

# Development in Counterinsurgency: Marrying Theory to Practice

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## **Original title:**

Conflict Sensitivity: A Study on the Theory vs. Practice Divide in Aid

## **Abstract (obsolete):**

The paper analyzes theory dissemination and adoption of new methods and practices in the context of three official development aid agencies - USAID (a bilateral aid agency), EU AID (a regional donor) and multilateral UNDP. Based mainly on interviews with the agencies' employees and document analysis, it explores the way how different agencies adapted to new findings about the relationship between aid and conflict. This paper builds on an earlier article published in 2008, summarizing the adoption of conflict-sensitivity instruments by official aid agencies (Do No Harm; Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment; Conflict Analysis etc). Further research focuses on the role of academics, think-tanks, advocacy networks and epistemic communities in introducing and mainstreaming conflict sensitivity agendas in aid practices. Preliminary data of the research suggest that the area of conflict sensitivity is a very vibrant ground where theory-focused academics share their views with practice-oriented policy makers. A decisive factor hindering faster progress in adoption of new practices is predictably the bureaucratic structure of the organizations. The final question ponders the role of academics in creation of new policies, compared to the agencies' staff, all set in the context of the structural hurdles.

## **Abstract (updated):**

This paper examines the relationship between theory and practice in the context of development assistance and counterinsurgency operations. Although theorists and practitioners, in both military and development, were fast to recognize the importance of development in counterinsurgency, converting theory into practice is not as easy. The paper starts by describing the role of development in counterinsurgency and the newly emphasized security dimension of foreign aid, drawing from military documents and interviews with aid workers. It then illustrates a few limitations of practice research oriented on the example of a report on US foreign policy instruments in Afghanistan, published by the Center for American Progress. Finally, it analyzes the implications of using social science research for predefined military objectives, using the case of Human Terrain System. It concludes that efforts to integrate theory into practice are hindered by normative issues, which are yet to be resolved.

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## **Introduction**

When Jake Sully, the former marine turned anthropologist taking part in the Avatar program, pleads with Colonel Miles Quaritch, the head of the private security company Sec-Ops, not to raze the Na'vi community whose home village sits on the largest deposit of the valuable mineral unobtanium, he argues that the tribe could be persuaded to relocate from their Hometree through negotiations. But the Colonel rejects waiting any longer, based on Jake's own entry from a video log, in which he admits the Na'vi will never ever leave their Hometree. Jake had recorded the entry after having been accepted into the Na'vi community, the only member of Avatar program who gained this much trust. The Colonel then gives Jake an hour-long ultimatum to negotiate resettlement, and finally issues an order to take the site by force. (Cameron 2009)

Albeit a fiction, this story from the movie Avatar raises some important questions about the ethical use of knowledge, the role of research in decision making, and the responsibilities of social scientists in a conflict environment. This paper uses three examples of the use of development in counterinsurgency to explore the relationship between theory and practice. The first section describes the basic foundations of security dimensions of development, both from the military and the development point of view. Additionally it provides an overview of the input from research of conflicts and radicalization into development agencies, drawing mainly on interviews with senior officials from USAID. These examples are used to demonstrate how practice is informed by theory.

The second section analyses the discourse about development in practice-oriented research. On the example of a report prepared by Center for American Progress, a think-tank producing research to influence policy, the section deconstructs several basic concepts, meaning of which is presumed as understood, but in fact has crucial implications for the results of the report. In this process, the section exposes the limits of theory informed by practice.

In the third section, the paper examines a program which intends to bridge the divide between theory-informed and practice-informed research. Acknowledging the limitations of a theory built solely from practical experience, as well as the difficulties to translate complex theories into practical instruments, the army employed anthropologists and social scientists to do practical research while utilizing the rich theoretical background provided by their respective disciplines. This program sparked major controversy, which raised important questions about the role of science and moral responsibilities coming from knowledge.

## **Counter-insurgency and development: practice informed by theory**

One domain where practice has been significantly shaped by theory is the merging of security and development. While commentators have examined the mutual influence of development strategies on militaries and security responsibilities of development agencies equally, the increasing "securitization of development" is more controversial than the

“developmentalization of military”. This can partially be explained by the perceived nature of these activities. Militaries have, on the whole, willingly embraced the fact that modern conflicts can no longer be fought by military means alone, as illustrated by the establishment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan and Iraq that have sought to undermine the insurgents’ popular support by ‘winning the hearts and minds’ of the locals. The US military has boasted successes in building schools, paving roads, and running hospitals.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, development agencies have grappled with their newly assumed role as an agent of war. Having their programs coordinated under the ‘whole-of-government’ approach, they are shunning accusations that they have become complicit in a neo-imperial campaign of power.

Mark Duffield (Duffield 2001) has convincingly explained why circumstances of modern conflict and complex emergencies led military instruments to fuse with development mechanisms. The US State Department’s 3D foreign policy approach demonstrates that development has been elevated on par with defense and diplomacy.<sup>2</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow for a comprehensive summary of key arguments of the debate, which I (Petřík 2008b) and others (The Reality of Aid 2006 2006; Brainard 2007) have done elsewhere. Instead, this paper examines some manifestations of the development-security fusion in the US army and USAID. While the army clearly articulated its new development agenda in response to the changed environment in its Field Manual 3-24 (Counterinsurgency 2006), the incorporation of security into USAID’s programming is expressed in a host of various documents. This paper therefore draws on a series of interviews with senior USAID officials, held in Washington DC and in the field between February and December 2009. This provides an empirical basis for a later argument about the normative gap in mainstream development theories currently available to practitioners.

### *The role of development in counterinsurgency*

FM 3-24, a key doctrinal document of the US army that shapes its strategic, tactical and operational choices in the two most important current combat theatres, brings the local population into the center of focus. In particular it focuses on the importance of counterinsurgency (COIN), which it describes as:

“[a]t its core, ... a struggle for the population’s support. The protection, welfare, and support of the people are vital to success. Gaining and maintaining that support is a formidable challenge. Achieving these aims requires synchronizing the efforts of many nonmilitary and HN [host-nation] agencies in a comprehensive approach.” (Counterinsurgency 2006: 1-28)

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<sup>1</sup> Embracing development by the military did not pass without controversy, but most of the debates have taken place in 1990s in the context of the evolution of peacebuilding into 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of peacekeeping operations and the transformation of the military for the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> Some argue that while this shift has occurred on the policy-making level, it has not been matched with adequate institutional reform. USAID of late 2000s is not significantly more robust and powerful compared to USAID of late 1990s, which suggests more than a certain lag in policy implementation. (Brigety 2009)

The FM 3-24 describes that the population will support those actors who manage to provide them with 5 basic needs:

- Security from insurgent intimidation and coercion, as well as from nonpolitical violence and crime.
- Provision for basic economic needs
- Provision of essential services, such as water, electricity, sanitation, and medical care
- Sustainment of key social and cultural institutions
- Other aspects that contribute to a society's basic quality of life. (Counterinsurgency 2006: 2-2)

In the light of this statement, the potential gains of development projects are crucial to the outcome of the overall campaign.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, David Kilcullen, an influential COIN theorist, wrote that “[c]ounterinsurgency is armed social work.” (Kilcullen 2006: 33) In article no. 13 of his *Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency*, reprinted in their entirety in *Field Manual 3-24.2 Tactics in Counterinsurgency* (Tactics in Counterinsurgency 2009), he describes that the true main effort of a counterinsurgency company is to “[c]onduct village and neighborhood surveys to identify needs in the community – then follow through to meet them, build common interests and mobilize popular support” (Kilcullen 2006: 32), which is the basic algorithm of development work.<sup>4</sup> The key article relating to development though is Article 23:

“Practise armed civil affairs. Counterinsurgency is armed social work; an attempt to redress basic social and political problems while being shot at. This makes civil affairs a central counterinsurgency activity, not an afterthought. It is how you restructure the environment to displace the enemy from it. In your company sector, civil affairs must focus on meeting basic needs first, then progress up Maslow’s hierarchy as each successive need is met. ... [T]here is no such thing as impartial humanitarian assistance or civil affairs in counterinsurgency. Every time you help someone, you hurt someone else – not least the insurgents. So civil and humanitarian assistance personnel will be targeted. Protecting them is a matter not only of close-in defense, but also of creating a permissive operating environment by co-opting the beneficiaries of aid – local communities and leaders – to help you help them.”

Indeed, he argues that partnering with development agencies is vital:

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<sup>3</sup> Conversely, it is also understandable why development agencies are not too enthusiastic about their involvement alongside the military: where the army has a lot to win and little to lose, they have much to lose and little to win. If winning the trust of the locals, which the military doesn’t currently have, is the turning point in winning the counterinsurgency, then the potential gains are high but the potential losses are little. If, on the other hand, increased cooperation between the development agencies and the military violates the trust the development community has had so far from the local population, potential losses are considerably higher for development workers.

<sup>4</sup> Development experts will probably argue that this view is outdated as recent debates in the field emphasize the value of community-based development, where the external agent is not meant to “follow through to meet [the needs of the community]” but to help the community to meet their needs themselves, so that local ownership is ensured. (Sen 1999; Mosse 2005)

You need intimate cooperation with inter-agency partners here – national, international and local. You will not be able to control these partners – many NGOs, for example, do not want to be too closely associated with you because they need to preserve their perceived neutrality. Instead, you need to work on a shared diagnosis of the problem, building a consensus that helps you self-synchronize. Your role is to provide protection, identify needs, facilitate civil affairs and use improvements in social conditions as leverage to build networks and mobilize the population. (Kilcullen 2006: 33-34)

In Kilcullen’s paper, and mirrored in many other military documents such as (Stability Operations 2008; Tactics in Counterinsurgency 2009), development is viewed simply as an *instrument* of COIN. The purpose of this instrument is clear – to undermine the mass base of the insurgency and to win the “hearts and minds” (Counterinsurgency 2006: A-5) of the local population for a broader objective of the intervention, which is not for the military to define.

However, the process of “identifying the needs of the community” is inherently political. Different members of a community will have different preferences for different needs, so if the military is to identify needs, they will have to favor some representatives and sideline others. While the development community is well aware of potential pitfalls of such choices, army manuals do not elaborate on how could they alienate segments of society and exacerbate divisions between ethnic, religious or other identity-based groups.

In addition, “identifying the needs of the community” is also inherently ideological. The focus of the PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq has been on building roads, bridges, infrastructure, hospitals or schools. Yet, these activities do not match the five basic needs that were outlined in the FM 3-24. This suggests that the PRTs are engaging in activities that are practically viable and easy to get success, rather than engaging local communities in identifying core needs. Indeed, building schools and hospitals could place additional strain on societies in conflict, as teachers, nurses and doctors need to be employed and paid, curricula needs to be drafted and equipment needs to be purchased. Both of these challenges suggest that although the PRTs are engaging in activities that are traditionally “development” activities, they are not necessarily utilizing them in line with traditional development objectives. In other words, doing development *activities* doesn’t necessarily mean doing development.

### *Security dimension of development*

The development community has been grappling with these two challenges considerably longer than the military. Indeed, how development agencies engage community needs is one of the major points of contention for critics of development enterprise, including from developing countries themselves. Commentators from developing countries have particularly critiqued activities by development agencies and international financial institutions as neo-colonial efforts to infringe on the recipients’ sovereignty and political, social and cultural independence. The debate over whether the development enterprise is a genuine effort of the more developed countries to help others achieve the same standard of living or yet another attempt to maintain western influence and control over other nations’

resources is unresolved in both theory and practice. Nonetheless the point here is that the military has not, to this point, mused over these issues in the immediate course of a mission.

Development theorists have approached the interplay between development programs and conflict situations more from the practical rather than ideological or philosophical point of view. Since late 1990s, development agencies have adopted and improved tools to analyze conflicts and the way they could be affected, for better or worse, by development projects. This has been labeled “conflict sensitivity”, and virtually all government development agencies, multilateral agencies including UNDP and the World Bank, and international NGOs have incorporated it into project designs and project cycles. I have explored this topic in more detail elsewhere (Petřík 2008a), so let me just briefly summarize the nature of these instruments.

Conflict sensitivity tools are intended to provide aid agencies with capabilities to ensure that their work does not exacerbate existing conflicts and does not create new conflicts in places which have until now not experienced violence. The core elements of this include extensive conflict analysis, and adjusting the development program in line with the analysis’ outcomes. In practice, this is highly complicated, and practitioners in different development agencies believe that much of the theory on conflict sensitivity has yet to be translated into practice.

Interviews with aid workers<sup>5</sup> revealed three major deficiencies in the use of conflict-sensitivity instruments. Firstly, the conflict sensitivity tools often do not enhance the projects, but add to bureaucracy. For example, one former USAID country mission director criticized the form that comes as part of a conflict-sensitivity toolkit, designed to ensure that various components of the project are not a potential cause of harm. However, he argued that before conflict-sensitivity tools were introduced, he used to do similar analysis automatically and somewhat subconsciously. While he recognized that this may have helped him to think about additional topics he might have omitted, his overall impression was that the form not add much to the process of designing programs. Similarly, a USAID evaluation officer in the same country expressed disillusion that “the form is there, but it’s being filled just for the sake of filling the form, not to bring actual change.” This might be caused by the fact that conflict sensitivity has yet to be introduced into evaluation stages of project cycles, as confirmed by a EuropeAID evaluation officer.<sup>6</sup> Another USAID employee at the Conflict Management and Mitigation office expressed concern that the conflict assessment framework currently available to USAID is too vague and not very helpful. This is most probably caused by the fact that universal tools like this cannot control for the nuanced risks posed by various conflicts.

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<sup>5</sup> Between 2007 and 2009 I held a series of interviews with development practitioners from USAID, AusAID, EuropeAID and UNDP in different positions and different capacities, in their head offices and in the field. As the interviews were confidential, I cannot provide references to the information cited.

<sup>6</sup> One of the obvious reasons why this has not yet taken place is that it is very difficult to measure the absence of a potential impact.

Secondly, conflict sensitivity tools can only change a project to a limited extent, indirectly proportional to the scale of the project. It is a lot easier to alter small-scale, community-based projects, as a smaller number of actors involved allows for greater flexibility. The larger the project, the more stakeholders it involves, and the higher the political profile of the project, the more difficult it is to act on concerns of potential harmful consequences on a conflict. For example, the Temporary International Mechanism, established by the European Union on behalf of the Quartet<sup>7</sup> in May 2006 to enable continued financial support to the Palestinian people while bypassing Hamas, who in January won the election into the Palestinian Legislative Council and took over the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Because Hamas is blacklisted as a terrorist organization, EU decided not to acknowledge that one of the main issues on which Hamas capitalized in the election was rampant corruption within the PNA. (Devi and Morris 2006) TIM ensured continued support to the same people who were in power before the election, and a large amount of the money was spent on the salaries of PNA-employed civil servants, pensioners and ‘social hardship cases’. These ‘social hardship cases’ were taken from a list produced by the Fatah-run Ministry for Social Affairs, even though TIM workers knew that the lists were outdated and unrevised.<sup>8</sup> While this is, at one level, a simple failure of mechanisms EU accepted in 2001<sup>9</sup> to inform a major program design, it also illustrates a situation where micro- and medium-level components of a program were overridden by competing political objectives. The rationale for bypassing the Hamas-led PNA was that it was believed to be beneficial for the long-term solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, despite the fact that in the short-term it exacerbated the conflict between Hamas and Fatah.<sup>10</sup>

Thirdly, conflict sensitivity measures, however well planned and rigorously implemented, might be rendered ineffective if the local population views the program as incoherent with the donor’s general foreign policy in the recipient country. For example, although the US spent more money in economic assistance in Pakistan post-9/11 compared to anytime in the past (Fair 2009),<sup>11</sup> there is very little knowledge and acknowledgement of this fact among the Pakistanis.<sup>12</sup> No matter how many schools USAID open, the first number that a Pakistani recalls when seeing an American flag is the number of casualties in the latest drone attack in the North West Frontier Province.<sup>13</sup> The ferocity with which Pakistani public opposed the

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<sup>7</sup> The Quartet on the Middle East is a group of representatives of the United States of America, Russian Federation, European Union and United Nations, involved in mediating the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The group was established in 2002 in Madrid.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with EU officials, May 2009. That time, four years into the program, the officials were still talking about updating the lists on the basis of income and poverty levels.

<sup>9</sup> EC checklist for root causes of conflict, see <http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/node/38>

<sup>10</sup> Many argue of course that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be solved unless Hamas and Fatah come to terms and agree on a unified strategy.

<sup>11</sup> Including the \$1.5 billion annually appropriated by the Kerry-Lugar Bill.

<sup>12</sup> Author’s interviews in Pakistan and Pew Global Attitudes Project, which found that in 2009 68% Pakistanis held unfavorable opinion of the US, compared to 16 % favorable. See

<http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=1&country=166&response=Unfavorable>

<sup>13</sup> Author’s interviews in Pakistan, August-November 2009.

Kerry-Lugar Bill in Pakistan proves that not even \$7.5 billion for economic assistance will ensure a nation's allegiance.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, one of USAID's goal in the West Bank is supporting democracy and governance.<sup>15</sup> However, when USAID withdrew all support to the municipal council in Nablus because the new democratically elected mayor happened to represent Hamas, Palestinians understood that their democracy is limited by US preferences. Indeed, in spite of the amount of aid given to Palestine (on average \$341 million annually in the recent years),<sup>16</sup> the Palestinians hold the most unfavorable opinion of the United States worldwide (82%).<sup>17</sup>

Different from conflict sensitivity, a more closely conflict-related dimension of development is the deliberate use of development to address the conditions conducive to conflict. The difference between conflict sensitivity as described above and the use of development to enhance security is the specific design of development programs to mitigate the notorious 'root-causes' of conflict. This function of development aid particularly targets the prevention of radicalization.<sup>18</sup> Some of the best examples of this process are the US engagements in Pakistan and Afghanistan post-9/11, where US justifies all its activities as trying to prevent another large-scale terrorist attack. Similarly, the development community is exploring using development to respond to the security implications of failed and fragile states. The category of "failed" states is still relatively new, and so again, the development community is trying to develop policies in a field that has not yet been fully theorized.

This field poses significantly more complex challenges than conflict sensitivity. One of the largest challenges is the elusiveness of the concept of 'root' or 'underlying' causes of conflicts, coupled with the fact that every conflict is so profoundly different, while agencies require uniform policy tools and development instruments. The resulting tension makes it exceptionally difficult to build practical toolboxes. Thus in 2009, all that was available to USAID and EuropeAID were preliminary studies, commissioned by the agencies and researched by private think-tanks, which were meant to educate the agencies' staff on the nature of radicalization processes, reasons for resorting to violence, and so forth. USAID subjected the study (Denoeux and Carter 2009) to a rigorous peer-review process, for which some of the best US experts on terrorism were summoned, including Mia Bloom, John

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<sup>14</sup> The Kerry-Lugar Bill was a brilliant example of aid insensitive to conflict. The proposal touched on possibly every sensitive nerve the Pakistanis have, beginning with 'violation of state sovereignty' through Pakistan's cooperation in the WOT and ending with 'control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons' through anti-proliferation safeguards. As people's behavior in conflict is largely driven by perceptions rather than facts, it does not matter whether the Kerry-Lugar bill really was as controversial as some believe. What matters is that Jemaah Islamiyah was able to distribute pamphlets claiming that Kerry-Lugar Bill enables US to control Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, and that many people believed them.

<sup>15</sup> see <http://www.usaid.gov/wbg/dgo.html>

<sup>16</sup> Data from U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants, Fiscal Year 2008, available from <http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/docs/gbk2008.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> see <http://pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=1&response=Unfavorable>

<sup>18</sup> Radicalization is generally understood as a process resulting in an individual joining a terrorist or militant organization.



Horgan and C. Christine Fair. The study is a comprehensive overview of the latest findings in the field.<sup>19</sup> It is just an introduction, meant to be followed by another more practically oriented paper, recommending concrete policies and instruments. USAID also has an informal group of 10-15 interested officers ranging across different sectoral and regional offices, who will probably serve as vehicles for knowledge transfer into their respective departments.

The European Commission (EC) adopted a more formal approach and set up an expert group, which produced a very concise, only 20 pages long report, submitted in May 2008. (Reinares et al. 2008) The report was prepared on the basis of four background studies covering (1) the factors creating and influencing the process of violent radicalization, esp. among youth; (2) beliefs, ideology and narratives of radicalization; (3) recruitment and mobilization for the Islamist militant movement in Europe; and (4) best practices of authorities and civil society for the prevention of and response to violent radicalization. Three different European think tanks produced these studies and together they comprise an impressive base of more than 500 pages.<sup>20</sup> The expert group included some of the best European terrorism experts, such as Tore Bjørgo, Donatella Della Porta, Alex P. Schmid and Michael Taarnby.

These examples of direct expertise contribution into the strategic level of policy-making in USAID and EC serve as an illustration that at least in areas where the current knowledge is insufficient, practitioners themselves seek to bridge the theory-practice divide and welcome input from theorists. At the same time, these examples reveal challenges for both theorists and practitioners.

### **Development and social change: theory informed by practice**

While the previous section explored cases where theoretical concepts are translated into practical tools, this section considers how practical experiences are transformed into theories about how the intervening forces should respond to counterinsurgency. Focusing on basic premises of a report intended to provide policy recommendations, it illustrates the limitations of a practice-informed and practice-oriented theory.

In January 2009, the Center for American Progress organized a three-day long simulation exercise to examine the potential effectiveness of expanded foreign policy instruments in the context of the war in Afghanistan. CAP invited practitioners representing all three pillars of foreign policy (3D – defense, diplomacy and development). Results of the simulation were

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<sup>19</sup> Given the magnitude of the topic, the 108 pages the study concisely summarizes it, which is thoughtful to the limited time practitioners have to study academic papers. EU was even more successful in this regard, producing a 20-page summary of four large background studies.

<sup>20</sup> The studies are available from

[http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/fsj/terrorism/prevention/fsj\\_terrorism\\_prevention\\_prevent\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/fsj/terrorism/prevention/fsj_terrorism_prevention_prevent_en.htm)

described in a report titled “Swords and Ploughshares” (Brigety 2009), which was launched at a conference organized by CAP on 26 February 2009. (Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul 2009) Since CAP is clearly more focused on practice than on theory, some of the expressions and terms used by the conference presenters illustrated where practice is divorced from theory.

Describing the background of the Sustainable Security Program at CAP, Rubin Brigety explained that the Program’s “approach to security is based on the premise that we actually make America more secure and support our direct national security interests when we focus on *improving* the lives of others, particularly in the context of developing countries and countries that are in conflict or in various stages of transition. ...” (Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul 2009: 04:30) Listing the lacunae of the discussion in the US about the state of their foreign policy instruments, Brigety said that “[w]hat we have not seen in any great detail thus far is a detailed analysis of what those non-kinetic instruments will have to be in order to achieve *success* in Afghanistan and more fundamentally what changes we might have to make in our own government in order to be able to *achieve those gains*.” When describing the outcomes of the first round of the simulation exercise, Brigety said that “a major priority was the need to support the government of Afghanistan, broadly that meant improving the capacity of the government so that they could *provide services* for their own people...” Finally, one of the four key points that emerged as a conclusion to the whole exercise was “the use of development assistance as a counterinsurgency tool, and the importance of linking *development* and counterinsurgency.” (Sustainable Security in Afghanistan Requires Sweeping U.S. Policy Overhaul 2009: 22:30) (all emphases added)

The selected quotes capture the contemporary thinking about counterinsurgency with US policy-making and would undoubtedly be seen by many as a desirable direction in which the Afghan strategy should be evolving. However, here I would like to focus on the language rather than on the message to show some of the potential problems looming for social scientists. The italicized terms build on the premise that there is a universally shared understanding of their meanings, which does not require further examination. At the same time, they share a normative dimension in that Brigety perceives them as positive. The presumed positive meaning of those words may hardly be contested in the western civilization, but would not be as clear in the cultural context of Afghanistan.

*Improving the lives of others* suggests that *our* lives are better than lives of *others* and if we facilitate a change of *their* lives so that they become more like *ours*, they will be better. The term *improving* implies a simple, single trajectory. However, social change is complex, and while some elements (increased their living standard, expanded economic, educational and employment opportunities, better access to health facilities etc.) are changes for the better, it also entails some elements that are changes for the worse (environmental degradation due to industrialization, less free time, less children, more pressure on personal achievement etc.) The fact that the vast majority westerners believe the trade-off to be worthy is only a result of very gradual development, where partial trade-offs were negotiated step by step on a daily

basis in the course of decades and centuries. The fact that other nations in other continents formed cultures so distinctively different from ours suggests that they might not have seen the trade-off equally beneficial.

*Success* in Afghanistan, especially when coupled with *achieving gains*, suggests that the Afghan campaign is *our* endeavor (hence we *succeed* or fail) in which we are meant to *achieve gains*. If the *gains* are meant to be our own security, does that still allow us to give Afghanistan the freedom to decide about its own political system, governance, and course of development? Or does that mean we will only allow a certain form of governance structure, one that we prefer?

The term *development* is equally problematic in this circumstance. Again, it suggests a linear trajectory aiming in the direction *forward*.<sup>21</sup> This fact still holds true despite the enormous depth of debates about what development actually means within the development community,<sup>22</sup> but this community is blessed in its curse because development is the final objective of its endeavors, as opposed to using development as an instrument to *achieving* other *gains*. Therefore, each of its projects continues to be under constant scrutiny allowing for continual re-examination of the concept of development itself. Using development in COIN, although it builds on all the knowledge gathered over the more than 60 years development assistance practice, does not allow for such continuous re-examination. In a position of power, an occupier has little motivation to reconsider its own concepts of development. (Dichter 2003) The practical consequences of this are visible when Brigety discusses supporting the Afghan government to *provide services* for their own people, for example. In a different cultural context, different services might be preferred to those preferred by a person with a western background. Although the development community has a pretty good understanding of how to control for this variation (through increased participation of the local population, seeking local ownership and community-based development, which CAP itself advocated for as 'catalytic development'), the military interests (such as achieving our own security) collide with, and could override completely, these practices.

So, does renouncing the question of the meaning of development and whether it is justified to promote a singular understanding of development in the rest of the world result in a belief that 'development' essentially means 'facilitating social change so that other nations are more similar to ours'? This is of course the main argument of neo-colonialism critics in the Global South and anti-globalization activists in the West. However far-stretched their arguments might be, one has to give some credit to research that has been done on the

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<sup>21</sup> Of course the word 'development' is sometimes used with negative meanings to, such as in 'the security situation in Afghanistan is a disturbing development'. However, in this particular context, the word is heavily normatively loaded with progress and improvement. Terms such as underdevelopment or even de-development are used to show the contrast between a change for the better and for the worse.

<sup>22</sup> Despite all the debates, the economic dimension of development continues to dominate major aid agencies.

relationship between knowledge and power (Hobart 1993) and on the way some technical assistants conduct themselves in the field. (Nakhleh 2004)

Additionally, the notion of positive motivation as acceptable compared to negative motivation dismisses the complexities of persuasion methods. Compare these two quotes:

“money or favor given or promised in order to influence the judgment or conduct of a person in a position of trust; something that serves to induce or influence”

“Conduct village and neighborhood surveys to identify needs in the community – then follow through to meet them, build common interests and mobilize popular support.”

The first one is Merriam-Webster’s definition of a bribe,<sup>23</sup> while the second one is Kilcullen’s definition of ‘winning hearts and minds’. (Kilcullen 2006: 32) In some interpretations, the activities described by Kilcullen could be defined as bribery. It should be explored then whether the mode of motivation (positive or negative) accounts for justification or rejection of intervention. Such a question cannot be answered by practice alone.

This section intended to describe the implications of using development as an instrument to achieve other objectives, such as the donor’s security. As a think-tank, CAP is a very practice-oriented institution. When one is to draw practical implications from research and propose recommendations, they have no room for further re-examination of basic concepts. Therefore this section was not meant to be a criticism, but an explanation of why and how practice-oriented research narrows the scope of analysis.

### **The Human Terrain System controversy: the theory of practice**

The past two sections have explored the relationship between theory and practice. However, further complexities arise when theories about practices (that is, what should be done and how) collide. The controversy in the anthropological community about the Human Terrain System (HTS) is one such example of this occurring.<sup>24</sup>

Pursuant to its belief that soldiers operating in theatres of insurgency need to be equipped with basic understanding of the local culture,<sup>25</sup> the US Army recruited anthropologists and social scientists to conduct in-the-field research in the local communities of US Army operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their task was to deepen their understanding of the locals’ customs and habits, and then transfer this knowledge onto combat units so that they will be able to avoid unnecessary armed confrontation. The army claims that in some cases

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bribe>

<sup>24</sup> A comprehensive annotated bibliography on HTS is available from <http://culturematters.wordpress.com/2008/08/21/annotated-bibliography-on-hts-minerva-and-prisp/>

<sup>25</sup> “Designing operations that achieve the desired end state requires counterinsurgents to understand the culture and the problems they face.” (Counterinsurgency 2006: 1-28)

the deployment of a Human Terrain Team (HTT) reduced the unit's lethal operations by 60-70%. (Army 2009)

The anthropological community has criticized the HTS project for violating ethical principles of anthropological research, arguing that information collected by HTTs is not sufficiently safeguarded from being used as intelligence and that having a tactical function in the army compromises HTT members' unbiased approach to their research subjects. In 2009, American Anthropological Association's special commission released a report that formally rejected HTS:

"When ethnographic investigation is determined by military missions, not subject to external review, where data collection occurs in the context of war, integrated into the goals of counterinsurgency, and in a potentially coercive environment – all characteristic factors of the HTS concept and its application – it can no longer be considered a legitimate professional exercise of anthropology." (Albro et al. 2009: 3)

Perhaps the most vocal opponent of HTS is an anthropologist Roberto Gonzáles, who in his critique goes well beyond methodological concerns, but questions the role of anthropology as a science and whether it could and should be used for goals ethically controversial objectives. (Gonzáles 2009) The opponents of HTS believe that unless a person is committed to the mission, they should not partake in it in whatever capacity. Although several lives might be saved, an entire nation will still die.

Gonzáles's arguments have been challenged by anthropologists and social scientists involved in the program. They have advocated that as long as they possess the knowledge to improve something, they are entitled to do so, and in the particular case of HTS they are nearly obliged to do so, as their knowledge actually saves lives. (Wynn 2008) Some of them support the occupation, but even if they do not, they know that although cannot reverse it anymore, they can still help mitigate the damage.

These debates are centered on the general question of whether social sciences can be divorced from values, moral judgments and the notion of right and wrong. In this case, the two theories of doing the right thing and doing something in the right way collide.<sup>26</sup>

The HTS example raises important questions about the uses of theory in practice. Some attack the HTS critics for believing that anthropology (and many social sciences) "have a ridiculous, sniveling superiority complex when it comes to dealing with institutional power". (Wynn 2008: Ryan A. Brown's comment on 13 Oct 2008) Others, such as Gonzáles,

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<sup>26</sup> It is not for me to decide which of the two approaches is more appropriate or more desirable. I am certainly not the first one who asked this question, neither will I be the last one—essentially this line of argument reverberates on the classic dispute between values-free positivism and other schools investigating issues of norms and values. The overwhelming majority of contemporary social science methods are based in positivism, focusing on empirical analysis without normative judgments. A scathing criticism of this approach can be found in Eric Voegelin's 'The New Science of Politics', still just as current today as it was in 1951 when it was published. (Voegelin 1987)

have argued this animosity is justified, given many implications coming from social analysis of institutions, organizations, bureaucracy and elites; and in the case of anthropology the role it played in the history of colonialism, which Gonzáles sees as very dark. Rather than answering questions, it has just opened many more. For example, should all those who want to use the methods of anthropology be then constrained by the code of conduct for anthropological research? Should political science analysis come with a manual on how not to use it, taking the freedom to make their own decisions from those who use those findings? And, finally, is it justifiable when a nation uses its knowledge to exercise power over other nations?

## **Conclusion**

The incorporation of development into security operations and the security dimension of development assistance illuminates the way in which there is friction between practice informed by theory and unresolved conceptual issues.

Practice-oriented research, such as CAP, also does not enable adequately extensive analysis to cover all aspects of a subject, if it were to be presented in its entirety, including normative ethical dilemmas. While it is understandable that research aiming to suggest practical instruments, tools or recommended policies, does not explore the presumptions on which it is based, it is necessary for both practitioners and theorists to know that this research has little room to ponder the ethical dimensions of different policies, as their practical efficacy and utility in pursuing given objectives is much more important.

Finally, even though research institutions such as universities and think-tanks are willing to cooperate with policy-making bodies at a practical level, such cooperation can be controversial when an inevitable component of the policy is normative, as illustrated by the heated debate around Human Terrain System.

To summarize the arguments presented in the paper, the first section showed some of the difficulties of translating a theory into practice. The complexities of theories of development, conflict and radicalization pose a serious challenge to the usefulness of whatever policies might be devised on their basis. One of the possible solutions, explored in the second section, is to limit the theoretical discussion to a level which allows for easier translation into practical instruments. The report described is an example of basing research in practice, building on key concepts whose meaning is a generally accepted premise. This method is certainly successful in building practical tools to meet certain objectives, but does not allow for evaluation of the appropriateness, usefulness, and morality of those objectives.

The third section presented an example of a program in which practice-oriented research is being conducted by scientists with a strong background in theory. In a sense, the Human Terrain System program is an attempt to bridge the divide between practice informed by theory and theory informed by practice: acknowledging that it is impossible for practitioners to review grand theoretical concepts, but seeing the limitations of omitting them from the

theory-building process, HTS enables individuals familiar with the grand theories do practical research on very specific and clearly defined issues. However, the controversy this program has caused raised a number of questions about the relationship between theory and practice, which have yet to be answered. One of them is how to ensure that normative consequences of theories informed by practice are still examined, and how to bring the results of these examinations back into the loop.

“I want you to learn them from the inside, I want you to gain their trust,” Colonel Quaritch explains to Jake when he is about to join the Avatar program on Pandora. The Colonel’s objectives for why he wants the Na’vis’ trust are clearly defined, and he is in no capacity to change them even if he could. Neither Jake is in the position to influence those objectives, no matter how deep his knowledge grows. Whether he should have that capacity is a question to be asked.

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