customs, and in part due to the unconventional nature of a counterinsurgency. Not all troop-contributing nations embraced COIN as a strategy, further complicating a coherent ISAF plan.[52] ANSF needed to be dramatically expanded both in number and in effectiveness, an undertaking that would require higher troops levels, as training and fighting had to take place simultaneously.[53] Another major threat was political and social. As Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) institutions were weak or nonexistent, Afghan society was plagued by "the un-

punished abuse of power by corrupt officials and power-brokers, a widespread sense of political disenfranchisement, and a longstanding lack of economic opportunity. ISAF errors have further compounded the problem."[54] Defeating the insurgent groups was necessary but insufficient for success without addressing the structural and institutional weaknesses of Afghan society.

The review did not explicitly mention economic development, as logistics and funding were national level responsibilities, and the provision of such resources to ISAF was a political issue in each contributing state, but it hinted at it pervasively. In the ISAF mission statement, governance and socioeconomic development are linked, and the strategic review expands on these connections.[55] The long-term viability of the Afghan government and its security forces rested on legitimacy and capability as well as the ability to support itself from the taxes it could raise from its own economy and trade.[56] A major driver of disenfranchisement and resentment among the local population, which led some to join the insurgency and more to lend it explicit or tacit support, was the chronic unemployment in the region, exacerbated by the concurrent attempts to curtail the opium industry.[57] While the new COIN approach McChrystal articulated would seek to minimize civilian casualties and damage to civilian property, when Coalition forces caused such losses, appropriate compensation was vital not only for political purposes but also to mitigate the economic harm done to families and communities by casualties and destruction.[58] CERP funds were ultimately used as means toward all these ends in Afghanistan.

Campaign Planning and COIN

The assumptions on which the COIN of the Afghan surge was built were derived, by 2009, not only from historical insurgencies and the efforts to contain them but from Iraq and the early years of Afghanistan as well. The Western understanding of counterinsurgency had generally converged upon legitimacy as the key to a host government that could rule through something other than brute force.[59] Another body of literature argues that Western states fail at counterinsurgency because they are reluctant to resort to the levels of coercion and violence necessary to subdue an insurgency.[60] However, this approach was never seriously considered in either theater of the GWOT.[61] One mechanism for building legitimacy, and the approach reflected in most doctrine, is in the provision of public service and good governance. Equally important to how the state governs, though, particularly in regions with sharply drawn and contested lines based on ethnicity, heredity, or religion, is who governs.[62]

American COIN, implicitly and perhaps unconsciously building on colonial counterinsurgency efforts, is based on an almost teleological drive to rational, liberal democracy as the form of government with the most legitimacy, and which delivers the best governance. Such governments involve accountability

to the electorate, representation at all levels, and economic growth.[63] This approach to COIN imputes or imposes Western standards of legitimacy to local political traditions to which such standards are alien. Built into this model, particularly as it was applied in Iraq and Afghanistan, are three assumptions. First, that economic development increases the stability of a region. Second, that the provision of aid, particularly aid that drives economic development, can help win "hearts and minds" and thus increase support for, or at least acceptance of, the host government and the intervening power. Third, that the increased capacity of the central government to provide services and maintain economic development will build legitimacy and stability.[64] These assumptions remain unsupported by empirical evidence.[65]

Regarding Afghanistan in particular, much of the literature arguing for poverty as a root cause of conflict seemed in the early twenty-first century to be borne out, with humanitarian assistance and economic development as logical cures.[66] The deep and complex nature of intertribal relationships and the strength of tribal affiliations in Afghanistan, while exploited by the Taliban and local warlords, were often underestimated or ignored by ISAF forces.[67] While studies of violence and poverty often emphasize the importance of context in shaping how the two phenomena reinforce each other, social factors were often discounted in the counterinsurgency planning for Afghanistan, and "in 2006 and 2007 the combination of the extension of governance, the extension of Afghan security force presence and the application of development assistance were viewed as both necessary and sufficient for stabilization to occur."[68]

These assumptions are an implicit part of the documents outlining the strategic framework for Afghanistan in the first Obama administration. The initial *United States Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan* (or ICMCP), published in August 2009, identifies 11 COIN "Transformative Effects." Designed to avoid stovepipes between lines of effort, civilian and military sectors, and community, provincial, and national levels, the plan does not relegate aid or development to any particular transformative effect. However, there are roles for MAAWS and CERP funds in many of the 11 categories. "Expansion of Accountable and Transparent Governance" includes expansion of health and education coverage; "Creating Sustainable Jobs for Population Centers and Corridors" includes municipal development of electricity, sanitation, and transportation infrastructure; "Agricultural Opportunity and Market Access" is almost entirely concerned with both the direct provision of assistance for the agricultural sector and the development of Afghan capacity to sustain this sector; "Countering the Nexus of Insurgency, Narcotics, Corruption and Crime" includes developing prison and detention facilities so they are both secure and humane; and "Community and Government-led Reintegration" (of low- and medium-level Taliban members) includes en-

hanced economic assistance for communities willing to reintegrate Taliban fighters. When addressing resources, the ICMCP specifically mandates pushing funding down to the lowest possible operational level, and using in particular CERP or Economic Support Fund (ESF) programs based on funding criteria.[69]

In a note to Congress in June 2015, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reiterated the critical importance of economic development to counter-insurgency during the Afghan surge. "[P]overty and widespread unemployment in population centers are exploited by insurgent and criminal elements for recruitment," it warned, and reported that the highest reconstruction priority in Afghanistan in 2010 was job creation in agriculture.[70] CERP was singled out as a source of funding both for humanitarian relief and for reconstruction needs, as part of the discussion of economic stabilization—even as the office noted the need for oversight to ensure that funds were used effectively. This included ensuring that the Afghan government would ultimately take responsibility for development and that civilian and military development efforts be coordinated.

The revised ICMCP in 2011 was in most respects similar to the original document. One of its planning assumptions is that "GIRoA continues to improve revenue collection abilities, leading to greater self-sufficiency" and that it establishes a solid economy as the key to transferring power to the Afghan government, not simply to prevent the disenfranchisement that the insurgency exploited.[71] The 11 Transformative Effects are updated to 13 Campaign Objectives, which are grouped into categories relevant to security, governance, development, and cross-cutting (i.e., those that cut across two or three different categories). In this sense, economic assistance and development are less broadly emphasized than in the earlier version of the plan. The clear priority of the 2011 plan is transition. Metrics for evaluating progress are featured for each objective, and few of them involve U.S. funding at the local level. Neither CERP nor any other MAAWS program are mentioned.

The Americanization of the War in Afghanistan

Prior to 2009, the poor coordination between combat and development activities was due in part to the different preferences of the participant states, as well as the lack of expertise on the part of the military at the latter mission. Additionally, they lacked sufficient security to permit civilian agencies with more expertise in humanitarian and development activity to conduct these activities—a chronic lack of resources from 2001 to 2009 and a lack of unity of effort and command, which meant that success at the tactical level were often not knitted together to achieve larger strategic purposes.[72] The "Americanization" of the war announced in 2009 by Obama and implemented in 2010 and onward muted the influence of different national preferences and command control challenges to coordinate the many types of activity necessary to achieve the political goal

of stabilizing Afghanistan and then withdrawing. The surge of military and civilian personnel for the first time provided adequate resources to carry out these missions.[73]

The ISAF campaign plan released publicly in January 2010 reinforced these themes.[74] While economic development is mentioned only obliquely, its role in the overall campaign plan is well-defined. It is clearly not the primary focus of the military effort, but neither is it ignored. Lack of economic opportunity is described as an element of the weakness of the GIRoA, which is portrayed in the briefing as the major obstacle to the implementation of the new U.S. strategy (which now included a definite, if frequently moving, departure date). In the context of expanding Taliban influence and more frequent kinetic events, population protection and stronger ANSF are paired with improved governance and development as the goal underlying military operations. Socioeconomic development was a distinct enumerated line of effort, with the operational objectives of increasing revenues for the GIRoA, enhancing infrastructure, and increasing employment and economic activity, with the recognition that a stable and sustainable Afghan government required these attributes.[75] The most direct military implications of this line of effort for ISAF was the creation of sufficient security for economic activity to thrive, as well as the connection of economic corridors to allow reliable intra-Afghanistan trade and exports.[76]

Many NATO states, particularly Germany and the United Kingdom, increased funding for development efforts in support of this new campaign plan, although often through their own national agencies rather than through multinational or direct ISAF efforts.[77] As U.S. humanitarian and development spending increased under the Obama administration, USAID provided more than $2 billion per year to assist development in Afghanistan, with the goal of providing half through Afghan government agencies. CERP funding—the portion directly administered by the U.S. military—peaked at $501 million in FY 2009, decreased slightly in 2010 and 2011, fell to $104 million in FY 2012, then to $38 million in 2013, and dwindled to insignificant (by DOD standards) levels in the years since.[78]

The Logic of CERP in Afghanistan

This influx in funds, matched by a troop surge and civilian surge, was designed to reverse the momentum in Afghanistan, which even official reports described as a struggle that might easily be lost. It was built on a set of assumptions, derived from the history of COIN and from experiences in Iraq, about the relationships between intervening powers, insurgents, host governments, and the local population in contested regions. The first official publication of doctrine in the twenty-first century to address counterinsurgency, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, FM 3-07.22, described the will of the people as the center of gravity

of an insurgency. Along with calls to minimize the use of force around the host nation population, it includes the development of infrastructure and a strong host nation economy as vital parts of the civil-military aspect of a COIN.[79] *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24, replaced *Counterinsurgency Operations* two years later and included economic development in its discussion of the causes of, and solutions to, insurgencies.[80]

Counterinsurgency recognizes that a range of groups, including insurgents, multinational corporations, and NGOs, as well as intervening powers through both civilian and military programs, engage in economic development, while acknowledging that even civil affairs personnel, trained to carry out stabilization and development missions, lack deep knowledge of the topic.[81] Notably, it characterizes economic development on the part of the counterinsurgents as part of a "middle stage." Using a medical metaphor, the first mandate is to stop the bleeding, which involves combat and information operations, as well as population protection. Continuing this analogy, economic and infrastructure development can only take place during the recovery phase, with economic responsibilities being transitioned to the host government in the outpatient care phase.[82] The logic of development in COIN is stated succinctly in *Counterinsurgency*:

> Without a viable economy and employment opportunities, the public is likely to pursue false promises offered by insurgents. Sometimes insurgents foster the conditions keeping the economy stagnant. Insurgencies attempt to exploit a lack of employment or job opportunities to gain active and passive support for their cause and ultimately undermine the government's legitimacy. Unemployed males of military age may join the insurgency to provide for their families. Hiring these people for public works projects or a local civil defense corps can remove the economic incentive to join the insurgency.[83]

A more practical publication designed to guide the use of money in shaping the counterinsurgency environment was released by the Center for Army Lessons Learned in 2009, under the imprimatur of the commandant of the U.S. Army Financial Management School (*Counterinsurgency* was signed by Lieutenant Generals David Petraeus and James F. Amos). Ensuring that the subtle interdependencies of economic activity, social unrest, and governmental legitimacy would not obscure this handbook's point, it was titled *Commander's Guide to Money as a Weapons System: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, and the term *money as a weapons system*, or MAAWS, already in use in Iraq, became ubiquitous in the efforts in Afghanistan that were ramping up.[84] Many programs other than CERP fell under the umbrella of MAAWS, and this handbook was

designed to guide company- , battalion- , and brigade-level commanders as well as noncommissioned officers in the use of these funding sources, not simply CERP.

There were signs that CERP might not be achieving either its development or its COIN goals in Iraq well before the publication of the MAAWS handbook and the substantial investment of CERP and other MAAWS funds in Afghanistan during the Afghan surge. Accounts of PRT teams that worked with CERP noted a lack of direction and a marginal return on investment that benefited fewer Iraqis than intended and exacerbated existing tribal hostilities and instability.[85] The lack of central control or oversight—in some ways a desirable attribute to allow rapid and local response—also allowed funds to be used for unintended and sometimes frivolous projects, as CERP became the funding source of choice for works far beyond its mandate due to its streamlined processes, and receipts and documentation were often incomplete or entirely missing.[86]

CERP in Implementation in Afghanistan

The quarterly reports released by SIGAR during the Afghan surge document not only the changes in funding and disbursements but also changes to the guidelines around the uses to which CERP funds could be put. These reports illustrate the extent to which CERP spending drifted from its original constraints and purpose. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 directs that the military not engage in development of construction projects that would typically fall under the jurisdiction of USAID or the Department of State, both of which had other funding streams substantially larger than CERP. It also stipulated that priority be given to projects of less than $500,000 and prohibits the use of CERP funds to provide goods, services, or direct funds to national armies; guard forces; border, policy, or civil defense forces; infrastructure protection forces; or intelligence forces in support of other security or defense forces.[87]

Despite these unambiguous prohibitions, it soon became clear that, particularly for higher cost, high visibility infrastructure works, there was little purpose in committing funds without some assurance that the project would not become a target for insurgent attacks. The SIGAR report from the first quarter of 2010 noted a request to use CERP funds to provide security at the Kajaki Dam Hydropower Plant, a necessary development to provide reliable electricity to the particularly violent Kandahar and Helmand regions.[88] Beyond security, the ability of a future independent Afghan government to maintain a project caused SIGAR-led audits to criticize CERP spending that put funds in jeopardy, and in some cases to redirect resources to non-Afghan agencies, as when 92 percent of the funds dedicated to infrastructure in Laghman Province

were considered at risk due to the inability of Afghan provincial authorities to maintain or operate them.[89]

Without exception, each SIGAR quarterly report between 2010 and 2013 mentions the importance of increased oversight, audits, and monitoring to ensure project completion, the appropriateness of project funding, and the technical quality of large infrastructure projects in particular. These reports also note mission creep, both in what is funded and where the funds go. In the second quarter of 2010, SIGAR reported that when local contractors could not fulfill project requirements, CERP funds were suballocated to other organizations, including elements of the U.S. Army, despite the clear prohibition of CERP funds going to U.S. forces or agencies.[90] The lack of coordination between military and civilian efforts also was noted by the inspector general, who reported in the third quarter of 2010 that, while a process existed to harmonize USAID and CERP projects at the provincial and national level, in practice, USAID did not participate in this process and often did not even notify local authorities of their development projects, while only 4 of 26 audited CERP programs documented coordination with an Afghan authority.[91]

New reporting requirements were instituted in early 2011 for high-cost projects, reflecting concerns that "DoD was using CERP to fund large scale projects to support its counter-insurgency strategy rather than for the original purpose—to implement small-scale projects to enable military commanders to meet the urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction needs within their areas of responsibility."[92] In other words, where CERP was intended to be used at the battalion level or below as a tactical tool to achieve campaign goals, DOD was increasingly using it at the theater or combatant commander level to achieve strategic goals. Though projects spending more than $500,000 made up fewer than 3 percent of CERP projects by count, they consumed two-thirds of CERP funds in 2009. Although the proportion of large CERP projects decreased, usually staying below 1 percent of the total number of CERP-funded projects, the proportion of CERP dollars these projects consumed remained high.

In addition to tighter reporting around high-cost projects, the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) created a new fund, the Afghanistan Infrastructure Fund (AIF), to enable DOD to fund large infrastructure projects with more technical expertise and oversight than CERP could provide, with the caveat that such projects must be agreed upon by the Department of Defense and the Department of State.[93] However, the tactical expediency of CERP funding, combined with a lack of incentives to choose AIF over CERP when it was a better programmatic fit, attenuated the change in spending patterns that AIF was meant to create. Despite this new fund, and the reiterated desire that CERP funds be used on a small scale to relieve pressing humanitarian needs or threats to the counterinsurgency mission, by late 2011 CERP funds

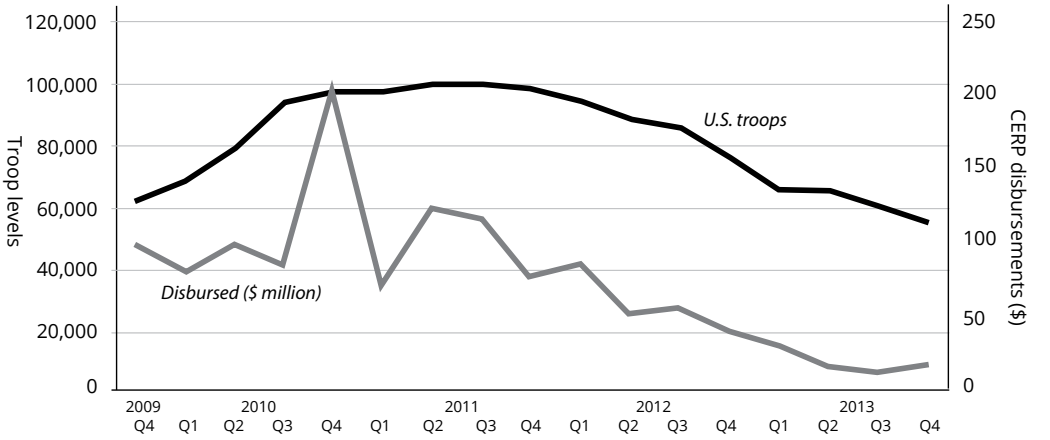
had been committed to construct an additional 1,600 kilometers of roads in Afghanistan.[94]

As the Afghan surge drew down, increasing scrutiny revealed serious problems with even the humanitarian and comparatively low-cost projects for which CERP had been intended. A SIGAR inspection in 2013 revealed that a medical clinic in Kabul Province that was to be built in 2011 for less than $200,000 was built to entirely different (and inferior) specifications and was never intended to operate as a clinic.[95] A similar small hospital funded at more than $500,000 for Parwan Province lacked equipment and infrastructure specified in the construction contract. This made it unable to deliver care during an inspection in summer 2012, when auditors recommended that payment be withheld until the missing components of the hospital were constructed and in working order. In October 2012, payment was delivered, despite a November inspection confirming that no improvements had been made. While the contractor was barred from bidding on anymore CERP or MAAWS projects, the funds were neither returned nor was the building able to provide services.[96]

The mismanagement, lack of oversight, and waste of resources documented in the SIGAR reports were not unique to CERP. Other funding streams, some administered by DOD (e.g., Afghan Security Forces Fund), some administered by the Department of State, and others by different governments and NGOs, experienced similar problems. Many of these programs, particularly the ASFF and ESF, as well as the assorted counternarcotics programs, dealt with significantly higher budgets. What is particular to CERP is that it was the sole program designed to be allocated, disbursed, and to some extent overseen by military personnel who interacted with the local Afghan population. Its purpose was to provide rapid relief to humanitarian concerns that would first come to the attention of military forces, as well as to serve as a nonlethal fires system to be used in support of the military elements of the counterinsurgency. The sharp drop-off of CERP disbursements illustrated in figure 1 was partly a function of the drawdown of troops after the surge promised in the first year of Obama's administration and partly a function of the increased funding levels for other programs. These newly increased lines of funding took over major infrastructure investments, as did the Afghan government as it assumed some of the funding and administration roles carried out by the U.S. military under CERP.[97]

In the years prior to the Afghan surge, most CERP spending was concentrated in regions along the border with Pakistan. Between 2010 and 2013, this shifted, with spending increasing in the south, throughout the country in areas characterized by current or historical military activity, and in areas with greater population density and economic development. Patterns of CERP spending by type also shifted. During and after the surge, agricultural spending increased

Figure 1. CERP disbursements and U.S. troop levels during the Afghan surge, by quarter



Source: Heidi M. Peters et al., Department of Defense Contractor and Troop Levels in Iraq and Afghanistan: 2007–2016*; dollar figures from the SIGAR* Quarterly Reports to Congress*, 2010–13.*

both with respect to number of projects and level of funding. Battle damage payments increased to more than a quarter of all projects by number as a result of intensified fighting, but as the amount of each payment was trivial for such a large budget, the percentage of funds used for this purpose remained very small. High-cost projects in electricity, education, and health care increased with the surge, even as the number of projects in those areas remained the same or even decreased. Transportation spending levels decreased but remained the highest proportion of CERP dollars during the surge period. Urgent humanitarian projects decreased during the surge, both as a percentage of projects and as a percentage of CERP dollars. The ability of outliers to distort statistics is illustrated by the fact that the spike in electricity funding from CERP budgets is attributable to a single project: a dam in Kandahar that cost $100 million. While the use of CERP funds for such projects was not within the parameters established by Congress, and was consistently the subject of criticism from SIGAR and other agencies, small projects (<$5,000) made up 86 percent of all projects, while big ticket projects (>$500,000), while consuming in some years 70 percent of the CERP budget, were usually less than 1 percent of projects.[98]

Mapping the regions in which CERP projects had direct effects, regions in which Coalition forces had been active in the previous and current years using battlefield reporting systems, and a range of geographical indicators (population, satellite imaging of lights at night indicating development, and patterns of vegetation indicating agricultural activity) showed that CERP activity was greater in areas in which these indicators were high. Factors linked with low-

er CERP activity include low road density, distance from major roads, and very rugged terrain.[99] An important note about the limitations of the data from which these relationships were derived is that they reflect CERP obligations, not disbursements, and do not reflect whether the projects were completed to specification or indeed at all. Since a portion of CERP obligations were never disbursed, and a nontrivial number of projects are known not to have been completed or have not been recorded as complete or not, these figures are a better reflection of where commanders sought to use CERP funds than of the delivered results of CERP project spending.

Effects of CERP

A Rand project that conducted anonymous interviews with 197 U.S. servicemembers—primarily Marines and SOF, despite the majority of CERP projects being carried out through conventional Army units—found patterns in CERP spending and perceived effectiveness that are slightly at odds with the mandate and some of the other research on CERP in Afghanistan. Notably, while all legislation and guidelines forbade the use of CERP funds for security forces, Army, Marine, and SOF respondents consistently reported doing so, either through quid pro quos for local security personnel or by labeling the payments as support (security) for critical infrastructure, which put the payments under the infrastructure column in reports.[100] When asked to evaluate the outcomes of CERP projects with which they had been involved, respondents in the aggregate seem to echo the ambivalence of research on CERP results. An important caveat is that respondents were given criteria for identifying outcomes as successful or unsuccessful, and they were merely asked if, in their opinion, results had been "successful," "unsuccessful," "unintended positive," or "unintended negative."

Agriculture, economic development, and local freedom of movement activities were generally considered successful. Local rapport, local security, and governance were considered successful by the greatest margins. This suggests that the "hearts and minds by governance" theory of COIN was being advanced. Health care and education CERP projects were viewed with ambivalence by respondents, as were intelligence gathering, ISAF security, and ISAF freedom of movement activities, which suggests that neither of the two ostensible purposes of CERP—relief of urgent humanitarian need and supporting the immediate needs of the COIN—were advanced in the view of the forces implementing the program. And corruption and local tensions were both rated as unintended negative project outcomes.[101] These critical appraisals of the effects of CERP come from a group that, by a large margin, believed CERP had helped their overall mission, with 90 percent of Army respondents, 80 percent of SOF respondents, and 60 percent of Marine respondents agreeing with the statement that CERP had helped them achieve their mission.[102]

On the question of whether CERP reduced violence during the Afghan surge, the consensus of studies shows that it did so only under very particular circumstances, and that in other circumstances it had the opposite effect. The Rand study found that localized CERP efforts (within one district) were correlated with long-term decreases in enemy engagements, but with only marginal statistical significance. Further, it found that CERP activity is "functioning as a proxy for the application of counterinsurgency effort" and that it is impossible to separate positive security outcomes in regions with high CERP activity from the increase in intelligence gathering, higher military presence, and non-CERP development activities that were also higher in these regions.[103]

A comparison of two streams of Department of State development funds and CERP finds that, early in the surge, small CERP payments contingent on certain actions by local authorities, and particularly on the provision of intelligence, were correlated with a reduction in violence. In addressing how CERP was less effective in Afghanistan than it had been in Iraq, this study also makes the case that the conditions directing CERP funding was met less often in Afghanistan than it had been in Iraq. Further, the broader extent of corruption and the weaker institutions in Afghanistan meant that CERP funds were less likely to be translated into services that benefited the population, and thus that dollars spent or projects funded was a much less useful metric than physical outputs or Afghans helped by the projects. The weaker institutions and culture of corruption in Afghanistan also helps explain why high-dollar projects in which both nominally friendly contractors and bureaucrats as well as insurgents perceived more opportunities to bleed off funds for themselves had negative effects on both governance and violence.[104]

A mixed methods study of CERP funding during the Afghan surge relied on interviews with career Army civil affairs officers who had administered CERP and been involved in development in other theaters, as well as a particularly granular database of more than 100,000 insurgent-initiated events in Afghanistan between 2011 and 2013, and the creation of the CERP database. This work found that the mean level of violence in Afghanistan in this interval was 13.4 violent events per month per 100,000 people. A $1 increase in small CERP projects (<$50,000) per capita was associated with a reduction of about eight events per month per 100,000 people, an almost 60 percent reduction. A $1 increase in large CERP projects (>$50,000) per capita was associated with an increase of one event per month per 100,000 people. The results suggest that "since large CERP spending exceeded small CERP by a factor of four on a per capita basis—and at times by an order of magnitude—large CERP projects were non-productive, or even counter-productive, and at great cost."[105] The mechanism responsible for this difference, the author hypothesizes based upon the qualitative interviews, is twofold. First, smaller projects required significant-

ly fewer signatures from up the chain of command and thus were implemented in a timelier manner. Second, smaller projects involved more direct negotiation between civil affairs officers and the local authorities in the area in which the CERP project took place, during which the exchange of information, sometimes explicitly required but sometimes an organic part of the negotiations, enabled counterinsurgents to increase security and improve both force and population protection.

Another study of variation in CERP and violence differentiated projects by the degree to which territory had been secured by progovernment military forces, whether ISAF or ANSF. Using weekly CERP spending and insurgent attacks involving bombings and live fire, this work finds that CERP spending in secured regions reduced bombings, attacks against Coalition troops, and improvised explosive device (IED) placements. When a region is no longer actively contested, then, the hearts and minds theory of counterinsurgency as expressed in CERP appears to solidify or even increase COIN gains. In contested areas, humanitarian CERP projects had no effect on insurgent violence, whereas development projects related to security or governance "massively increase insurgent violence."[106] This corresponds with the guidance from *Counterinsurgency* that development aid is most useful after the "first aid" phase of conflict, in other words while active fighting is no longer ongoing. The finding that local levels of pacification shape the ability of development to reduce violence also has implications for the "three block war" theory of twenty-first century warfare, which envisions counterforce, counterinsurgent, and humanitarian efforts being carried out simultaneously and in close proximity to each other.[107]

Consistent with the studies that looked only at CERP in Afghanistan or a portion of Afghanistan, the meta-analysis found that development funding reduced violence only in very specific circumstances, such as when it was carried out in areas that were already pacified, when it was carried out in conjunction with significantly increased troop levels, when it did not present a strategic threat to insurgents, or when it was funded at levels low enough not to create particularly attractive spoils for insurgents. Across a range of countries and conflicts, the development programs most strongly linked with reductions in violence took place in stable areas with relatively strong institutions, two factors lacking from the great majority of Afghanistan CERP projects.[108]

The development and governance effects of CERP also range from weakly positive to strongly negative, to the extent that rigorous conclusions cannot be drawn at all. A 2018 audit of CERP activities between 2009 and 2013 found that project tracking and accountability was lacking. While many projects documented the goals for funds disbursed, none of the medium- or large-dollar projects in the audit (64 medium-dollar projects and 45 high-dollar projects) reported on the achievement of these goals. One hundred percent of small-

dollar CERP disbursements met this requirement, but since this was recorded at the time funds transferred, this does not represent a dramatic increase in diligence for small projects.[109] CERP standard operating procedures during this interval required "a focus on measurable effects to meet urgent humanitarian needs and COIN objectives," although the nature of the reporting requirements and the threshold for various reporting requirements shifted during and after the surge.[110] The audit concluded that DOD did not consistently assess whether CERP projects achieved their stated goals or whether CERP as a whole assisted in carrying out U.S. strategy.[111] When cataloging how CERP documentation was missing or incomplete, the audit also implicitly makes clear that it is difficult for an external body to comprehensively assess after the fact whether CERP succeeded on its own terms or in advancing the broader Afghanistan strategy of stabilizing the country, building the capacity for self-governance, and then transferring authority to Afghan governance.

Despite the absence of complete records on the parameters, goals, timelines, and ultimate status of CERP projects, a number of assessments exist that were done by government agencies and external researchers on the effects of CERP development, COIN, and the Afghan surge. While there are tactical and isolated successes in these studies, the general verdict is that CERP was a tactic that was usually executed poorly. It was an example of military-directed development in support of the hearts and minds theory of COIN, which was the approach selected to achieve the ultimate strategic goal of a stable and sovereign Afghan government that would deny safe haven to those who would attack the United States and the West. The flaws in the CERP program highlighted that it supported a campaign plan based on unsubstantiated assumptions in the service of a strategy that was not achievable. It is also notable that reviews of the Afghan surge written earlier in the 2010s, when the effort was ongoing, are more optimistic and favorable than those written after troop levels were drawn down to around 10,000 at the conclusion of Operation Enduring Freedom.

A Congressional Research Service overview of the Afghanistan war in early 2011 found that "micro-level" spending, and particularly CERP, tended to be allocated in two ways, both of which were flawed. Projects selected by the military often failed to consider the full context of the problem and thus were less useful than intended, such as when clinics were funded in regions with no medical staff to operate them or plans to provide medical staff. Sometimes, as when a well-digging project provided more benefit to one tribe than another, the ensuing disruption to the status quo increased hostilities both among Afghan groups and toward the Coalition. When commanders sought to avoid such pitfalls by consulting with local authorities and village elders to allocate CERP funds, they benefited from an enhanced perception of competence for local governance, but the priorities set through such consultations often reflect-

ed the interests of local power groups, rather than humanitarian needs or the needs of the counterinsurgents.[112]

At the national level, the extensive use of foreign funds to provide everything from clean water to transportation to security forces may have been intrinsically antithetical to the strategic goal of a sovereign and stable Afghanistan. In 2009, up to 95 percent of the Afghan budget (at all levels of government) and development spending came from foreign assistance, a share that does not include NATO or ISAF spending on military activities, and which declined only slightly in the ensuing four years. This perpetuated a dependent relationship between the Afghan government and Coalition states for funding and also for legitimacy and perceived (and actual) autonomy, running counter to the official goal of creating a sustainable and legitimate democratic Afghan government.[113] While aware of this problem, NATO faced two unpalatable options: assisting the Afghan government to take more direct responsibility for development, governance, and security, knowing that such a course of action would result in markedly worse outcomes, particularly in the short term; or maintaining its role in funding and overseeing these functions, knowing that this would hinder the development of meaningful Afghan capabilities. In general, Coalition states and the U.S. military, in particular, opted for the latter until the drawdown of forces mandated the former, with the transition to a particularly unprepared Afghan government.[114]

An economist working for the Afghan government saw a similar disconnect between the ostensible goals of spending in support of the Afghan strategy and actual development spending. Many programs seemed more concerned with demonstrating that they were disbursing tremendous amounts of money through numerous projects than they were with the nature of the projects funded or with their completion. Further, rather than an economy more attuned with local culture, resources, and sustainability, this aid was shaping an economy dependent on very high imports, financed by oil pipelines. One assessment showed that "the emphasis is not on meeting the basic needs of the majority of Afghanistan's population, like food, healthcare, education, etc., but on encouraging trade that only benefits the elite and foreigners."[115] The relative ineffectiveness of CERP activities in building agricultural, trade, and social service capacity was a part of this failure.

Perhaps the final word on the outcomes of U.S. stabilization and development efforts in Afghanistan, and particularly those carried out by the military, should go to SIGAR, which judges these efforts to have "mostly failed." Political factors in Washington, DC, caused the Afghan surge and efforts that followed to be placed under time constraints that created unrealistic expectations, based on the United States greatly overestimating "its ability to build and reform government institutions in Afghanistan." After transition, the services and se-

curity provided by official Afghan institutions "could not compete with a resurgent Taliban as it filled the void in newly vacated territory." In practice, money spent—not numbers of Afghans assisted, projects seen through to completion, economic growth, or reductions in corruption—was the metric by which U.S. military and civilian staff were judged. These infusions of cash increased corruption and often increased conflict. Despite the inherently political nature of stabilization and development,

> the military consistently determined priorities and chose to focus on the most insecure districts first. These areas were often perpetually insecure and had to be cleared of insurgents again and again. Civilian agencies, particularly USAID, were compelled to establish stabilization programs in fiercely contested areas that were not ready for them.[116]

Explaining the Disconnect between Policy and Tactics

The initial policy guiding U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in the wake of 9/11 was set out in President George W. Bush's speech on 7 October 2001, in which he declared a range of financial, diplomatic, and military actions to prevent al-Qaeda from engaging in further attacks on the United States.[117] Beyond the decision to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the broader goal of the Bush administration in the immediate wake of the attacks was to focus on possible sponsors of terror worldwide on the grounds that the next 9/11 would likely not come from al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. "A strategic response to 9/11," according to a cabinet official, "would have to take account of the threat from other terrorist groups—Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia, Lebanese Hezbollah, various Africa-based groups—and state sponsors beyond Afghanistan, especially those that pursued weapons of mass destruction. We would need to determine what action—military or otherwise—to take against which targets, and on what timetable."[118] While the military maintained a presence continuously from the initial invasion of Afghanistan, in May 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld announced that major combat operations in Afghanistan were over.

The *National Security Strategy* of 2006 laid out what would remain in various forms, with the overarching goal and rationale for the U.S. and ISAF mission in Afghanistan to focus on "the best way to provide enduring security for the American people" and "create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system."[119] The 2006 NSS announced that the people of Afghanistan had replaced tyranny with democracy and ratified a constitution. But the institutions of democracy beyond elections and legislatures also were emphasized as essential to spreading democracy to make the world safer. The

strategy also reveals the Iraq emphasis of the White House and the Department of Defense in 2006. While several pages are devoted to plans for Iraq, including elements of counterinsurgency (without using that term), only one brief paragraph prescribes the approach to Afghanistan:

> In Afghanistan, the successes already won must be consolidated. A few years ago, Afghanistan was condemned to a pre-modern nightmare. Now it has held two successful free elections and is a staunch ally in the war on terror. Much work remains, however, and the Afghan people deserve the support of the United States and the entire international community.[120]

President Obama campaigned in part on concluding what was widely seen as illegitimate war in Iraq while intensifying efforts to win the "good war" in Afghanistan. During his inaugural address, he promised that the United States would "responsibly leave Iraq to its people and forge a hard-earned peace in Afghanistan."[121] The policy of the Obama government was to ensure that Afghanistan would not serve as a safe haven or operating base for terrorists again while minimizing both the extent and the duration of American presence there.[122] The strategy for enacting this policy was a period of brief but intense presence and activity by American military and civilians, complemented by Coalition forces, which would develop and then transition power to Afghan civil and military institutions. The operational approach to supporting this strategy was to combine counterterrorism with population-centric counterinsurgency, largely following General McChrystal's guidance as laid out in his 2009 strategic review.[123] CERP was a tactical innovation intended to play a crucial role in this campaign.

As SIGAR's lessons learned report states, these efforts were largely failures on every level. The United States still has a military presence in Afghanistan, and the same general who sought to plan a rapid and satisfactory conclusion to the U.S. effort there recently advocated maintaining a force in Afghanistan indefinitely to "muddle along."[124] Far from being defeated or rehabilitated, the Taliban is resurgent and is set to act as a spoiler in the next round of Afghan elections.[125] The policy and strategy developed by both the Bush and Obama administrations have clearly failed.

The inability to tie tactical actions—traditional lethal events as well as more nonlethal tactics such as CERP—to strategic goals is a different question related to why the Afghanistan policies and strategies have failed. Tactics have been used successfully to advance a strategy that proved ultimately unsuccessful, but that is not the case with counterinsurgency tactics in Afghanistan. The assumptions embedded in the strategy of Afghanistan, though, are interlinked with many of the flaws in the campaign plan and in the tactics of counterinsurgency,

so to understand why tactical innovation did not yield strategic success, the nature of the strategy and campaign plan is essential.

The strategy chosen to transform Afghanistan into a sovereign and sustainable state that would not support or provide refuge to terrorist organizations was to develop and transition power to a democratic government, largely in the model of the Western conception of a state, but with some concessions to Afghanistan's history and culture (e.g., making it officially an Islamic state). There are two general schools of post–World War II American thought about the nature of governance in other countries and how it influences American safety and influence. One, articulated by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1974 while evoking Woodrow Wilson, and later largely subsumed by so-called neoconservatives after the Cold War, argued that self-determination and democracy (which were conflated) were not only moral imperatives but intrinsically safer for citizens of those countries as well as for the United States.[126]

President Franklin D. Roosevelt most famously articulated the counterargument when he endorsed support for Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza as "our son of a bitch," on the grounds that excessive concern with the internal character of other states interfered with the relationships between states and could provoke conflict and disorder.[127] Jeane Kirkpatrick advanced a version of this argument, advocating for limited engagement with and support of autocrats as and when this was congruent with U.S. interests, with the potential to gradually convert autocracies into more democratic states through slow influence.[128] The strategy under Bush and Obama committed wholesale to the former vision and saw the creation of a democratic and representative Afghanistan—grading on a curve with respect to religious freedom, although notably not with regard to women's suffrage—as the key to eliminating safe haven for terrorists there.

As well as rejecting a long-standing strain of American realism, this concept ignored a different approach to promoting stability. Sociologist Amitai Etzioni argues that a state's preference for violence or persuasion in pursuit of its goals, rather than whether it is secular or religious or democratic or autocratic, is "the fault line that defines the clash of moral cultures and power in the post–Cold-War era."[129] At the micro level, U.S. and ISAF forces often did interact and cooperate with local tribal councils; at the national level, the strategy for Afghanistan was always the creation of a liberal, representative, and moderately secular democracy based on elements of the American civic religion. The American civic religion is the ideal that Americans have a teleological view of history in which everyone prefers a reasonably secular and liberal democracy, rather than upon any empirical basis for believing this to be the best course for achieving American policy goals.[130]

That strategy being set, the next question was which operational approach to adopt to achieve this end; a question taken seriously for the first time when

McChrystal and the Obama administration set out to assess the state of the war in Afghanistan early in 2009. Prior to the Afghan surge, major activities in the region were generally limited to counterterrorism, security force assistance, and development. The nature of the Coalition complicated the first two. The Provincial Reconstruction Team had evolved as the primary structure of NATO efforts in large part because many NATO troop contributing nations were reluctant to engage in or directly support counterterrorism efforts and had limited capability to partner with local forces for security assistance.[131]

While the strategic assessment and later plans included elements of counterterrorism and attempts to grapple with the role of Pakistan in the insurgency, the Obama administration converged on population-centric counterinsurgency, combined with a flexible schedule for withdrawal, as the model for campaign planning.[132] The target for troop withdrawal was a nod to political necessity in Washington, DC, but it undermined the COIN from the start; a quantitative analysis of third-party or expeditionary counterinsurgencies, as compared to those in which the counterinsurgents considered the contested region part of their sovereign territory, as with the British in Northern Ireland or the French in Algeria, found legitimacy, information, and resolve to be the three strongest predictors of success. Accordingly, declaring withdrawal to be a goal tied to a date and not a response to strategic accomplishments signals poor resolve.[133]

For those advocating hearts-and-minds COIN in Afghanistan in 2009, its failures in Iraq should have been considered. While touted as a turning point in the war, during which a handful of visionaries armed with a new philosophy snatched victory from the jaws of defeat, the verdict with a decade of hindsight is more mixed—and even at the time, many within the U.S. military and outside it were questioning the assumptions and results of the surge.[134] The collapse of the Sunni insurgency coincided with the surge, and may have been accelerated by it, but signs of its decline existed long before the new doctrine was put into effect in 2007.[135] Shifting tribal relationships, an aggressive counterterrorism strategy, the physical separation of sectarian opponents, even exhaustion after years of civil war have all been cited as factors that played a role.[136] A case can be made that increasing sectarian killings at the hands of Jaysh al-Mahdi and other Shi'a militant groups did as much to push the Sunni toward cooperation with the counterinsurgency as the hearts and minds approach did to pull them toward cooperation.[137]

While the doctrine and leadership changed markedly, actual practice did not in Iraq during and after the surge. As early as mid-2003, the U.S. Army had shifted from major combat operations to the activities that comprise counterinsurgency, although the term was not used at the time. Despite the rhetoric of hearts and minds that spread from 2006 on, the day-to-day tactical activities of ground forces in Iraq did not change significantly between 2005 and 2007.[138]

Arguably the single most important influence of the burgeoning number of books, theories, and experts around population-centric COIN was preemptively to foreclose on all other operational approaches to the strategic goals in Iraq. Comparing COIN theorists with early airpower theorists, who both believed their approach to war would accomplish strategic goals through direct engagement with the people and bypassing hostile armies, Gian P. Gentile argues that the passion for hearts-and-minds COIN prevented the military from considering whether approaches other than COIN might yield acceptable results in Iraq or whether approaches to COIN other than hearts and minds. These were derived from successful counterinsurgencies and not the hagiographies of their practitioners and might be a more appropriate means to ending the conflict in Iraq.[139]

Despite these very real problems in the theory and practice of population-centric COIN in Iraq and earlier, it was determined—alongside a counterterrorism campaign and a largely notional engagement with Pakistan to curb material support and deny refuge to the insurgents—to be the operational approach for the Afghan surge. That this decision was based on flawed assumptions, and in the service of a strategy similarly based on ideological rather than pragmatic factors, is a separate matter from how well the U.S. military executed tactics in support of this operational approach. It is possible for good tactics to be harnessed to poor strategy. With respect to CERP in the Afghan surge, that was not the case. Spending was haphazard, carried out in such a way that tracking its influence accurately was almost impossible and, where the effects can be determined in hindsight, responsible for more corruption, waste, and conflict than for delivering services, improving security, and thus helping to build legitimacy for national, provincial, or local Afghan governance.

Later analysis of Afghanistan, and prior study of development and violence in other regions, indicated that development aid was most effective in already pacified areas, and in fact counterproductive in more violent areas. While phrased differently, *Counterinsurgency* grasped this, describing development as something that happened only after "first aid"—the quelling of active violence. Where insurgents were still active and violence still frequent, hearts-and-minds COIN was more likely to be effective when coordinated with active counterterrorism, or "hard COIN," with a focus on increasing security infrastructure and combat operations against insurgents, as in Panjwayi District in Kandahar in 2012–13.[140] In practice, despite the discussion of a civilian surge, the military's numbers, resources, and ability to operate in heavily contested areas meant that it often set the priorities for engagement, including the use of CERP funds, and according to the logic of more traditional military operations, this meant addressing the greatest threats (the most violent or contested regions) first.[141] In the absence of guidance about how development funds were most likely to

yield the desired effects, this was defensible, but it contributed to the failure of spending to achieve the campaign's goals.

With the blessing of commanders much higher up than the field grade officers who disbursed almost all the small-dollar project funds, CERP resources were often directed to purposes for which they had been discouraged or forbidden by policy. All the SIGAR quarterly audits express concern or frustration with the number of high-dollar, long-term development projects funded by CERP. In many cases, this was due to expedience, since CERP funds were delivered more rapidly and with less paperwork than were resources from the programs that more properly would have funded multiyear, multimillion-dollar infrastructure projects. While the use of CERP funds to pay for military, police, or security personnel, equipment, and ammunition was forbidden, in practice, CERP was used to arm locals, ostensibly as guards for infrastructure, and thus under infrastructure line items in budgets. The combination of expensive projects, a large pool of potential spoils, and the need to hire locals as security forces to protect the projects and related resources proved particularly likely to increase violence and corruption.[142]

Conclusion: Firing for Effect without Firing for Range

The military's advantage over civilian agencies and workers in spending money for development resulted in what one analyst describes as the "securitization of aid," with the understanding of development and humanitarian aid as a tool for the military (MAAWS) stripped of the lessons aid workers had learned about the effects of intervention on local economies and cultures, tribal politics, and existing tensions.[143] Some military personnel grasped this, and they made the case that the military could best use CERP as a nonlethal fires system. One veteran of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars argued that using CERP and similar programs explicitly to help the counterinsurgency, with humanitarian and development benefits as possible externalities but not the driving purposes, would have avoided the gradual creep of CERP to include public works never within its aegis, as well as avoiding unsuitable timelines for the military.[144] Throughout the wars, though, the program remained dedicated to humanitarian and development ends, as well as support of the COIN. Even a more literal reading of MAAWS, too, feeds into a targeting-based view of operations that assumes clear causality at the tactical level, and that the accomplishment of a series of tasks would lead to the desired outcomes, without reference either to the inherent ambiguity of social effects or to the complex factors causing the problem to be solved.

While ongoing exchanges between civil affairs officers disbursing funds and the local authorities may have contributed significantly to a reduction in

violence through the exchange of information that was an explicit or implicit condition of CERP funds, or an incidental aspect of the negotiations, this mechanism was poorly understood at the time, particularly by the troops who most often provided small payments but were not trained in civil affairs. "Drive through" CERP grants, in which the ostensible goals of modest infrastructure improvement or economic development might be the same as those in which more sustained relationships existed, provided neither the incentive nor the opportunity to transfer useful information to U.S. forces.[145]

These tasks were not, to put it mildly, those for which U.S. soldiers and Marines had been trained prior to 9/11 and for some time after it. According to former vice chief of staff of the Army General John M. Keane, the institution deliberately purged itself "of everything that dealt with irregular warfare or counterinsurgency," except some SOF capabilities in those domains.[146] If COIN is armed social work, as it has been described, then the skills necessary are more related to those of a constabulary force than a military with no such tradition, but also with an added dimension of linguistic, cultural, and sociological skills. Soldiers and Marines with similar training and skills did and do exist, but they are generally confined to civil affairs, an occupation traditionally undervalued and under-resourced.[147]

Coupled with the absence of development expertise was a set of incentives around CERP that rewarded behaviors that had little to do with increasing security and development or supporting COIN. While a number of lines of effort and priorities were identified at different stages of the Afghan surge, these criteria were much less relevant to how commanders were evaluated on their use of CERP than simpler and less informative metrics. One Afghan government worker commented to an American soldier: "In Vietnam, they were measuring success of operations in the number that are killed. In Afghanistan, it is how many schools you are building and how much you spent. This is better, but [just] as wrong. What you need to measure is . . . the impact of what you've done[.]"[148] To ask these questions, though, a different and less tactically focused culture is needed. The impact of schools without teachers, or of schools in a region where local authorities would not permit children to attend, was minimal, as was the impact of clinic buildings that lacked electricity, plumbing, or qualified staff, phenomena that arose often with CERP projects. Another important effect of CERP seldom measured was the negative externality of preventing or undermining relief and development efforts by civilian and international NGOs. The ease with which the military used CERP funds often crowded out efforts by USAID, UN organizations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, and others, who might have taken longer to obtain funding but had substantially more expertise with development in what one study of CERP in Iraq referred to as "reconstruction fratricide."[149]

Not only was the impact (positive and negative) of CERP a metric missing from the evaluation of units and commanders disbursing CERP funds, but a more crude metric actively drove behavior that ran contrary to the campaign goals: "Money spent was often the metric of success."[150] When units were evaluated on how well they had achieved the governance goals of the mission, the only indicator used until 2011 was total funds spent under CERP, which rewarded disbursements without regard to how and why they were made or whether the projects were completed.[151] At the individual level, the amount of CERP money transferred to locals was "strongly considered in evaluations for promotion."[152]

While tactics can be well executed in the service of the wrong operational approach, in this case, the series of misconceptions within which CERP was nested suggest that the wrong strategy and the wrong operational approach may have ensured tactical failure at winning hearts and minds. By adopting a "strategy of tactics," mandating the operational and tactical approach from the top down rather than establishing strategic goals and freeing campaign planners and tactical units to determine how best to achieve them, population-centric COIN created an "intellectual straitjacket" that limited forces in Afghanistan to a narrow set of tools.[153] In the case of CERP, the military lacked the training, incentives, support, or expertise to use money as an effective weapon.

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