



The Outcome of War

A New Metric of Success against Insurgencies

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Every military unit that goes to war reaches a point in its deployment where it takes stock of how it is doing, how its lethal and non-lethal operations are going, and whether its achievements further the goals of the broader military campaign. While this type of assessment is likely ongoing, there are times where it becomes more acute. It is at these moments, such as after an operation, when an after action report is drafted, or when the performance of a unit or individual is evaluated, that the true measure of success is determined. It is quite common during these evaluations to use some metric of inputs and outputs to judge success or failure. For many infantry units for example, one common measure is how many enemy forces were killed during its tour. Other metrics often used are the number of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) found, the number of completed patrols, and the amount of enemy munitions captured and destroyed. This way of thinking has also expanded to include non-kinetic missions in the furtherance of other counterinsurgency goals such as good governance, development, and reconstruction such as the number of key leader engagements (KLEs) held, the amount of development money spent, and the

number of projects completed. While many of these measurements are valuable to know when understanding how a unit or individual has performed, especially when it comes to conventional warfare, they are not as helpful when determining success against insurgencies. Success against insurgency includes many aspects of traditional measures of performance but also several, which are unique to it and are completely dissimilar from conventional warfare. Additionally, establishing and actually *using* criteria to measure how one unit or one leader compares with another in terms of achieving the goals of the military campaign is also challenging, since too frequently the personnel systems of the U.S. military are focused on career progression centered on conventional warfare metrics. Thus, while a Special Operations Forces (SOF) team, for example, may have killed substantial numbers of the enemy, how this compares with another SOF team which has fewer enemy killed, but more locals joining local protective forces is more challenging for leaders to judge. How, for example, do you properly weigh the real risks the first unit took in fighting the enemy compared to the second which might have taken fewer risks but whose actions are more fundamentally sound

in defeating an insurgency? How then do we move beyond a mismeasure of success and embrace one that is fundamental to victory against an insurgency?

At their core, insurgencies are about political power struggles where the center of gravity is not the enemy's forces *per se* but the population¹ where "the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or, at worst, on its submissiveness."² Largely for this reason, while input and output metrics are useful, they are not the fundamental measurement that determines how effective a unit's actions are, or how enduring its results will be in the long-term. Instead of focusing on what is done to a community, (e.g. number of raids, shuras held), it is more important to focus on what comes from it (e.g. the community joining local protective forces, the enemy re-integrating, villagers identifying the insurgents). Outcomes are the product of inputs and outputs, and it is through understanding the totality of a unit's actions and how they affect the population that the progress a unit makes against the insurgency can be measured. Seen from this perspective, a unit's actions are judged successful if its efforts (e.g. clearing operations, raids, key leader engagements, and development

projects) prompt the community to enlist in its own defense, seize the initiative on governance, and undertake development activities. In this respect, the community is no longer a bystander to its own security, stuck between insurgent and counterinsurgent forces, but is actively resisting the insurgency. It is when a community reacts positively to a unit's actions that true progress can be measured. The central challenge for many military units fighting insurgencies, is determining what is important to measure, rather than what is easy to measure, and recognizing that what the community does is more significant than what the unit does. What is required is a new metric of success, focused on insurgencies, that measures the things that matter rather than the things we think are significant.

The Calculus of the Insurgent

Faced with a military force it is unable to defeat directly, insurgents seek to weaken the will of the counterinsurgent through targeted operations that maximize the insurgent's small numbers while raising the costs for government forces. By blending in with the population and striking at security forces at times and locations of its choosing, the insurgent force is able to persist beyond the point that the costs in blood

and treasure are supportable for the government. The armed element of the insurgency is simply, as author Bernard Fall described it, “a tactical appendage of a far vaster political contest and that, no matter how expertly it is fought by competent and dedicated professionals, it cannot possibly make up for the absence of a political rationale.” Any counterinsurgency strategy that seeks to defeat simultaneously the armed element and the political arm of the insurgency by both military actions and a holistic political strategy, must enlist the population in its plans if it hopes to succeed. Since insurgents realize the population is the true prize in this type of warfare, its behavior focuses on the outcomes of its actions on the population. It principally centers on how it influences and maneuvers the population away from the government and towards the insurgency, with the goal of frustrating the counterinsurgent to the point of giving up. It does this through persuasion and coercion while maximizing its influence through a tactical political strategy that attempts to enlist the population in insurgent efforts. If the population is unwilling or unable to join the government, this raises the costs for the counterinsurgent since they will have to continually clear and secure insurgent areas. Lacking local allies to hold the newly cleared area, subsequent operations will have to be undertaken, which have the potential to alienate the population because of the accidental killing or injury of civilians. If these operations are continuously carried out, the population may become supportive of the insurgency if only to prevent the damage and death that comes from being repeatedly “liberated” through military operations. Unlike conventional warfare where “military action ... is generally the principal way to achieve the goal” and “[p]olitics as an instrument of war tends to take a back seat,” in uncon-

ventional warfare, “politics becomes an active instrument of operation” and “every military move has to be weighed with regard to its political effects, and vice versa.”³ This is why the assassination of a local government official, though militarily relatively insignificant, has drastic effects on a population since it demonstrates that the insurgents can strike at any person regardless of his status and that the government is unable to protect its own members. Additionally, when villagers do not attend government-facilitated shuras, it is as much a function of the threat the insurgents pose to the population as much as it is a judgment call on the part of the locals that the government does not serve their interests. Similarly, when the local population seeks out the insurgency for dispute resolution this demonstrates that the “soft power” of the insurgency (its political strategy) addresses the interests of the people more directly than the government. In light of these aspects of insurgent strategy, how then have military units typically addressed the insurgent threat as well as evaluated the success of its operations?

The Mismeasure of Success

One of the central challenges U.S. military forces initially faced when confronted by the insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq was adapting their approach to warfighting, which was focused on conventional warfare, to the unique demands of counterinsurgency. Many of the habits, mental models, weapons systems, and means of evaluating success had to be completely rethought. Some units adapted, others did not. Even today, some continue to view the insurgent challenge through the prism of a conventional mindset. Most of the aspects of the approaches military units used at the outset of the wars were rooted in an attrition-based strategy of war against conventional forces where

inputs and outputs were relatively straightforward, such as number of enemy killed, miles of territory seized, number of detainees captured, etc. Political tasks were the responsibility of the U.S. Department of State and this relatively clean division of responsibility, military and political, allowed the outcome of total military defeat of the enemy to be relatively uncomplicated. Over time, this simplistic understanding broke down as the insurgency grew. Since insurgencies conflate military and political strategies relatively seamlessly because the nature of the conflict is population-based, traditional measures of inputs and outputs had to be rethought. The problem, however, is that many of these conventional methods of evaluating success were still relevant when it came to fighting an insurgency. It is still important, for example, to remove the enemy insurgent from the battlefield and to retain control of key geographical features. Instead of having the output (enemy killed) as the outcome, it should be subsumed within a mix of inputs and outputs, all of which create an outcome focused on community reaction to the insurgency. What this perspective suggests is that while, for example, removing a high value target degrades the insurgency, its true impact is in how the community reacts. Do villagers begin to attend government-facilitated shuras, do they begin to report on the insurgency, do they enlist with local protective forces to prevent insurgent intimidation? So while the removal of insurgent commanders is still important, a unit’s success is not judged by the *number* of enemy killed in action but by how these actions affect the community and its response to the insurgency. A concrete example may be useful to illustrate this concept.

In one province in Afghanistan which U.S. forces have had a presence since 2001, approximately 35 units have rotated through the area.

Every unit likely claimed that it significantly degraded insurgent forces and greatly improved security in the province. If these reports are accurate, and they likely are from an input/output perspective, then why does the insurgency persist? It persists because the population was a bystander in the struggle between insurgent and counterinsurgent forces, and was not provided an opportunity to enlist in its own defense. Although enemy forces were consistently degraded, they were never defeated. Even though factors such as insurgent safe havens in Pakistan contributed greatly to this challenge, there were no realistic opportunities for a villager to join a community-based program of local defense. For a long time, U.S. forces lacked the language, the mental models, the experience, and the wisdom to undertake this type of initiative. Similarly, conventional development strategies sidelined Afghans with respect to prompting them to fund their own projects in a sustainable manner. Additionally, because the emphasis was on development versus stabilization, villagers tended to be on the receiving end of assistance but never culpable for it. They were equally bystanders to their own development. These tendencies were exacerbated by the expansion of NATO within Afghanistan, which had greater amounts of conventional military intellectual and peacekeeping baggage and bureaucratic tendencies to overcome, to see the Taliban insurgency as it was rather than how they wished it.

An Outcome-based Approach

While measuring inputs and outputs will still be required when evaluating how a military unit has performed, a more constructive approach should be focused on outcomes, which are outgrowths of these two variables. What we need to measure is not what is done to a local

community but what comes from it. When a local villager joins with government forces, such as becoming a part of a local protective force, appeals to his district officials for justice, or informs on insurgent forces, it is a conscious choice on his part to reject the insurgency both because he wants to and he can. This crucial choice is not made easily and is a calculated weighing on his part of the risks to himself, his family, and his property from the insurgency. His choice has consequences, which he knows all too well, and he does not take it lightly. Therefore, when he does decide which side of the struggle to support, it is significant and profound for it indicates which side is stronger, which side is winning, and which side best serves his interests. Outcomes are the result of a number of inputs and outputs, which are traditionally measured, but not always linked to an outcome-based perspective. However, what are the crucial outcomes we must be worried about, that we must track and measure that are also realistic to capture for units in the field? Which outcomes capture a villager's siding with the government and the conscious choice of a community to enlist with the government? Any measure of progress against an insurgency needs to be relatively easy to collect, accurately capture the community's actions, and demonstrate a pro-active willingness on the part of the village to turn against the insurgency. Many of these types of variables will shift over time as a local population increasingly asserts itself against insurgent fighters. Thus, initial clearing operations may be accomplished exclusively through the outside counterinsurgent force but as conditions improve, villagers may begin to provide information on insurgent movements to the government, and, as security persists, start to join local protective forces to fight the insurgency. At this point, security operations

are typically conducted in a joint manner with local and government security forces operating together. When local forces reach a level of maturity where they can operate on their own, the counterinsurgent has achieved a substantial security outcome, which truly accounts for the community's willingness to fight the insurgency and join with the government. The following are a series of indicators along the security, governance, and development lines of operations, which a unit might use to measure its progress against an insurgency. Additionally, fictitious situation reports are included to demonstrate how outcome-based results may manifest themselves on the ground and in military reporting.

Security – (1) number of local protective force members increase, (2) number of insurgent forces that re-integrate increases, (3) villagers identify and inform on members of the insurgency or fight them, (4) number of night letters decreases or is eliminated, (5) government security officials reside in the village/district.

Security Situation Report

Since clearing operations were completed a month ago in Char Chena Valley, the number of local protective force recruits in the area continues to climb. Following the construction of five checkpoints, initially manned by local police forces, approximately forty military age males have been vetted by the local shura for inclusion within the local protective force program. Village elders approached Forward Operating Base Kaufman within a week of the conclusion of security operations expressing their support for the government and their willingness to volunteer their sons for the protective forces. In private discussions, elders also volunteered information on insurgent

movements in the area as well as bed-down locations. The number of night letters has decreased precipitously since security operations were concluded, and key leader engagements with village mullahs have also been positive. Local sources indicate that at least two mullahs have expressed support at their Friday prayers for construction of the checkpoints. Other atmospheric suggest an improvement in security in the area. Two villagers stopped by checkpoint number three with information on improvised explosive devices in the road and another villager brought bomb components, which he said, had been buried in his field.

Governance – (1) villagers petition the government with complaints, requests for projects, and official attention, (2) village religious leaders regularly express support for the government, (3) local tax revenues/economic activity increases, (4) local assemblies meet regularly and are representative, (5) government officials reside in the village/district.

Governance Situation Report

Village elders from Char Chena Valley traveled to the District Center today to meet with the District Chief of Police and to discuss a long-standing land dispute between the villagers of Anarjoy and Segech. The elders represent two sub-tribes of the Ghilzai Tribal Confederation and appealed to the Police Chief to address the ownership of several hectares of land that until recently had been covered by floodwaters. The Police Chief welcomed the elders to the District Center, requested the attendance of the District Governor, who sat down with the elders, and commenced

a shura, which lasted for several hours. While the meeting did not resolve the land dispute, it did clarify many aspects of the issue and the elders agreed to visit the District Center next week to continue discussions. The land in question was owned by villagers from Anarjoy but had been rented to villagers from Segech. Due to recent flooding in the region, approximately thirty percent of the land had been washed away and villagers from Anarjoy want compensation from the villagers of Segech for the loss. The visit of these elders is notable since their villages are approximately eight kilometers from the District Center and, until recently, were under insurgent control.

Recent clearing operations in the area as well as the construction of several checkpoints have noticeably improved not only the security situation in the area but also freedom of movement for local villagers.

Development – (1) increase of delivery trucks and/or road traffic, (2) cost of processed/manufactured goods (e.g. cooking oil, lumber, cooking implements, salt) and perishables (e.g. tomatoes, wheat seed, almonds, sheep) decreases (inelastic vs. elastic pricing), (3) cell phone towers are built and radio station(s) established (e.g. third-party validation), (4) increase in number of marriages, (5) number of non-governmental organizations or their activity increases.

Development Situation Report

Security improvements in Char Chena Valley have demonstrably improved local economic conditions. With the construction of five checkpoints in the area and villagers joining local protective forces, bazaar shops are opening earlier and staying open later. During a foot

patrol last week, three jingle trucks were found to have traveled from the provincial capital to the bazaar – a bazaar that had not seen any traffic from the capital in two years. Villagers also presented a petition from local elders to the District Governor, who shared it with Coalition Forces, requesting a retaining wall be built in the area as well as have the main road in the area paved. Additional economic atmospheric suggest the opening of the road to the District Center has caused local cooking oil and tomato prices to decrease. Several shops are also stocking goods only available in the provincial capital and scattered reports indicate that a small boom in local marriages is also occurring suggesting that economic conditions are improving.

Preparing for Deployments

The challenge of overcoming a military unit's natural tendencies toward conventional warfare and directing them instead to the key tasks of counterinsurgency is profound. Arrayed against a leader inclined toward an outcome-based approach are the preferences of the unit's members, many of whom had joined the military and then the unit with the

express purpose of achieving its usual mission. Shifting this mentality requires not just education but continual and persistent attention by the leaders of the unit, opportunities for back-and-forth discussions about the upcoming deployment, and an effort to truly *understand* the primary motivations of the enemy and the population. This process must begin months before a unit deploys, it must permeate all of its training, and reinforced at all levels of the organization. It will require as much bottom-up feedback as top-down direction. The second stage of adapting a unit to the insurgency challenge takes place upon arrival of the unit in country. When the stresses of the war become a lived reality versus an abstract discussion, the true test of a unit's leadership and its strategy takes place. This stage in a unit's tour will require continual leadership support. However, if an outcome-based strategy is pursued which enlists a community in its own governance, development, and security efforts, a unit's usual proclivities toward a conventional approach will naturally adjust along with the problem it faces; an enemy hiding in the population, is defeated with this new approach. While opportunities for conventional approaches will persist, such as when an area is being cleared, this will shift dramatically

once an outcome-based approach is utilized and the insurgency's military and political arm are being defeated simultaneously. The third stage in a unit's deployment is communicating the successes and challenges of its tour to not only the broader military community within which it serves but also to the unit that is replacing it. In addition to the substance of what was accomplished comes the perceived sense of what was achieved which is why communicating the tour's successes is very important as well. Much like an insurgent, a good information operations campaign must be enlisted to communicate within a conventionally oriented organization the record of a unit's actions focused on an outcome-based approach to fighting insurgency. If a war-fighting organization seeks to fight the insurgency as it is and not as they would like it to be, it must constantly adapt to the unique challenges of the conflict it finds itself in and do what is required and not what feels most comfortable. If these efforts are not institutionalized by follow-on units, the insurgency will continue to persist.

Conclusion

The most fundamental question a military unit fighting an insurgency must answer is whether its actions are degrading the insur-

gency or defeating it? While traditional measurements of a unit's actions such as inputs and outputs provide a useful metric of the unit's achievements, it is an incomplete method of measuring progress against an insurgency. The central goal of a counterinsurgency strategy must be how the community responds to both the counterinsurgent's actions and the insurgent's. In this respect, the behavior of an indigenous community indicates how truly effective your operations are, for they accurately reflect the outcome of your actions. When a villager takes the pro-active decision to enlist in his own defense as well as participate in governance and development activities, it is a conscious choice on his part to reject the insurgency both because he wants to and because he can. Determining this tipping point of when a villager or community makes this decision to join the government and reject the insurgency and the right mix of inputs and outputs to achieve this outcome is the greatest challenge a unit confronts when it comes to measuring success against an insurgency. Unless the community participates in its own security, governance, and development, all actions by the counterinsurgent force, no matter how aggressive, will be ephemeral and the military campaign will be no closer to victory.

Endnotes

1. Kalev I. Sepp, "Best Practices in Counterinsurgency," *Military Review* (May – June 2005): 10.
2. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 4-5.
3. Ibid. Italics in the original.