

PRACTICE NOTE

Special Operations Forces' Turn: Recommendations for Leading the Way in Governance and Development in the Afghan Districts Post-DSTs

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The work of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and District Support Teams (DSTs) in Afghanistan emphasized building the district government structures, improving their capacity, and mobilizing economic development. With the completion of the mandate of the PRTs and DSTs, the Special Operations Forces (SOF) will take a greater role in governance and development activities in districts and communities throughout the country. In 2014, security responsibility will fall under the Afghan security forces, but the war is not over. SOF will remain in the districts through the early fall of 2014.¹ This practice note examines the role of the DSTs and how SOF should engage in governance and development in the districts. It provides recommendations from the field despite the challenging and minimal resources available in a district. With the right strategic approaches, SOF should be able to maximize the impact of their stability operations; however, it must not be forgotten that achieving stability will depend on whether Afghans are willing to take the lead.

Introduction

Governance and development can prevent the resurgence of violence. Security alone will not prevent insurgent activities. Governance matters instrumentally for socio-economic development. It requires that Afghan officials become accountable for the provision of essential services. Better governance and development provides stability for sustainable development, which will allow Afghanistan to move away from its condition as a fragile state. What is needed in Afghanistan

is the development of a citizen-government partnership. Good governance and development can develop this partnership.

The Village Stability Operations (VSO) uses a bottom-up approach to foster security and relative stability in key strategic villages in Afghanistan by creating and strengthening linkages with the district government. The VSO redefined the four phases of the Special Operations Joint Task Force-Afghanistan's (SOJTF-A's) methodology: Shape, Hold, Build, and Transition to reflect the strategic realities and today's operational environment. *Shape* is characterized by a context that is not secure in the absence of the Afghan National Security Forces

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(ANSF) – resulting in a dangerous environment. It is characterized by villagers and tribes that are hostile, suspicious, and unwilling to cooperate with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In this stage, the mission's essential task is to embed itself into the local area and begin to engage with the populace. Key success indicators are: a) SOF is invited into the village; b) through the Shuras elders support the establishment of the Afghan Local Police (ALP); and c) SOF begins a village engagement plan. *Hold* creates a sense of security in the village and SOF begins to receive village support to combat threats and insurgents. Informal governance capacity begins to develop and the District Augmentation Teams (DATs) and Provincial Augmentation Teams (PATs) assist with capacity building. Key success indicators are: a) establishment of the ALP; b) creation of district government linkage with villages; c) facilitation of projects with ministries (i.e., Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock); and d) locals perceive an improvement in security. *Build* is an important phase for stability, as it will lead to transition and a stable district where Afghans are empowered. Key success indicators are: a) Ministry of Interior supports the ALP; b) villagers are engaged with the Shuras and voice their concerns; c) institute village and district partnership; d) Community Development Councils (CDCs) are recognized; and e) district government administration capacity improves. *Transition* aims for tactical over-watch to facilitate the transfer of security and stability responsibility to GIROA. Key success indicators are: a) ALP is viable and providing security; b) Shuras are properly functioning with existence of regular coordination with the district government; c) NGOs have access to villages; d) a functioning governance framework is in place; e) citizen trust towards GIROA is realistic; and g) CDCs and District Development Assemblies (DDAs) are executing their roles (VSO 2.0 2012).

An excellent case study of stability operations that sought to support the implementation of the village stability counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy is the DST Maiwand, Kandahar Province. In Kandahar province, the PATs and DATs established a relationship with the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT), DST, GIROA, and Battle Space Owner (BSO). The KPRT was located in Kandahar City and composed of civilian and military counterparts. The KPRT was civilian led. In 2009, the U.S. mission expanded the PRT role to a smaller version and created the DSTs, composed of 3–5 civilians, which included interagency officers from the U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and U.S. Department of Agriculture. The DST model was similar to the British Military Stabilization Support Team. The U.S. Department of State or USAID officer led the DSTs. The DSTs were embedded in the districts and took part in the governance and development efforts alongside the BSO, DAT, and SOF.

The DSTs adapted the COIN strategy, which identified civilian-military strategic goals and focused on achievable milestones. This approach was essential for a unified integrated agency effort that translated into progress in creating a more stable environment for communities. An example of the DST Maiwand milestones were: reinstatement of the DDA, bringing key Provincial Line Ministry Directors to Maiwand, launching the first community outreach radio program '*Local Democracy Voices*,' establishing the first Vocational Training Center, and having a development project implemented with Afghan funds and by Afghans in the lead. These milestones were completed in a period of 10 months. Connecting villages to the district and provincial capitals was vital to success. In this way, the stability COIN strategy enables a shared understanding between security, governance, and development.

In 2011, the DST Maiwand was composed of a State Department and a USAID officer,

with the State Department officer in charge of the DST. The DST Maiwand was a key player working with the District Governor and mentored the BSO, DAT, and SOF on how to strengthen the capacity of the District Governor and DDA. It also supported a burgeoning civil society. The DST ensured that all interagency civilian-military efforts were in sync with President Obama's *'Afghan First'* Afghanistan-Pakistan Strategy, which calls for empowering Afghan institutions with Afghan leaders taking a leading role. At the same time, drawing on lessons learned from Iraq, the DST ensured that all governance and development efforts were aligned with Afghanistan's National Development Strategy 2008–2013. The DST, BSO, and DAT instituted a development-working group that assisted with the reinstatement of the DDA. The reconstitution of the DDA allowed the Maiwand District to receive hand water well pumps and biogas funds from the Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development (MRRD). The DST, BSO, DAT, and SOF mobilized mechanisms that enabled tribal elders and villages to connect directly with the District Governor, Provincial Leadership, and local NGOs in Kandahar Province. The primary role of the DST was to shift the district from the *Build* to *Transition* phases of the VSO strategy.

To achieve stability in the districts, it is imperative to have a sustained and sustainable government that is able to provide services and convince its population that it can meet their needs. Even with military success against the Taliban, stability will not be achieved without a foundation of governance or development left behind in rural Afghanistan. The pull out of the DSTs means that SOF, Civil Affairs teams, PATs, and DATs will assume a greater role in governance and development without the involvement of the civilian experts associated with the DSTs. With this shift away from civilian involvement toward SOF implementation of the VSO strategy, this practice note offers some suggestions to ensure that the transition

occurs smoothly and continues the efforts to strengthen governance and development throughout the districts.

Building Governance and Development

The functionality of a district government remains a struggle, with civil servants representing the line ministries not reporting to the district government, a lack of outreach by District Governors to the villages, poor basic services, food insecurity, high unemployment, lack of alternative crops to combat poppy production, poor school attendance, and a weak infrastructure. Several aid governance programs which aimed to provide an engine to the district government had setbacks. For example, USAID's District Delivery Program (DDP), a program partnered with the Independent Directorate Local Governance (IDLG) and the Ministry of Finance, was tasked with assisting the district by improving the delivery of key services. It also sought to put in place a functional civil servant administration. DDP was developed to support the *Hold* and *Build* phases; however, the DDP did not reach all of the intended districts and, in the places that it was implemented, encountered setbacks with payments and disorganization.

An aid governance program will deliberately include local government officials and citizens in the reconstruction phases, which in the short-term assists in developing a citizen government partnership that was probably previously nonexistent. It contributes to the rebuilding of citizen trust, an important component that GIRoA continues promoting throughout the districts. An impediment to the aid governance program is weak institutional capacity to deliver proper essential services quickly and effectively. The setbacks of an aid governance program should not deter governance efforts. An aid governance program can lay the groundwork for creating legitimacy whereby local governments can begin to see the connection of government and citizens – a key phase of developing a pluralistic society.

To ensure the best possible opportunity for success during the transition to SOF management, governance and development efforts should be implemented with the following approaches:

Understanding governance policy and context

It is important for SOF to understand well the functionality of GIRoA's Sub-National Governance Policy. Understanding the Afghan government's roles and where to allocate different objectives and activities will ensure that efforts are targeted and time and resources are managed effectively. Although the laws are in place, for many Afghan government officials the laws are not definite and clear. District Governors' authority at the sub-national level is insignificant. ISAF military units have previously pressured the District Governors to do more for the villages, without understanding the authority roles of the District Governor and its limits. Empowering both SOF and the District Governor with knowledge on how GIRoA works must be one of the main efforts.

One important aspect of governance is the budgetary process—a critical element for SOF to understand in order to work effectively as a partner in the stabilization process. For example, it is common in Afghanistan to meet a District Governor who will have limited knowledge on how much money his district receives from the national development budget. Every March, the districts find out how much money they will receive. District Governors usually submit the same budget requests. In 2011, the Maiwand District Governor requested the construction of new schools and health clinics, electricity from the Kajaki hydroelectric power plant, and provision of alternative crops to farmers. The Maiwand District Governor was skeptical that GIRoA would assist his district. According to the District Governor, the Provincial Line Ministry Directors in Kandahar City have a tendency to amend his budget request (Terrones 2012). Below were

some of the common complaints on the budget process:

- a. Poor communication and coordination
 - External projects are coordinated with central and provincial government, excluding the district level.
 - Ministries' budgets do not reflect the district priorities.
- b. Poor Execution
 - Kandahar officials lack the capacity to understand the planning and budgetary processes.
- c. Unfair Allocation
 - Line Ministry Directors use an ad hoc or historical approach to budget allocation.

In 2011, several districts in Kandahar Province didn't have a functional DDA, a key government body that receives funds for service delivery. As a result, Maiwand didn't receive development funding to implement projects. The national development budget programs have sub-programs that could be implemented in the district but funds may never reach the district and villages, as was the case here. In Maiwand, the DST, BSO, DAT, and SOF undertook a strong effort to reinstate the DDA. Important activities on this point would be to work with the District Governor and DDA to draft a District Development Plan (DDP). SOF should also collaborate with the District Governor and DDA to ensure that the priorities outlined in the DDP are realistic and achieving short-term gains should be considered to demonstrate to the villagers that GIRoA is making efforts to meet their needs. Therefore, it is important to strategically understand the governance and development environment.

Maximize resources

In order to maximize governance and development in a context like Afghanistan, it is necessary to recognize that implementation of a program in a dynamic and unpredictable environment is a complex process that car-

ries risks. In order to mitigate some of these risks, SOF should develop a strategic vision that would allow the maximization of their efforts and provide structure and guidance for their stabilization initiatives. In an effort to mitigate risk and maximize resources, the following core competency areas should be targeted which would assist in building a self-sustaining, representative, and accountable district government:

- a. Operational Civil Servants
 - Contact the district's Line Ministry Representatives and find out the fiscal year funding resources.
 - Ensure key district government officials attend the Shuras. The District Governor should be impartial with who attends the Shuras.
- b. Government Effectiveness
 - Mentor the District Governor on policy reform, institutional development, and implementation.
 - Mentor the DDA on the prioritization, development, implementation, and monitoring of projects.
 - Inform the District Governor and DDA on policy issues that may impact the district on a weekly basis.
 - Educate the District Governor on transparency and accountability. Take the District Governor out of the district center and organize a district governance tour to the villages.
 - Transfer the Development Shura at least once a month to a village location whereby villagers can be familiarized with projects and operations and participate in local governance processes.
- c. Decentralization/ Support of Line Ministry Representatives
 - Mentor the District Governor to contact the Provincial Line Ministry Directors and invite them to the district to develop a plan on how to address the village needs.
 - Advise the District Governor on how

to prioritize which line ministries are most relevant to the district's needs.

- d. Civil Society Development
 - Mentor the DDA in bringing provincial local NGOs to the district to engage with local villagers in economic and political development projects. It is important for local villagers to identify development needs. Collaboration with local NGOs is important because of their responsiveness, innovation, direct relationship with the poor, capacity to stimulate participation and articulate local views, cost effectiveness, local accountability and independent assessment of issues.
 - Task NGOs with empowering the local community and enforce participation.
 - Engage the NGOs with the District Governor and DDA.

Community learning and development

The community learning and development approach seeks to understand the community with the aim to strengthen communities by improving people's skills, organization, and ability to take control of their communities. In Maiwand, the civilian-military interagency partners used the following components (Terrones 2012):

- a. Empowerment – Increase the confidence and competence of the District Governor and DDA to bring GIRoA funds to the district by ensuring the projects fall under the DDP.
- b. Participation – Support the District Governor, DDA, and Elders to take part in the decision-making. This ensures accountability of the decision-makers to the citizens.
- c. Self-Determination – Support villagers to solve their own problems through the Shuras.
- d. Partnership – Acknowledge the contribution of GIRoA and other key

partners to make the most of the resources available and be as effective as possible.

Villagers from the Kandahar Province districts don't trust GIRoA and the Taliban capitalizes on this mistrust in their efforts to bring villagers to the side of the Shadow Government. In order to facilitate building trust with the GIRoA and achieve participatory democracy, SOF should launch a governance civic education outreach for villagers to understand and appreciate their opportunities and responsibilities as democratic citizens. A radio education spot would seek to familiarize villagers with the precepts and practices of democracy. Villagers should be informed about services they have a right to expect from their district government and provincial government. It should also discuss ways how communities could make themselves heard and become active in their own development, such as CDC. Educating villagers about democracy should not be viewed as an isolated subject, taught for a short time each day and otherwise ignored. Good democracy education in the village would be part of good education in general. The community learning and development components can contribute to building trust and change villagers' view on GIRoA to one of a government that is trying to be accountable, inclusive, and prioritizes the needs of the villages.

Governance framework

Building governance is challenging in the best of circumstances, more so in a conflict-affected context like Afghanistan. Therefore, creating effective and relevant tools to build governance is very important. To that end, the SOF should develop a framework that can assist governance efforts. Afghanistan remains an infant democracy and local officials will continue to make mistakes. A proper framework can enable SOF to monitor achievement towards its strategic objectives and measure whether those objectives

were met. The DST Maiwand successfully used a framework that included the three input elements of Administrative, Economic, and Local Governance with outcomes that enhanced transparency, improved performance of public administration, and accessibility of public services (see **Figure 1**).

To achieve this governance framework, it is important to:

- a. Visualize the work and establish realistic goals that can be monitored.
- b. Keep projects simple. Recognize that effective time management is crucial to accomplish operational tasks as well as to avoid wasting valuable operational assets.
- c. Set up timeframes in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term.
- d. Adjust priorities as a result of new tasks requested by GIRoA.
- e. Reflect on lessons learned. Lessons learned should be fed back into the system and inform ongoing implementation and future programming efforts.

Another tool would be to link the governance framework with the World Bank's six governance dimensions: Voice Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption (WB 2010). The DST Maiwand was the first DST to use these dimensions to track the district governance progress. These dimensions should be updated bi-monthly based on opinions, observations, projects, and engagements. These dimensions could be monitored in the following ways:

1. *Voice and Accountability* – Assess how villagers are able to participate in the Shuras.
2. *Political Stability and Absence of Violence* – Assess what is the chance that the district government would be destabilized.

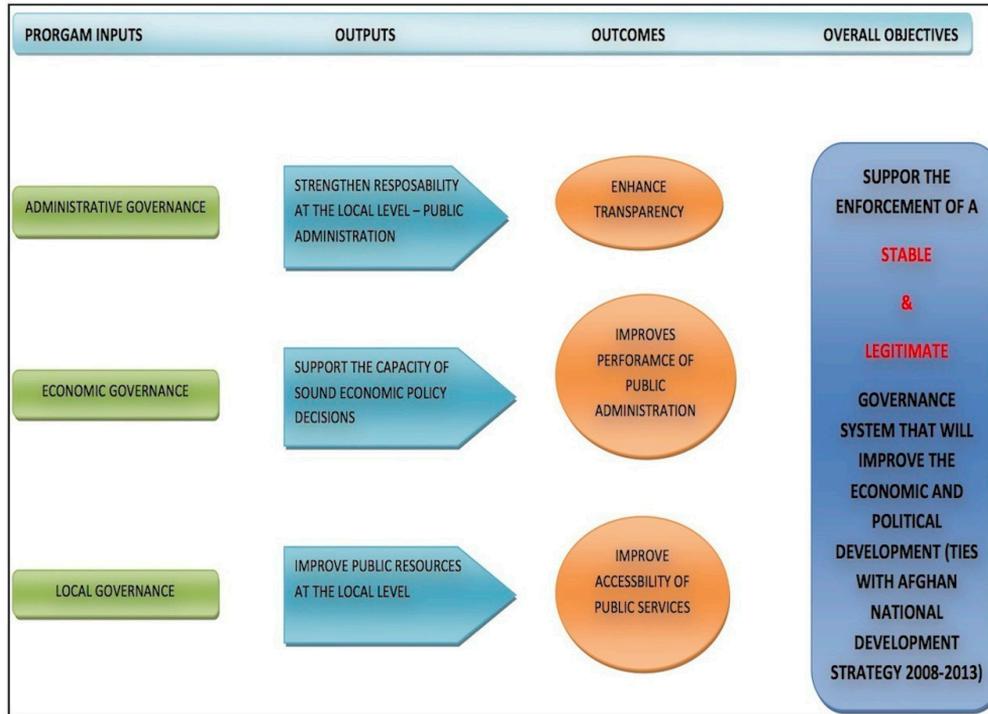


Figure 1: DST Maiwand Governance Framework.²

3. *Government Effectiveness* – Assess perceptions of quality of public services and administration.
4. *Regulatory Quality* – Assess the district government’s ability to formulate and implement sound policies.
5. *Rule of Law* – Assess how the district abides by the rules of society, police, and justice.
6. *Control of Corruption* – Assess corruption activities by powerbrokers.

3. *Government Effectiveness* – District Government was not implementing projects and poor communication existed with the Provincial Line Ministry Directors.
4. *Regulatory Quality* – District Governor did not have a sound policy to regulate the effectiveness of the district in place. Policies in economic development never made it to Maiwand. If the policy did, it only made it with the assistance of the DST, BSO, DAT, and SOF.
5. *Rule of Law* – District did not have an attorney general.
6. *Control of Corruption* – Assume corruption is high.

Below is an assessment example showing the progress made in the Maiwand District conducted in February-August 2011 (Terrones 2012).

February 2011

1. *Voice and Accountability* – Poor attendance at the Shuras and distrust in the District Governor.
2. *Political Stability* – Insurgent threat to assault the district center is high.

August 2011

1. *Voice and Accountability* – At the Development Shura, the DDA Chairman kept the villagers informed on the type of projects ISAF and DST were

doing in Maiwand. For this reason, attendance increased at the Development Shuras.

2. *Political Stability and Absence of Violence* – The District Center became stable; therefore, limiting the possibility of any type of civil unrest among the local population.
3. *Government Effectiveness* – Reinstatement of DDA improved the District Government perception among villagers. The DDA became a symbol for the local population to bring their concerns to the Kandahar Provincial Officials. The MRRD implemented 130 hand water well pumps and 10 biogas projects (Afghan-led).
4. *Regulatory Quality* – The Provincial Governor did not provide sound policy guidance to the District Governor.
5. *Rule of Law* – District Governor organized a rule of law working group session and as a result the Provincial Chief Judge allocated a part-time District Attorney.
6. *Control of Corruption* – Corruption in Maiwand was inherently difficult to measure. Statistically, the margin of error and level of confidence for Maiwand's corruption level will be very uneven in relation to the perception.

Conclusion

Strategically, governance and development offer villagers alternatives to insurgency and a motivation to combat insurgents in their communities. SOF must ensure that governance and development approaches truly empower the villagers and they become active participants in the process. If done correctly, aspirations to obtain stability can be achievable. Governance becomes the center of gravity for ensuring a secure, stable Afghanistan. To ensure that governance and development efforts are maintained during the transition period, this practice note recommended four approaches to the SOF that will be managing the efforts until

late 2014. It is important that SOF understands the institutions well and ensures that impact is felt across all layers of the government system and community. SOF should pay attention to the outputs and outcomes. Even though outcomes can be small, they are important. Small successes have the potential to have greater impact in the long-term than larger ones.

It must be emphasized that a democratic system cannot be built in the short-term. It takes years for a representative government to develop. In countries like Afghanistan that have gone through cycles of intervention and violence, patience is important. Afghanistan has taught us that no matter the amount of programming or the amount of money spent on nation building, productive, sustainable outcomes cannot be expected in the short-term. There are countries that can recover quickly from conflict, while in others, like Afghanistan, success comes at a much slower pace. Good lessons learned would be part of any success, which can only occur if GIRoA decides to take the lead and reach out to the rural areas. Otherwise, SOF efforts to empower the villagers can ignite insurgency, challenging the government's legitimacy and sovereignty. As much as SOF tries to bring stability through governance and development, success depends on the Afghans.

Notes

- ¹ The absence of a bilateral security agreement between the United States and Afghanistan puts in question the future of a U.S. military presence. SOF should be prepared in the case of an agreement for a post-2014 U.S. military presence. According to the GAO report, the State Department is currently planning for a continuing U.S. military presence in Afghanistan or complete withdrawal after the deadline December 31, 2014. United States Government Accountability Office, *Testimony Before the Subcommittee on National Security, Committee*

on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives. *Afghanistan Key Oversight Issues for USAID Development Efforts*. Washington, DC. March 13, 2014. On March 12, 2014, ISAF Commander General Joseph Dunford briefed the U.S. Senate on the need for between 8,000 – 12,000 NATO troops with SOF on the lead post-2014 (Cooper 2014).

² Terrones 2012: 76.

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