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CONFIDENTIAL

November 12, 2009

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Afghanistan strategy

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Below are two documents: One is a memo from [redacted] who served in the counter-insurgency program in Vietnam with John Paul Vann. He writes about Bernard Fall, the great French journalist and analyst, whom he studied with. His memo is a critique of COIN proposals and his own recommendations.

The other document consists of notes from my conversation with William Murray, former station chief of CIA in Pakistan. He was one of the members of a small CIA team, including Milt Bearden (whom you probably know and who is close to Richard Holbrooke), that directed the Afghan resistance to the Soviet occupation. Murray also served as station chief elsewhere, including Lebanon. His remarks focus on the lack of a clear mission and message in Afghanistan.

I neither endorse nor dispute [redacted]'s and Murray's analyses, but simply present them.

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1.
[redacted]

Counterinsurgency – a much failed strategy?

Bernard Fall was one of the most significant theoreticians and practitioner of Counterinsurgency (COIN) in the 20th Century. He was the expert most listened to at the Special Warfare Center at Ft. Bragg when LTG William Yarborough commanded the school there in the Kennedy and Johnson eras.

Fall defined COIN clearly. He said that: Counterinsurgency = political reform + economic development + counter guerrilla operations

This theory of warfare was developed by the colonial powers as a “cure” for the wave on “wars of national liberation” that swept through their overseas possessions after World War Two.

Because of these revolts against authority most of the European powers found themselves faced with colonized populations engaged in extended attempts to obtain independence from the metropole. Such rebellions were usually based on ethnic and racial differences with the colonizers and were often led by vanguard Left parties with communist connections. That connection caused an eventual American policy commitment to the COIN struggle. That commitment sometimes occurred as a partner of the colonial power (Vietnam in the late '40s and '50s) and sometimes as a successor to the colonial power after at least partial independence had been achieved. (Vietnam after the French)

COIN theory was seen by both the former colonial officers who taught it at Bragg and their American disciples of the time as the opposite of the methods of the anti-colonial insurgents who were thought to practice something called "revolutionary warfare." (RW)

Revolutionary Warfare + Political subversion (including propaganda) + economic transformation (usually socialist) + guerilla warfare (to include terrorism)

The central idea behind COIN was seen as competitive reformed government and economic development for the population that was at least potentially supported the insurgents RW movement. It was believed that if this population was "protected" from the RW efforts of the insurgent movement, then the population would choose to side with the counterinsurgents whether the counterinsurgents were the local post-colonial government or an occupying power.

This doctrine was widely applied across the world in the middle and late 20th Century. There were successes and there were failures.

Successes:

The British suppression of the "Malayan Emergency" was probably the greatest success of the counterinsurgents. In Malaya the British colonial authorities faced a clearly communist guerrilla movement that consisted altogether of overseas Chinese living in the midst of a majority Malay and Muslim population. The area of operations was a peninsula nearly completely surrounded by ocean areas dominated by the British Navy. The British forces suffered from cross department coordination issues early in the campaign, but once those were solved and the "Communist Terrorists" (CTs) isolated in the jungles and rubber plantations all that was needed to defeat them was persistence in small unit patrolling until the CTs were exterminated. There were never more than a few hundred of them. The British succeeded in suppressing this revolt but what did this successful effort cost them. It was enormously expensive and success was followed by British withdrawal from Malaya and the creation of an independent Malaysia completely dominated by the Malay ethnic adversaries of the overseas Chinese.

Kenya and Cyprus were both gripped by revolts by the Kikuyu and Greek populations respectively. In both cases, RW campaigns based on terrorism were fought to a standstill by the British only to be followed by political decisions on the part of the British government to abandon these countries and allow the ascent to power of the former leaders of the insurgencies, Kenyatta and Makarios respectively.

In Latin America, where I participated in several COIN efforts, the Kennedy created "Alliance for Progress" sought to defeat local insurgencies inspired and led by cadres from Castro's Cuba. These countries were particularly good targets for communist inspired RW because the political and economic structures of the Central American and Andean states were so clearly unfair and un-democratic that local populations of underfed Indians and peasants could be easily proselytized in the process of RW. In many cases in Latin America the low level economic development efforts of the civil and military arms of the US Government met with considerable success. Villagers were protected from the insurgents, local (village economies) were improved. Medical treatment was provided to those who had never known it. Nevertheless, the "Alliance for Progress" can not be considered a strategic success. Why? The local elites in all these countries quickly perceived the COIN campaign as a threat to their political privilege and wealth in land and simply refused to institute the reforms sponsored by the alliance. Much the same thing happened in various parts of Africa and Southwest Asia where it was attempted.

Failures

The American war in Vietnam is a typical example of failure of the COIN theory. The massive communist led Viet Minh independence movement was a classic example of RW in all its components taken to its ultimate development in the creation of a regular army for the insurgent movement under the sponsorship of its Chinese communist ally. The United States participated in the French COIN effort against the Viet Minh and then became the sponsor of the post-colonial government left behind by the French on their departure. Contrary to popular legend (I served there for two years) the initial approach of the United States to the situation in South Vietnam was pure COIN right out of the Ft. Bragg School. Populations of villagers were protected, the South Vietnamese armed forces were developed, village militias were created for self defense, good government was preached to the Diem government in Saigon. Economic development was fostered. It was only when the government of North Vietnam decided that these methods were a serious bar to their eventual success in RW in the South and brought its regular army into South Vietnam in 1964 that US forces escalated their own deployment to the conventional war level. This was a necessary step if the eradication of the South Vietnamese government and the US COIN effort was to be avoided. There followed three years of conventional warfare between US and North Vietnamese forces. This warfare was largely conducted outside populated areas. COIN efforts continued during this period but took second place to the need to defeat or at least seriously weaken North Vietnam's army. In 1967 it was judged that this had been accomplished and COIN was once again made the centerpiece of American efforts in Vietnam. To accomplish this, a fully integrated civil/military COIN structure was created under the combined military command in Vietnam. This was called "Civil Operations, Revolutionary Development Support." (CORDS) I worked in this program for a year. (1968-1969) This effort had virtually unlimited money, ten thousand advisers in every aspect of Vietnamese civil society, business and government function and a massive coalition and south Vietnamese conventional force standing by to protect the population and the counterinsurgents of CORDS while they did their work. This COIN program was largely successful. A handover to the South Vietnamese forces was devised in the form of the "Vietnamization Program" and US forces were withdrawn in "trenches" (slices) over a couple of years. Following the Christmas, 1972 renewed bombing effort over North Vietnam (caused by

North Vietnamese intransigence in Geneva) a ceasefire was reached and for two years there was quiet in South Vietnam with the South Vietnamese government holding much of the country. It was only after some minor incident on the world stage caused a revulsion in the American press and public against any further involvement in Vietnam that the US Congress passed a law forbidding any further aid to South Vietnam that the North Vietnamese decided to use their fine army to over run the country in a conventional war. Lesson – You can win the COIN war and still be defeated conventionally or politically at home.

The French war in Algeria is another example of COIN success followed by political defeat and withdrawal. After a prolonged struggle, the French security force had largely defeated the Algerian native guerrillas of the *Front National de Liberation* (FLN). This struggle had been waged with all the aspects of classic COIN doctrine. The revolt had started in 1955. By 1960 the French Army, police and their Algerian allies had largely won the fight. As in Vietnam, two years then passed in relative quiet. In 1962 De Gaulle was elected president of France with a political vision that required independence for Algeria. That negated all the struggle and success of the COIN war. Failure once again at the strategic level.

Our war in Iraq is now cited as an example of the success of the COIN theory and its methods.

In fact nothing of the sort occurred in Iraq. Remember – COIN = political reform + economic development + counter-guerrilla operations. We have not brought on political reform in Iraq. What we have done is re-arrange the “players” in such a way that the formerly downtrodden Shia Arabs are now the masters. This has in no way reduced the potential for inter-communal armed struggle. We did not defeat the insurgents in counter guerrilla operations. What we did was bring more troops into the Baghdad area to enforce the separation of the ethno-sectarian communities while at the same time using traditional methods of “divide and conquer” to split off enough insurgents to form an effective force to use against Al-Qa’ida in Iraq and others whom we disapproved of. This is not counterinsurgency!!!

Conclusion

COIN is a badly flawed instrument of statecraft: Why?

- The locals ultimately own the country being fought over. If they do not want the “reforms” you desire, they will resist you as we have been resisted in Iraq and Afghanistan. McChrystal’s strategy paper severely criticized Karzai’s government. Will that disapproval harden into a decision to act to find a better government or will we simply undercut Afghan central government and become the actual government?

- Such COIN wars are expensive, long drawn out affairs that are deeply debilitating for the foreign counterinsurgent power. Reserves of money, soldiers and national will are not endless. Ultimately, the body politic of the counterinsurgent foreign power turns against the war and then all that has occurred has been a waste.

- COIN theory is predicated on the ability of the counterinsurgents to change the mentality of the “protected” (read controlled) population. The sad truth is that most people do not want to be

deprived of their ancestral ways and will fight to protect them. "Hearts and Minds" is an empty propagandist's phrase.

- In the end the foreign counterinsurgent is embarked on a war that is not his own war. For him, the COIN war will always be a limited war, fought for a limited time with limited resources. For the insurgent, the war is total war. They have no where to escape to after a tour of duty. The psychological difference is massive.

- For the counterinsurgent the commitment of forces must necessarily be much larger than for the insurgents. The counterinsurgent seeks to protect massive areas, hundreds of built up areas and millions of people. The insurgent can pick his targets. The difference in force requirements is crippling to the counterinsurgents.

What should we do?

- Hold the cities as bases to prevent a recognized Taliban government until some satisfactory (to us) deal is made among the Afghans.

- Participate in international economic development projects for Afghanistan.

- Conduct effective clandestine HUMINT out of the city bases against international jihadi elements.

- Turn the tribes against the jihadi elements.

- Continue to hunt and kill/capture dangerous jihadis,

How long might you have to follow this program? It might be a long time but that would be sustainable. A full-blown COIN campaign in Afghanistan is not politically sustainable.



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2.
Bill Murray
11/12/09

There was a small group of us (CIA) who ran the war against the Soviets, about five of us. I was station chief in Pakistan from 1991-94. We were criticized by State for supporting the extremists. We always said we are only there to support those who fight. Our logic was that we had no political goal, just get the Soviets out. We should have demobilized the Afghans, but we didn't.

Our goals were understood by the Afghans. We stuck to the message.

The Afghans hated the Arabs, hated them during the war against the Soviets. It's mythology they liked them, built by the press. You can't get the press to get off the blowback theory. Bin Laden, I doubt if he ever fired a gun in anger. He was there when I was there. He was engineering projects, roads, bridges and medical teams. But there was no big Arab fighting force.

Milt Bearden and I met with Pakistani generals who contacted us in 2007 at their request, met with the key general from ISI who created the Taliban. The message to us was that the Brits shouldn't go into Helmand. They had thrown them out in 1880 and they would never accept them back. No one listened. I'm in contact with those people all the time. So is Milt. They don't believe us anymore. The US military has its own objective. They think we are fighting against Islam. The Afghans will never perceive we are a secular society.

The military reinforces the same things over and over again. We're literally fighting the people. The problem is not the number of troops. It's a failed mission. The Afghans believe we are there to stay. That is the thing they will never accept. They will allow armies to go through and even stay for a few years, but not stay forever. I pity the president on his choices. He's torn by the military, with their typical just-give-us-the-troops. I don't see how to make this work.

We need a clear mission, internationalize the message and set an attainable goal. The message should be: No place should be a sanctuary for a group that threatens the peace of the international community. There needs to be a clearly defined goal. We went there to get al Qaeda and get Bin Laden. We didn't go there to get the Taliban. We've shifted goals and we're trying to build a government in Afghanistan with a person who represents a small portion of the people and is corrupt.

To me the message would be, we came to get AQ, this place can never be a launch pad for terrorism against the West. Say we'll be out four months after we get Bin Laden. The Taliban are telling people we are there to stay forever. We talk about democracy, etc. They don't care. They care about the way of life. It's as simplistic as it gets. We can't afford to restructure that society.

McChrystal is a military commander. He is going to solve the problem with more troops. We are exactly where the Soviets were in '86. We are hunkered down in large encampments, we sweep down, they lure us into ambushes.

The problem is not the number of troops. It's a failed mission. We don't talk about Bin Laden anymore. We've never declared our objectives in a way the Afghan people understand. Too much talk about democracy and nation building. Obama should say we're here to get the people who disturb the international peace. I'd internationalize it. This is the whole world's problem. The AQ is a plague. What we want to achieve is the destruction of AQ and then we'll withdraw. You can make a deal they won't support AQ figures in the future.

In Pakistan, it's hopeless. I sat in on every discussion on the decision that led to cutting off aid in 1990. There was no doubt of what they were doing. Never once did a single Pakistani official deviate from saying that they were not making nuclear weapons. Every discussion began with a lie.

I would close every Indian consulate all over Afghanistan. The Pakistanis believe they are funding the Taliban.