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Analysis of Nation-Building during Insurgency in U.S. Defense Policy Strategy

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**ANALYSIS OF NATION-BUILDING DURING INSURGENCY IN U.S. DEFENSE
POLICY STRATEGY**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science, Defense and Strategic Studies

By

Joseph Valles

December 2019

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ANALYSIS OF NATION-BUILDING DURING INSURGENCY IN U.S. DEFENSE POLICY STRATEGY

Defense and Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, December 2019

Master of Science

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ABSTRACT

U.S. defense policy has often relied on a strategy of nation-building to reform the local government and address the root causes of the instability in a given nation or region. This strategy has, in recent years, been criticized for being ineffective and a wasteful drain on American resources. This paper will determine if such criticism is valid by analyzing the performance of four security environments where such a strategy was used: Vietnam, El Salvador, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The paper will determine if such a strategy was effective in these conflicts by analyzing the progress of reforms and, when possible, the final outcome of the conflict.

KEYWORDS: nation-building, insurgency, counterinsurgency, Vietnam, El Salvador, Afghanistan, Iraq

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December 2019

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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INTRODUCTION

There is currently a debate over the role and utility of nation-building in U.S. defense policy. Some argue nation-building is not useful and that the U.S. should focus solely on its conventional military capability.¹ Others argue that there has not been enough investment into nation-building and that America's efforts in conflicts like Afghanistan have suffered because of it.² This paper will delve into this debate by analyzing four insurgencies that America has been involved in: the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the El Salvador Civil War (1979-1992), the Afghanistan War (2001-the present), and the Iraq War (2003-2011). These four cases could be considered some of the largest of the "small wars" America has been involved. Due to the size and scope of nation-building in each of these nations and the fact that there were internal wars on-going, America's nation-building effectiveness as a defense policy tool was tested. In each of these case studies the goal will be to determine how nation-building affected the overall stability and security in the given nation. This will be determined through several factors. The extent to which the government reformed to deal with the main drivers of the war, the end-result of the war, and opinion polls when available. In cases where the conflict ended but resumed soon after the U.S. left the country, that will also be taken into account. Using the findings from these case studies, a conclusion about nation-building's effectiveness and to what extent it is useful as a way to end conflict will be determined. Before going further however, we first need to define

¹ Bing West, "After a Decade of Counter-insurgency, Eliminate Nation-Building from US Military Manuals," In *The New Counter-insurgency Era in Critical Perspective* edited by Celeste Ward Gventer, David Martin Jones, M.L.R. Smith, pp. 232-239, Rethinking Political Violence series (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Steven Metz, "Abandoning Counterinsurgency: Revising Antiterrorism Strategy," *Parameters* 47 no. 3 (2017), pp. 51-64, https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/Parameters/Issues/Autumn_2017/5_Metz.pdf.

² James Dobbins, "Nation Building after Iraq," Lecture, Smart Power Speaker Series from Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, DC, June 4, 2008); and Max Boot and Michael Miklaucic, "USAID Should Become the Department of Nation-Building," *Foreign Policy*, June 22, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/22/usaids-should-become-the-department-of-nation-building/>.

nation-building and the theory behind it.

It is important to differentiate the academic use of the word nation-building, with the foreign policy use of the word. In the academic world, nation-building and state-building technically mean two very different types of activity. “Nation” is the common identity that binds the various people of the country together. “State” is the government’s ability to deliver public goods, such as electricity and security.³ However, in the military and foreign policy realm, nation-building is frequently combined with process of state-building. This is due to the fact that, in practice, countries in which there is conflict often lack both “nation” and “state”. State-building can also be used to help create a nation, and vice-versa. As a result, nation-building in the foreign policy realm can be defined as: the process which generates a government that can provide a sufficient level of services and political representation so that all its citizens view that government as legitimate. It is this policy definition of nation-building which will be used throughout the paper, as it encompasses all the aspects of the policy approach.

The applicability for nation-building in the wars being discussed can be seen in the Army’s Counterinsurgency Manual which states explicitly on the first page that, “Defeating an insurgency requires a blend of both civilian and military efforts that address both assisting the host-nation government in defeating the insurgents on the battlefield and enabling the host nation in addressing the root causes of the insurgency.”⁴ In another section, the manual advises that, “Commanders and staffs must understand the nature of intrastate conflicts even if they are poorly defined. If a commander and staff misdiagnosis an intrastate conflict, they can fail to properly

³ Armin von Bogdandy, Stefan Häußler, Felix Hanschmann and Raphael Utz, “State-Building, Nation-Building, and Constitutional Politics in Post-Conflict Situations: Conceptual Clarifications and an Appraisal of Different Approaches,” *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2005): pp. 579-613, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/187574105X00138>, pp. 580-588.

⁴ Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, FM 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2014), p. 1-1.

identify and address the root cause of instability and the nature of the threat.”⁵ The manual also has entire chapters devoted to “Culture”, “Indirect Methods to Countering Insurgencies”, and “Working with Host-Nation Forces.”⁶ It is clear through directions given not only by the Army’s Counterinsurgency Manual but also by the Joint Publication on Counterinsurgency published by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that the non-military factors of an insurgency are as important as the actual killing of the enemy.⁷

There are two methods in nation-building to deal with these non-military factors. One is co-option, which is the process of reforming existing state institutions. The second is deconstruction, which is when the entire government is destroyed and rebuilt. Co-option has been used in all of the nation-building America has been involved in, though was most used in Vietnam and El Salvador. Afghanistan and Iraq are the only examples in this paper’s case studies in which deconstruction was used. Why co-option is used in one country and deconstruction used in another is the result of the policy maker’s judgement of the viability of the regime.⁸

A good way to think of a nation is to symbolize it as a house. The goal of nation-building is to fix those parts of the house which are unstable. In some cases, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, the entire house is viewed as unsalvageable, requiring it to be entirely rebuilt. In others, like Vietnam and El Salvador, the house is kept in-tact, but an effort is made to fix the parts of it that are unstable and threaten to bring the rest of the house down. The basic theory behind nation-building is that by fixing the structure of the country from which the instability originates, the rebellion against the government will dissipate and the country will become stable once again.

⁵ Ibid., p. 4-2.

⁶ Ibid., Chapters 3, 10, 11.

⁷ Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, pp. 1-1, 1-8, 1-15, 1-18 and Chapters 3, 10, 11; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Counterinsurgency*. JP 3-24 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), pp. I-6 to I-8, III-5, III-12 to III-13, III-18 to III-20, III-35, IV-19 to IV-21.

⁸ James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, and Beth Cole DeGrasse, *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG557.pdf, pp. xx-xxi.

What exactly is required to create a stable country is up for interpretation. Heather Selma Gregg, in her book *Building the Nation*, creates “six pillars of stabilization” which are: Security, Law, Governance, Economics, Social Well-being, and National Unity.⁹ *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building* by James Dobbins et al. also has six factors: Security, Humanitarian Relief, Governance, Economic Stabilization, Democratization, and Development.¹⁰ While these two lists are similar, with the two sharing some common factors, there are also some noticeable differences. There can also be differences in how one measures the importance of each of these factors. James Dobbins has a hierarchy with security being the most important. Heather Selma Gregg, by contrast, views each of her pillars as equally important.

While such criteria are useful, they do lack specificity. What is sufficient governance for one country may be insufficient for another. In addition, there is the fact that insurgencies usually do not form due to a state lacking in all areas, but often in just two or three. It can also be the case that some aspect of governance is a driver, but others are not. As a result, instead of using a broad set of factors that can be applied to every country, this paper will focus on the specific factors that were most important for that particular conflict. Using this approach will allow greater attention to be given to the issues that most matter for each case study, as all four are unique with differing circumstances.

For Vietnam, there was one main driver: the state’s lack of a positive presence in the countryside. Some areas of the country had no interaction with the central government, and those that did tended to do so only in the form of being taxed. Thus, the goal of nation-building was to extend the reach of the government outside the cities. There would be two general techniques used to do so. The first was through demographics. The United States would help fund

⁹ Heather Selma Gregg, *Building the Nation: Missed Opportunities in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2018), p. 88 and Table 3.

¹⁰ James Dobbins, et al, *The Beginner’s Guide to Nation-Building*, p. xxiii.

Vietnam's effort to move populations that were loyal to the government to areas that were not, through refugee resettlement and the Land Development Program. The second was by striving to make the people's lives better through population control programs like the Strategic Hamlet Program which would bring both security and government services. This also included land reform to increase the financial prospects of the peasants. The section on Vietnam will also have a focus on the Central Highlands, as this region had never been controlled by a central authority and were most disconnected from the Vietnamese nation-state. In the end, it will be shown that while nation-building showed success, it came too late to be of use.

For El Salvador, the main issue was the brutal oligarchic system of government, controlled by the agricultural elite and the military. The three ways the United States would attempt to destroy this oligarchic system was by promoting human rights, democracy, and land reform. Land reform would destroy the agricultural elite's power and help to alleviate the economic inequality in the country. Democracy would give the people political power to ensure that the land owners and military do not oppress them again. Finally, the promotion of a culture that respects human rights would cause supporters of the insurgency not to fear being killed if they stopped fighting and participated in the political system. While unable to fully reform the government, the United States was able to push El Salvador to reform enough that it was able to negotiate with the rebel forces and achieve peace.

In Afghanistan, the main drivers are governance, corruption, and the opium drug trade. The issue of governance is mainly related to the warlords in the country who treat their regions as mini-kingdoms to be exploited and dominated. This has caused many of the legitimate local leaders to either be killed or alienated, causing the central government as a whole to be viewed as illegitimate. Corruption has caused the government to be unable to meet many of the

population's needs and has caused villages to at least tolerate the Taliban for the services and better management they offer. The drug trade has caused Afghanistan to have a large illegal economy which the Taliban are heavily involved in. This results in many farmers not benefitting as much from state services, such as subsidies and infrastructure, as they would under a legal economy and causes Taliban services, such as protection of farms and free transportation of goods, to be more beneficial. In summary, the Afghan government lacks both legitimacy and the ability to fully provide for its citizens' needs.

In Iraq, the main issue that drove the insurgency was sectarianism (the conflict between the Sunni and the Shia sects of Islam). As will be shown, the year-long American occupation of Iraq did not account for the level of disorder that accompanied the destruction of Saddam's regime. Yet while actions such as de-Baathification, the dissolving of the military, and the inability to create a strong interim government in the early months after liberation would have consequences of their own right, sectarianism would magnify all these problems. The inability of the United States to solve this fundamental issue would cause what seemed to be a successful nation-building effort to ultimately turn into a failure as conflict resumed soon after American forces left the country.

SOUTH VIETNAM

Nation-building in South Vietnam was largely about expanding the reach of the government into the rural areas. It was these rural areas that were the least developed, least connected to the idea of the Vietnamese nation, and most susceptible to insurgent propaganda. Thus, this analysis will be about those programs that focused on transforming rural South Vietnam. These government extension techniques were: the settlement of refugees, the Land Development Program, population control, and land reform. In addition, there will be a section focusing on the Central Highlands, as this was an area that was particularly disconnected from the Vietnamese nation-state.

Refugee Resettlement

The first major trial for South Vietnamese nation-building was the influx of refugees that were arriving from the North after the division of Vietnam in 1954. The exact number of refugees that immigrated to the south varies depending on the source. This is due to the fact that the headquarters of the South Vietnamese agency in charge of refugee resettlement was burned down in 1955, resulting in many of the documents being destroyed.¹¹ However, all sources agree it was over 880,000.¹² The vast majority of these refugees were Catholic. A 1955 report stated that 76.3% were Catholic, 23.5% Buddhist, and 0.2% Protestant.¹³ A 1957 report makes a larger

¹¹ Bui Van Luong, "Commentary on Bernard Fall," In *Viet-Nam: The First Five Years*, edited by Richard W. Lindholm (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1959), p. 60.

¹² Bui Van Luong, "The Role of Friendly Nations," In *Viet-Nam: The First Five Years*, p. 49; Peter Hansen, "Bắc Đì Cù: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): pp. 173-211, DOI: 10.1525/vs.2009.4.3.173, p. 180; and Vietnam Task Force, "Evolution of the War: Origins of the Insurgency," In *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*, Part 4, Chapter A-5 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2011), <https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-A-5.pdf>, Tab 1, p. 9.

¹³ Peter Hansen, "Bắc Đì Cù: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam," p. 180

claim of 85.8% Catholic and 14.4% Buddhist and Protestant.¹⁴

In any case, the large amount of Catholics would be very important for the Diem regime. As the Pentagon Papers explain, the Catholics were “a politically malleable, culturally distinct group, wholly distrustful of Ho Chi Minh and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, dependent for subsistence on Diem’s government, and attracted to Diem as a co-religionist.”¹⁵ The doubling of the Catholic population would thus effectively double his support and legitimacy among the population. More importantly though was the fact that they could act “as a source of reliable political and military cadres.”¹⁶ As a result, Catholics tended to be prioritized for advancement and positions of importance.¹⁷

The influx of thousands of refugees also created new opportunities. Many of these Catholic refugees would be put into the countryside in order to bolster rural communities’ connection with the government, not through economic or political benefits but through simple demographics. A South Vietnam report in 1957 stated that, “settlers having experience in the anti-Communist struggle will greatly contribute to an effective control system in these regions and assure security in the village of the hinterlands.”¹⁸

Not all of the resettlement was about defeating the communists and extracting wealth from the land however. Diem had a vision of Vietnam being made up of landholding middle-class farmers, similar to the American ideal of the “yeoman farmer”. This was combined with a fear that Vietnamese cities were becoming too crowded. Such fears had existed in the past with the French colonial government and there had even been plans under the French to develop the

¹⁴ Bui Van Luong, “The Role of Friendly Nations,” In *Viet-Nam: The First Five Years*, p. 49.

¹⁵ Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Origins of the Insurgency,” p. 9.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Random House, 1989), pp. 9, 71, 77, 137, 175-176, 181-182, 334, 508, 549, 748.

¹⁸ Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954-1976* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 18.

countryside, though this ultimately did not occur. The spreading of refugees throughout the countryside would thus, in the eyes of the Diem government, provide several benefits.¹⁹

The Land Development Program

The resettlement program would transition into the Land Development Program in 1957. Known in Vietnamese as Khu Dinh Dien (to nourish the fields), the program sought to move people from the more populated coastal regions into the central highlands.²⁰ The sites for development were picked out personally by President Diem and would function as a “living wall” that would protect against Communist incursion.²¹ The United States would contribute more than \$10 million to this project. Problems soon became apparent. The Americans viewed the program as primarily economic. However President Diem viewed the program as primarily about security. Thus, many of the sites were picked more for their military value rather than their ability to sustain a population. For example, one village was built four kilometers from the nearest water supply.²² Another was built in mountainous terrain that was unsuitable for agriculture and over 87 miles from the nearest town, through roads that were impassable during half the year.²³

These problems would eventually lead to a suspension of funds for the program in late-1957. A month later the suspension was lifted when the two countries agreed on a set of planning procedures. Unfortunately, these procedures were never fully implemented in practice, causing problems to continue. For example, Americans wanted 3 to 5 hectares for each family, but

¹⁹ Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 79 and 161.

²⁰ Edward Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 171; and John D. Montgomery, *The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia* (New York, NY: Fredrick A. Praeger Publisher, 1963), p. 75.

²¹ Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Origins of the Insurgency,” Tab. 2 p. 29.

²² John D. Montgomery, *The Politics of Foreign Aid: American Experience in Southeast Asia*, p. 75.

²³ Ibid.

President Diem ordered just 1. When the Vietnamese refused to budge there was a discussion of suspending funds again, but Washington ultimately ordered funding to continue.²⁴ Funding was again suspended in 1958 when the Agricultural Machinery Office, the agency responsible for distributing and maintaining agricultural equipment, was shut down. Its responsibilities were transferred to the GCLD, the Vietnamese agency created to oversee the Land Development Program. Unfortunately, much of the expertise and infrastructure did not transfer, with around half the employees being laid off. As a result, not only was equipment more likely to break due to a lack of regular maintenance, but when it did break the machines took much longer to fix. The suspension was lifted within a couple of months due to lobbying by the Vietnamese government.²⁵

Finally, in June 1958, funding was cut permanently due to the U.S. government learning that Land Development funds were being used to build and maintain prison camps. A loophole of sorts did appear though when the \$5 million slated toward Land Development was instead transferred toward military aid. This allowed the Vietnamese to simply transfer the new \$5 million from their military to the Land Development Program.²⁶ The program would continue for a few more years and by 1961, over 210,000 people were relocated to 147 settlements.²⁷ This drastically changed the demographics of the Highlands. In 1954, 15% of the population in the Central Highlands was ethnic Vietnamese. By the late 1960s, it was estimated to be over double that at 37%.²⁸ However, this did not necessarily translate to better security.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 77-78.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 78-80.

²⁷ Boon Hwee (Stan) Tan, "*Dust Beneath the Mist: State and Frontier Formation in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, the 1955-61 Period*" (PhD diss., Australian National University, 2011), DOI: 10.25911/5d7a27dfaacf2, p. 211.

²⁸ Ibid.

The Central Highlands

As mentioned earlier, the Central Highlands was a particular focus of the Land Development Program. Sparsely populated with dense jungles and hilly terrain, it was the perfect environment for an insurgent group. The settlement of Vietnamese into the area would, however, exacerbate relations with the native Highlanders. Highly ethnically diverse, the Highlands have historically been independent from the rest of Vietnam and have fiercely defended this independence.²⁹ For their part, the Vietnamese viewed the Highlanders as inferiors, referring to them as “Moi” (savages).³⁰

The biggest issue that would continually plague relations was the issue of land. The French had, for the most part, respected Highlander land claims, giving adequate compensation or, for those tribes which did not typically sell land, bought 99 year leases. The French also had a policy of not buying more than 30 hectares to prevent entire villages being taken by wealthy foreigners. Gerald Hickey, the foremost American expert on Highlander issues, suggested a similar policy in 1957; that Highlander land claims be acknowledged and that the government work through the proper channels for each tribe.³¹ The South Vietnamese government, however, took the opposite approach. The government had an official policy of viewing all Highlander land as public and could thus be taken by the government with little to no compensation. When General Le Van Kim, Director of the Land Development Program, was found to be fairly compensating Highlanders with government funds he was promptly removed from his post.³²

²⁹ Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development*, RM-5281/1-ARPA (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1967), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_memoranda/2005/RM5281.1.pdf, pp. 16-22; and Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam: A Review of Political Developments and Forces* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1966), p. 4.

³⁰ Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development*, p. 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-92.

³² Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 44-45; and Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development*, p. 76n13.

Decrees in 1958 and 1959 stated that Highlanders “had a right only to the produce of the land they were farming, not to the land itself.”³³ The American advisory mission did not do much to dissuade such actions. Wolf Ladejinsky, a senior American advisor to President Diem, complained to Hickey that the Highlanders were being unreasonable, saying, “How do you expect the government to deal with these children?”³⁴

South Vietnam was also interested in “civilizing” the Highlanders; in this case “civilizing” meaning to adopt Vietnamese culture and practices. The minorities in Vietnam were viewed as a threat to national cohesion and stability. In the minds of the Vietnamese leadership, the only way to ensure the Highlanders’ loyalty and identity to the state was to turn them Vietnamese. This in effect meant the destruction of the Highlander way of life. Villages were officially renamed using the Vietnamese language, Highlanders were forced to stop wearing their traditional clothes, and all new houses were to be made in the Vietnamese style.³⁵

This destruction of Highlander culture was combined with habitual Vietnamese disrespect toward the native population. Vietnamese soldiers stole livestock and produce, merchants swindled ignorant natives, and Vietnamese were given priority for positions in government and schools.³⁶ Such ill-treatment led to serious Highlander dissatisfaction. One is quoted as saying, “The Vietnamese talk equality, but they don’t mean what they say. In their hearts they want to dominate us. They are colonialists. The French were bad at the mouth, but in their hearts they were good.”³⁷ The fact that the French, who were entirely alien to the country and which the Highlanders had revolted against in the early 1930s, were viewed in a more positive light than the South Vietnamese government was disconcerting.

³³ Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development*, p. 77.

³⁴ Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 54-55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

The Viet Cong were quick to take advantage of this rising tension. Unlike the South, North Vietnam had given their Highlanders a level of autonomy. This fact was frequently used in propaganda, with the Viet Cong promising similar autonomy to the southern Highlanders.³⁸ Such propaganda was extremely attractive to the Highlanders, especially after the Bajaraka Movement, a Highlander organization calling for autonomy, was suppressed by the government in the late 1950s.³⁹ By 1962, it was estimated that the government controlled only about 50% of the Highlands. The situation was even worse in the very Northern provinces, where the estimate was around 12%.⁴⁰

It was at this point that the government would begin arming the Highlanders in what would become known as the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG). Led by the CIA using U.S. Army Green Berets, Highlanders would be trained, given weapons, and sent to patrol their local area. Of note for this paper is the use of civic action by the CIDG. Villages were taught modern agriculture techniques, blacksmithing, and CIDG medics set up clinics providing basic healthcare. Even after 1965 when the program became much more focused on offensive action, the CIDG would be responsible for thousands of civic projects throughout the Highlands, including 6,436 wells, 1,949 kilometers of road, and 110 hospitals.⁴¹ Such projects were the first time this region had gained any benefit from the central government. Unfortunately, good-will tended to be more towards the Americans, as the Vietnamese officials and soldiers that worked alongside U.S. personnel tended to be “disappointingly indifferent”.⁴² In the official history of the U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam, a 1963 report from Tay Ninh province is highlighted

³⁸ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, p. 10.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 13-26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴¹ Francis J. Kelly, *U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-1971*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1973), p. 155.

⁴² Ibid. p. 62.

which states:

“Vietnamese military action in the province is almost non-existent... the refusal of ARVN military personnel to cooperate and assist in these projects results in failure to achieve the objectives of military civic action (goodwill leading to support of GVN).

While a few isolated instances of military civic action have occurred, the prevailing attitude among military personnel is that manual labor which assists civilians is beneath a soldier's dignity. The degree of indifference of the military toward civilian welfare was exemplified when the Vietnamese soldiers refused to help unload USO emergency food supplies for a hamlet destroyed by the Viet Cong. The arrogant, inconsiderate treatment of civilians by soldiers has caused many civilians to support the Viet Cong.”⁴³

The Vietnamese had a very different idea of how of how to deal with the Highlanders. In March 1964, in a meeting between ARVN and Highlander leaders, one of the Vietnamese officers stated, “I feel we can solve the Highlander problem the same way the Americans solved their Indian problem. We should form Highlander reservations the same way the Americans formed Indian reservations.”⁴⁴ The suggestion did not go over well with either the Highlanders or the Americans.

Continued ill-treatment would ultimately result in a revolt by the Highlanders in September 1964. Lasting two days, two thousand highlanders would kill 73 Vietnamese and take another 61 hostage. No Americans were harmed and the suppression of the revolt was led by Americans, who were ultimately able to stop the revolt with no bloodshed.⁴⁵ When the government reigned on promises made after the revolt, another would occur a year later in December 1965, though would be less successful due to advanced warning.⁴⁶ Both revolts would be instigated by the United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races (FULRO), a Highland

⁴³ Quoted in Ibid. p. 62.

⁴⁴ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, Chapter 12 pp. 66-70; and Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 99-108.

⁴⁶ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, pp. 82-83 and 89-91; and Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 133-141.

autonomy organization.

These revolts did cause some improvements, as the government sought to avoid any further conflict. After the 1964 revolt, more Highlanders were put into administrative positions and selected for officer training.⁴⁷ In 1966, members of FULRO were allowed to run elections for the Constitutional Assembly.⁴⁸ In 1967 the government finally recognized Highlander land claims. Farm productivity was increased through modern agricultural techniques and it was becoming increasingly common to see modern amenities such as motorbikes and electronics.⁴⁹

However, such improvements were often a case of two steps forward, one step back. While the government did officially recognize Highlander land claims, few actual titles had been given out to legitimize these claims. During 1971 and 1972, there was a surge of Vietnamese developing on Highlander land.⁵⁰ Many of these Vietnamese were ARVN officers who saw such land as an unofficial retirement benefit. When an officer was asked by Gerald Hickey if he planned to pay for the land, “he just laughed.”⁵¹ Part of the problem with the lack of enforcement was that, just as in the early sixties, the majority of government positions were held by ethnic Vietnamese, with Pleiku being the sole province with a native Highlander provincial chief.⁵²

The Vietnamese would also become increasingly suspicious of American motives. Some Vietnamese leaders believed the U.S. had encouraged the Highlanders to revolt, had intentionally trained and armed them to do so, and were attempting to create a third faction in the region directly under American control.⁵³ This mistrust caused any advice Americans gave about the Highlands to be viewed with suspicion. In the summer of 1965 for example, Americans were not

⁴⁷ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, pp. 72-73.

⁴⁸ Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 153-154.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁵³ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, pp. 57-58, 77, 80, 89-90, 94; and Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 133-134 and 141.

invited to be present during negotiations between the government and FULRO leaders.⁵⁴ That same year, an American and Australian official were asked to be reassigned from the region for their perceived closeness to FULRO leaders.⁵⁵

Part of this mistrust was due to the fact that the Highlanders did indeed believe that the Americans were taking the place of the French and would protect their autonomy.⁵⁶ This caused the Highlanders to readily accept the American presence while resisting the Vietnamese. The Americans also tended to be personally friendly with the Highlanders. Their foreignness, ironically, made them much better at befriending Highlander natives, as they did not come with any preconceived notions. All of this alienated the Vietnamese, who saw American-Highlander relations as undermining their attempts to assimilate the population.

By the time of American withdrawal from Vietnam, the central government still had little control over the region, especially in the border provinces of Pleiku and Kontum. In 1972, around 48% of the hamlets in Pleiku and 56% of Kontum were marked as having low security by the Hamlet Evaluation System.⁵⁷ In a January 1972 report, just a few months before the 1972 Spring Offensive, the CIA would issue a report about a worrying buildup of forces in the Highlands, saying, “If the Communists do decide to make a major military effort...they may estimate that the balance of forces will be more favorable to them in the highlands than anywhere else.”⁵⁸ This assessment would ultimately prove true, as the Highlands were a major launching point for both the 1972 and 1975 offensives.

⁵⁴ Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, p. 80.

⁵⁵ Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 133-134.

⁵⁶ Gerald C. Hickey, *Free in the Forest*, pp. 83; and Vietnamese Affairs Staff, *The Highlanders of South Vietnam*, pp. 42 and 95.

⁵⁷ Calculated from data taken from: Research and Analysis Directorate, *HES Hamlet Map*, [map], 1:1250000 (Saigon, Vietnam: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 1972), https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/609498.

⁵⁸ *Intelligence Memorandum: Communist Military Build-up in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1972).

Population Control

In the summer of 1959, President Diem announced another settlement program, known as the Agrovillage program in English and “khu tru mat” (dense and prosperous areas) in Vietnamese.⁵⁹ The Strategic Hamlet Program, begun in March 1962, was largely an expansion of the Agrovillage concept with the same objectives. Unlike the Land Development Program where the main goal was to improve security by changing the ethnic geography, the Agrovilles and later Strategic Hamlet Program would seek to improve security by centralizing widely dispersed villages into one fortified location. These new living centers would be located “beside major roads and arteries of communication along which the security forces could more easily move to provide protection and surveillance.”⁶⁰ In addition, this centralization would also make civic action much easier. With one central location, all the needs of the local community could be met within one hamlet. Due to the similarities between the two programs and the fact that many of the problems with the Agrovilles would continue with the Strategic Hamlets, this section will be more about the overall concept of controlling the population in Vietnam rather than the specific programs.

Unlike the Land Development Program, where families were enticed to move because of the promise of free land and government subsidies, those involved in population control did not move voluntarily. Although there was technically a process whereby villagers would volunteer to be in the hamlets, in reality everyone in the designated area would be moved.⁶¹ In the hamlet of Ben Tuong, for example, only 70 of the 205 families volunteered for resettlement.⁶² In the

⁵⁹ Edward Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 178.

⁶⁰ Joseph Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam: An Agrovillage in Development* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, 1963), p. 4.

⁶¹ Joseph Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam*, p. 23.

⁶² Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Counterinsurgency: Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963,” In *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force*, Part 4, Chapter B-2 (Washington, DC:

Agroville of Tan Luoc, only the two nearest villages to the construction site had families that volunteered for resettlement.⁶³ In one case, after a man refused to move his family, his wife was kidnapped by the national police and would not be released until he agreed to the move.⁶⁴

Compensation for relocation was insufficient at best. Peasants were compensated to relocate, but their old homes were often valued at over ten times the amount paid by the government.⁶⁵ Payment could also be delayed for months and when it did arrive, a large portion of the funds were stolen by province officials. In some cases peasants receive no money at all.⁶⁶ In addition, new hamlets were often built some distance away from villagers' previous homes. This meant that villagers had to walk up to 5 kilometers away to work their fields.⁶⁷

The government worsened the situation by not only forcing villagers to relocate, but also requiring them to build the hamlets without pay. Such forced labor was, as can be expected, reported to be extremely unpopular among the peasantry. Government supporters would point out that forced labor had been used extensively in the past by the French. However, as a report produced for USAID would argue, "True, the French colonial regime regularly employed this technique, but an independent nationalist government does not win the support of its population by adopting the colonial method."⁶⁸ In the limited cases when compensation was provided, payment could be delayed for months.⁶⁹

National Archives and Records Administration, 2011), <http://media.nara.gov/research/pentagon-papers/Pentagon-Papers-Part-IV-B-2.pdf>, p. 22.

⁶³ Joseph Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam*, p. 23.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶⁵ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, (Washington, DC: Advanced Research Projects Agency, 1964), p. 204.

⁶⁶ William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965* (Washington, DC: Advanced Research Projects Agency, 1966), <http://www.vrenken.com/coin/Nighswonger%20%281966%29%20-%20Rural%20Pacification%20in%20Vietnam%201962-1965.pdf>, p. 129.

⁶⁷ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, p. 206; William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965*, p. 171; and Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 311.

⁶⁸ Joseph Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam*, p. 25.

⁶⁹ William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965*, p. 134.

It might be argued that the lack of payment was due to necessity; that a third-world country like South Vietnam did not have the resources to pay for such compensation. This would, in fact, be one of the excuses South Vietnam would make for their lack of compensation.⁷⁰ However, population control was heavily subsidized by the U.S. and its allies. The Strategic Hamlet Program alone cost over 1.4 billion piasters (the South Vietnamese currency).⁷¹ This would equate to over \$17 million in 1962 or \$153 million in 2019.⁷² Of that, nearly 70% was provided by the U.S. and its allies.⁷³ This also does not include the construction materials and military equipment that was freely given to the South Vietnamese government. The problem was less about funding and more Diem's view of the people's relationship to the government. In his view, it was the personal responsibility of the people to hard work towards improving the entire community. Since the government guided the community, peasants should be motivated to work due to that personal responsibility, not for monetary payment.⁷⁴

Lack of planning and poor decision making would be one such example of the improper use of U.S. funds. Province officials, feeling pressured to produce results in a short amount of time, would create what American advisors would term "paper hamlets".⁷⁵ These hamlets would be reported completed, but had no trained militia to man the defenses, no social services, and the quality of the homes and defenses built were suspect.⁷⁶ One of the major goals of U.S. advisors throughout the early 1960s would be, "to convince GVN to proceed at a more measured,

⁷⁰ Joseph Zasloff, *Rural Resettlement in Vietnam*, p. 25.

⁷¹ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, pp. 28-31 and 30, Table 1.

⁷² Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 191 and 190, Table 9.5; and "January 1968 compared with August 2019," CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=1.00&year1=196801&year2=201908>.

⁷³ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, pp. 28-31 and 30, Table 1.

⁷⁴ Edward Miller, *Misalliance*, pp. 137-140 and 164-165.

⁷⁵ William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965*, p. 126.

⁷⁶ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, pp. 120-121.

coherent pace with a qualitative improvement in the physical construction of strategic hamlets.”⁷⁷ Sir Robert Thompson, a British counterinsurgency advisor to President Diem, had originally envisioned the construction of Strategic Hamlets as part of an “oil-spot” strategy, where the government would gradually expand outward from already secure areas.⁷⁸ Combined with the social services that the hamlets would provide, population control was meant to solve both the military and political problems of insurgency. Instead, the South Vietnamese started construction of all hamlets around the country at the same time. This meant that some of the hamlets were constructed in areas dominated by the Viet Cong which, as can be expected, led to hamlets becoming fortresses of the Viet Cong rather than of the government.⁷⁹

Corruption would also cripple the program. Construction materials were embezzled, with province chiefs charging peasants for materials which had been provided for free by the United States.⁸⁰ Economic projects meant to better the lives of those within the hamlets were rarely implemented outside of “show-case” hamlets near provincial capitals, with officials simply pocketing the unused funds. The numbers of government cadres were much larger in official documents than in reality, likely due to officials pocketing the unused salaries in a situation similar to the “ghost soldiers” of the ARVN.⁸¹ In summary, if something could be stolen, it probably was.

Population control did have some success. In 1962, trained government cadres taught

⁷⁷ Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Counterinsurgency: Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963,” p. iii.

⁷⁸ Peter Francis Leahy, “*Why Did the Strategic Hamlet Program Fail?*” (PhD diss., U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), pp. 78-79.

⁷⁹ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, pp. 120-121; and Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Counterinsurgency: Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963,” p. iii.

⁸⁰ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, p. 310.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

more than 16,000 farmers modern farming techniques to improve agricultural production.⁸² To support this, trees to enhance the fertility of the soil, pesticides, fertilizer, and new high productivity seed strains were all delivered to enhance the potential of peasants' fields. The seeds turned out to be so successful that the Viet Cong gave orders to specifically allow trucks carrying the fertilizer to pass unmolested, as the increased crop yield meant more food for the VC.⁸³ Hamlets, using the funds allocated for development projects, built roads, bridges, schools, dams, canals, and in some cases even power plants, bringing electricity to the countryside for the first time.⁸⁴ From July 1962 to April 1963, enemy defections and government control increased, with Viet Cong attacks decreasing.⁸⁵ Hamlets which had successfully melded security with social services were strongholds of government influence and were examples of what such a program can achieve.

Unfortunately, such successes were not the norm. Many officials did not fully understand the nature of the Agrovillage and Strategic Hamlet concept of mixing security with social and economic improvement. Thus, many officials simply put up bamboo fences and forced the peasants to move in, without telling the peasants why they were being relocated and what benefits the hamlets would bring.⁸⁶ If South Vietnam had followed the counsel of its American advisers, the government might have been able to better regulate standards as well as educate officials on what the purpose of the hamlets were for.

Reporting methodology for estimated government control was also criticized for being

⁸² Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, p. 191.

⁸³ Michael Lee Lanning and Dan Cragg, *Inside the VC and NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), p. 130.

⁸⁴ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, pp. 181-201.

⁸⁵ Vietnam Task Force, "Evolution of the War: Counterinsurgency: Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963," pp. 30-35.

⁸⁶ Pham Chung, *Analysis of the Long-range Military, Economic, Political, and Social Effects of the Strategic Hamlet Program in Viet Nam*, p. 34.

inaccurate, due to local officials not wanting to report bad results. This problem was combined with the fact that some U.S. officials were not always willing to accept bad results. General Harkins reportedly refused to accept reports on government control in the northern Mekong Delta during this time as it showed “too much red”. Maps sent to Washington were “corrected” to show more government control than Americans on the ground actually believed was the case.⁸⁷

The Pentagon Papers would summarize the Strategic Hamlet Program as being, “similar if not identical to earlier population resettlement and control efforts practiced by the French and by Diem. The long history of these efforts was marked by consistency in results as well as in techniques: all failed dismally because they ran into resentment if not active resistance on the part of the peasants at whose control and safety, then loyalty, they were aimed.”⁸⁸ The authors of the report would conclude that population control was “doomed by poor execution and by the inability of the Ngo family to reform coupled with the inability of the U.S. to induce them to reform.”⁸⁹ Like many nation-building projects in Vietnam, the failures of population control were more due to the government in charge of implementing it, rather than the strategy itself. In the years to come, many of these hamlets would be torn down with the peasants returning to their old homes, which they had never wanted to leave in the first place. Population control would be largely discarded, and instead aid would be delivered in a more conventional manner.

Land Reform

Land reform was an issue that had been identified very early in the war by both the

⁸⁷ Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie*, pp. 323-324.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

⁸⁸ Vietnam Task Force, “Evolution of the War: Counterinsurgency: Strategic Hamlet Program 1961-1963,” p. iii.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Vietnamese and American leadership. As stated earlier, Ngo Dinh Diem had a vision of a new middle-class, land-holding peasantry. However, while Diem was cognizant of the peasant's plight, he did not want to anger his existing middle-class.⁹⁰ As such, his 1956 land reform program, Ordinance 57, was considered "modest in scope."⁹¹ The first problem was that agricultural land was limited to 100 hectares. Compare this to Japan's 1946 land reform program where all land worked by tenants in excess of 1 hectare and owner-cultivated land in excess of 3 hectares were subject to a forced government buyout.⁹² Taiwan's 1953 program had a similar limit of 3 hectares for all landowners.⁹³ The 100 hectare limit, while far too high to completely solve the problem of tenant farmers, would free up roughly 20% of arable land. In reality though, only half of this was actually sold to former tenant farmers, as owners split up their holdings among family members to get around the law. Most of the land that was sold was to northern refugees and Catholics who, as discussed in the section on refugees, were already more likely to support the government. Tenant rents were fixed at 15 to 25% and farmers were guaranteed the right to farm rented land for at least 3 years.⁹⁴ However, these rent reductions, like the land redistribution, had mixed success with some land owners still forcing tenants to pay higher rents. Land continued to be a problem for several years, as the political instability after President Diem's death in 1963 would cause any more reform efforts to flounder.

The year 1967 would bring several advances for land reform. One was the election of Ngyuen Van Thieu as President of South Vietnam. Thieu was much more sympathetic to the

⁹⁰ Edward Miller, *Misalliance*, p. 161.

⁹¹ William A. Nighswonger, *Rural Pacification in Viet Nam: 1962-1965*, p. 52.

⁹² Toshihiko Kawagoe, *Agricultural Land Reform in Postwar Japan: Experiences and Issues*, Policy Research Working Paper 2111 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1999), <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.17.860&rep=rep1&type=pdf>, p. 30

⁹³ Antonio J. Ledesma, "Land Reform Programs in East and Southeast Asia: A Comparative Approach," *Philippine Studies* 28, no. 3 (1980): 305-43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42632541>, p. 313; and Walter Galenson, *Economic Growth and Structural Change in Taiwan: The Postwar Experience of the Republic of China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 174.

⁹⁴ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975*, pp. 111-114.

plight of Vietnamese peasants, having grown up on a small rice farm.⁹⁵ The United States also began to perceive land reform as more important. Personnel were sent to study the possibility for a new land reform bill, embassy staff was replaced with people who had previously advocated for land reform, and Congress began to criticize the President's performance on promoting reform in Vietnam.⁹⁶ This support among both America's and Vietnam's leaders with lead to a 1970 land-to-the-tiller law, which would expropriate all land not directly cultivated by the owner and limit all agricultural land to 15 hectares. The land would be paid for by the government and given to the peasants for free. The United States would help by paying 10% of the cost to compensate landowners.⁹⁷ Combined with the earlier Ordinance 57 law, the 1970 land-to-the-tiller would decrease land tenancy from around 75% farmers in 1955 to 20% in 1975.⁹⁸

The distribution of land to farmers would bring immediate benefits for the Vietnamese peasantry. Since farmers no longer had to give over a quarter of their crop as payment, peasants now had, on average, 27% more income.⁹⁹ Land ownership also meant that whatever crops a farmer was losing was due to Viet Cong taxation, not landowners identified with the government. A survey conducted by the Control Data Corporation and funded by USAID, found that "the Land to the Tillers Law was mentioned by 68 percent of the people as a major reason for improvement in their village life."¹⁰⁰ The survey also stated, "The reform seems to be a major causal factor creating political support for and identification with the national government."¹⁰¹ Yet what is notable is that the survey takers were disguised as French, with one recounting, "I

⁹⁵ James L. Tyson, "Land Reform in Vietnam: A Progress Report," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 1, no. 1 (1973): pp. 32-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.1973.10587697>, pp. 33-34.

⁹⁶ David A. Conrad, "'Before it is Too Late': Land Reform in South Vietnam, 1956-1958," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 21 (2014): pp. 34-57, DOI: 10.1163/18765610-02101002.

⁹⁷ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975*, pp. 113-114.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-113.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁰ James L. Tyson, "Land Reform in Vietnam: A Progress Report," p. 40.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

met one tough-looking little Vietnamese in a remote village, and noticed a look of relief on his face when I started talking French. I think he was relieved when he decided I was a Frenchman and he wasn't going to have to shoot me.”¹⁰² This encounter shows that land reform was not a cure-all solution that immediately brought rural peasants to the government’s side.

Conclusion

The question though is: did nation-building have a positive effect on the war? The best metric we have to determine this is the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES), which measures security and socio-economic conditions in hamlets throughout the country. By November 1972, the Hamlet Evaluation System showed that 78% of Vietnam’s hamlets, representing 90.1% of the population, were relatively secured by the government. This is a definite improvement over 1964 when only 40% of the population was under government control or in 1967 when 62.1% was under government control. The government seemed to be making progress in winning over the people, if at a slow and often stumbling pace.¹⁰³ Yet it is also important to note that HES data correlates heavily with population.¹⁰⁴ As one goes further out from the cities, one finds the villages less and less safe. Considering that guerilla forces are able to operate best in the peripheries of a country, nation-building seems to have had a mixed result. It did extend the reach and influence of the central government, but not entirely. There were still portions of the countryside that were outside the government’s control.

By 1972 though, the war had fundamentally changed. It had become much more conventional and much more Northern dominated. Thus, to a certain extent, the success of

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰³ Robert Komer, *Impact of Pacification on Insurgency in South Vietnam* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1970), <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2008/P4443.pdf>, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁴ Research and Analysis Directorate, *HES Population Density Map*, [map], 1:1250000 (Saigon, Vietnam: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, 1972), https://vva.vietnam.ttu.edu/repositories/2/digital_objects/609503.

nation-building would not matter. Public support would do little good against large conventional offensives in 1968, 1972, and 1975. The fact that the insurgency would come to be dominated by Northern recruits would also lessen the importance of control over the population, as the South was no longer the insurgency's primary recruitment base.¹⁰⁵ Combined with America's waning support and ultimate withdrawal, one can see that whatever advantages South Vietnam gained were countered by the North's increasingly conventional capabilities. Perhaps if 78% of hamlets were under government control in 1962 instead of 1972, nation-building might have made a difference. As it was, nation-building's successes proved to have come too late to be of use.

Between 1955 and 1975, the United States would give a total of \$8.5 billion of economic assistance to South Vietnam, which would equate to around \$64 billion in 2019.¹⁰⁶ Of that assistance, 45% (over \$3.8 billion) was provided before the 1968 Tet Offensive. During this period, U.S. non-military aid would be valued at upwards of 35% of South Vietnam's gross national product (GNP).¹⁰⁷ Such massive amounts of aid would, in theory, give the United States an incredible amount of influence over the Vietnamese government. Yet despite North Vietnam's rhetoric of South Vietnam being a "puppet" of the United States, America gave little pressure on the South Vietnamese government to reform.¹⁰⁸ Despite ignoring advice given by the U.S. on how to conduct the Land Development and Strategic Hamlet Programs, the U.S. continued to fund these projects, even when it was clear to American observers on the ground that there were serious flaws.

¹⁰⁵ William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Ceasefire to Capitulation*, CMH Pub 90-29 (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1985), p. 28, Table 1.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975*, p. 200, Table 10.2; and "January 1968 compared with August 2019," CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=1.00&year1=196801&year2=201908>.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975*, p. 206, Table 10.5.

¹⁰⁸ The term "puppet" is used frequently in: Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954-1975*, Translated by Merle L. Pribbenow (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

The best description for America's reluctance to use coercion would be Lyndon Johnson in his book on his years as President. In a meeting on November 22, 1963, President Johnson told his advisors that,

"I thought we had spent too much time and energy to shape other countries in our own image...the main objective at present was to help them resist those using force against them. As for nation-building, I said that I thought the Vietnamese, Thai, and other peoples of Asia knew far better than we did what sort of nations they wanted to build. We should not be too critical if they did not become thriving, modern, twentieth-century democracies in a week."¹⁰⁹

With nation-building in Vietnam, American leaders had largely worked on the principle that it is better that the Vietnamese do it tolerably than Americans do it perfectly. The problem was that the Vietnamese were not performing nation-building tolerably. They were performing it poorly and slowly; a bad combination that even a large American military presence could not fix.

¹⁰⁹ Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969* (New York, NY: HEC Public Affairs Foundation, 1971), p. 44.

EL SALVADOR

The El Salvador Civil War lasted from 1979 to 1992. The main objective of the rebel forces was to topple the oligarchic system of government that facilitated economic inequality. As will be described in more detail, this system was led by the agricultural elite who owned most of the land and the military, who used force to keep the oligarchy in place. The United States would attempt to break this oligarchy and satisfy the moderates among the opposition by promoting democracy, human rights, and land reform. In the end, America's efforts would only have limited success.

Background

El Salvador's Civil War cannot be explained without first a summary of El Salvador's war with Honduras in 1969. For years, Salvadorans had immigrated to Honduras, often illegally, to find work. In the late 1960s, Honduras would increasingly see these immigrants as the source of economic troubles and, in 1969, would use an old land reform bill to take farmland held by Salvadorans. Thousands of Salvadorans were thus forced off their land, sometimes violently. This caused outrage among the public in El Salvador and in July of 1969 El Salvador invaded Honduras. While El Salvador won, it would be a hollow victory.¹¹⁰

Honduras subsequently cut off all trade and immigration between the two countries. This caused a crisis for El Salvador. Overpopulation and the lack of jobs had been the reasons why Salvadorans had originally moved to Honduras. The estimated 130,000 Salvadorans that had

¹¹⁰ Jay Mallin, "Salvador-Honduras War, 1969: The 'Soccer War'," *Air University Review*, March-April 1970, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170604143527/www.au.af.mil/au/afri/aspj/airchronicles/aureview/1970/mar-apr/mallin.html>; and Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 1990), pp. 24-26.

returned thus put a serious strain on the country's economy. The Christian Democrats (PDC), the most powerful of the opposition parties, pushed for land reform to help alleviate the problem. The argument being that by breaking up the large landholdings, there would be more farms and thus more jobs. While the idea was widely popular, it was seen as a threat to the elite families that acted as an oligarchy for the country. In the 1972 election, the PDC presidential candidate lost in what was considered by many to be a fraudulent election. In response, some young officers of the army attempted a coup, but did not get the support of the wider military and failed. The years after the coup would be a period of increasing violence. The people, led by left-wing organizations, would call for reform. The government, unable to bring about reforms due to pressure from the right, would respond to criticism and protests with violence. This violence would cause the left to become more militant, leading to attacks against the government, who would inevitably respond with more violence.¹¹¹

The U.S. would have little involvement in the conflict during its early stages. Between 1970 and 1979, the amount of aid (military and economic) the U.S. gave to El Salvador would total just \$7 million.¹¹² In 1977, El Salvador would refuse further U.S. aid due to President Carter's insistence that countries improve their human rights record in order to receive American funds.¹¹³ Although the Carter administration would encourage El Salvador to reform and stop its strategy of unrestricted violence, the administration would have no leverage to persuade the Salvadoran government.

The turning point would be in 1979 with two events. The first would be in July when the

¹¹¹ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State: Elite Politics, Military Extortion, and Civil War in El Salvador* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 1996), pp. 107-133; Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, pp. 26-33; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 33-40.

¹¹² Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 114.

¹¹³ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 223; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 38.

Sandinistas, a Marxist rebel group, overthrew the U.S.-backed Nicaraguan government. This would bring about fears of Marxist groups being successful in other parts of the Americas, including El Salvador. These fears would only grow as less than a year later the various Salvadoran rebel groups consolidated into the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).¹¹⁴ The second event would be a coup by junior military officers in 1979. This new government was seriously interested in reform and creating a better country for the lower classes. With a government now in power that it could be seen working with, the Carter administration offered \$5.7 million in military aid, beginning America's involvement in El Salvador's Civil War.¹¹⁵

Violence and Human Rights

Human rights violations and war crimes would be a continual issue with the Salvadoran military. This was due to the fact that violence had always been used as a way to put down rebellions in the past, the most notable being the 1932 revolt in which an estimated 30,000 peasants were killed.¹¹⁶ In 1977, state-sponsored militias, targeting church leaders who advocated for political reform, distributed leaflets saying, "Be a Patriot! Kill a Priest!"¹¹⁷ As U.S. involvement grew from 1979 onwards, the goal of American officials was to create security institutions that respected human rights and could thereby gain the support of the people it was supposed to serve.

America's main tool for achieving this goal was the threat of suspending aid. However,

¹¹⁴ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 38-40.

¹¹⁵ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 224; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 44.

¹¹⁶ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 16; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 42.

¹¹⁷ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 38.

El Salvador often failed to fully enact the reforms desired and aid would need to be continued for the war effort despite only partial fulfillment of objectives. In October, 1980, the U.S. government demanded a series of human rights reforms in exchange for the leasing of six helicopters, including the transfer of officers involved in death squads. Instead, America settled on a new code of conduct for the Salvadoran military; a code of conduct which would be useless unless actually enforced.¹¹⁸ In December 1980, four American nuns were raped and killed by the Salvadoran National Guard. In response, America suspended aid. In return for the resumption of aid the government had to install Jose Duarte, the Christian Democrat who lost the 1972 election, as president and kick several right-wing officers out of senior military position. After these concessions, economic aid was resumed 12 days later.¹¹⁹

From 1980-1982, the security forces would systematically hunt down leftist forces, with little regard to whether the person being killed was civilian or combatant. This would result in the destruction of entire villages, killing hundreds of civilians that may or may not have actively supported the insurgency.¹²⁰ Although the vast majority of the violence was located in the countryside, the government's dominance in the cities would largely destroy the FMLN's presence in the urban centers.¹²¹ Of particular note is the targeting of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), the political wing of the FMLN.¹²² The killing of several of the FDR's leaders in November 1980 by right-wing death squads not only would hamper efforts for an early

¹¹⁸ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 45-46.

¹¹⁹ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 214-215; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 62-63.

¹²⁰ Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, "From Madness to Hope: The 12-year War in El Salvador: Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador," S/25500 (April 1, 1993), <https://archive.org/details/S25500EN/page/n3>, pp. 114-126.

¹²¹ Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, "From Madness to Hope," p. 44; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 222.

¹²² Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 240; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 38.

negotiated settlement but also showed the mentality of the military.¹²³ Pinned on one of the bodies was a note declaring, "Long live El Salvador! Long live the massacre of 1932!"¹²⁴

The killings would also weaken the Christian Democrat's political infrastructure, hurting their ability to organize voters against right-wing parties.¹²⁵ In 1980 alone, 64 Christian Democrat leaders were killed.¹²⁶ The right was further strengthened in May 1980 when, after a fierce standoff between conservative and reformist military officers, many reformists were transferred to non-combat positions. Thus, any officers that might moderate human rights offenses were sidelined to positions where they would have little impact on the conduct of the war.¹²⁷

In December 1983, Vice President Bush would visit El Salvador to deliver a list of demands. Several military officers known to be involved in death squads had to be relieved of command, trials held for murdered Americans, and the military had to publically condemn death squads.¹²⁸ CIA Director William Casey would arrive soon after; again threatening aid if the country did not curb the death squads. This would in fact have an effect. Most estimates show a decrease in extra-judicial killings after 1983.¹²⁹ However, while the killings decreased, they never actually stopped. The biggest evidence that the security forces had not fundamentally changed was during the 1989 FMLN offensive. The military used indiscriminate air strikes when attacking insurgent forces in civilian areas and, even before the battle was over, security forces

¹²³ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 40; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 59.

¹²⁴ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 59.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹²⁶ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 184.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208 and 224.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹²⁹ Jule Krüger, Patrick Ball, Megan E. Price, and Amelia Hoover Green, "It Doesn't Add Up: Methodological and Policy Implications of Conflicting Casualty Data," In *Counting Civilian Casualties: An Introduction to Recording and Estimating Nonmilitary Deaths in Conflict*, edited by Taylor B. Seybolt, Jay D. Aronson, and Baruch Fischhoff, pp. 247-264 (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 256-258, Figure 12.2.

began a campaign of retaliation against anyone it perceived to have leftist leanings.¹³⁰ This included several Jesuit priests at Central American University, which was perceived by the military to be a source of subversive thinking.¹³¹

The UN Truth Commission, created in 1992 to investigate war crimes, documented 22,000 “serious acts of violence” from January 1980 to July 1991. Of these: 60% were extrajudicial killings, 25% were disappearances, and 20% torture (figures add up to over 100% due to overlapping complaints). 85% of these acts of violence were attributed to the government or its state-sponsored death squads. The vast majority occurred during the early years of the war, with 50% of the violence taking place in the first two years.¹³²

Overall, reforms for human rights were largely a façade. While the U.S. could make the security forces decrease their killings, it could not fundamentally change how these forces dealt with the opposition. The government’s response to the 1989 offensive is indicative of the fundamental problem with Salvadoran security forces. Whether it be the military, National Guard, intelligence agencies, or police forces, all had a history of violent repression and would continue to use such violent methods when deemed necessary.

Political System

Historically, the large land-holders of El Salvador and the security forces have had a symbiotic relationship where the elite would be protected from the peasants and reformists, and in exchange the security services would receive money and power.¹³³ This would be derisively referred to by William Stanley as a “protection racket state”. This term, while perhaps

¹³⁰ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 246 and 249.

¹³¹ Commission on the Truth for El Salvador, “From Madness to Hope,” pp. 46-54.

¹³² Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹³³ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, pp. 197-200.

inflammatory, is accurate. The National Guard was especially notorious for being little more than the elite's private bodyguard, with National Guard stations located on large estates and Guardsmen given supplemental pay by landowners.¹³⁴ The military, though, was the security branch that held the power. Every President from 1931 to 1982 was a military officer, and the graduating class from El Salvador's military academy could expect to eventually occupy the top positions of power.¹³⁵ A continual goal of the United States was to change this political system to be more democratic, and thus win over a population that had shown increasing frustration with military rule.

As stated earlier, the United States' cooperation with El Salvador would really begin in 1979 with a coup instigated by reformist military officers. The United States had in fact known of the coup beforehand, as some of the conspirators had come to the embassy hoping for U.S. assistance once a new government was established.¹³⁶ The U.S. viewed a new government that was more progressive and not tainted by human rights abuses as a much better partner for future cooperation, with an internal memo stating, "a successful coup carried out by the moderates...offers the cleanest solution to our policy dilemmas".¹³⁷

The new government was led by two colonels and three civilians, with a cabinet composed of civilians.¹³⁸ Immediately after the coup, political prisoners were released and elections were promised.¹³⁹ This change in government and the initial steps they had taken convinced the left to give the new government a chance and a 30-day truce was declared for the month of November. However, the junta was unable to bring about the major changes that the

¹³⁴ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 49, 72, 81-82, 99.

¹³⁵ Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, pp. 200-203; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 71.

¹³⁶ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 143-145.

¹³⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹³⁸ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 40; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 148-149.

¹³⁹ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 149.

left wanted. Even before the end of the truce, the rebel groups had given up on the new government and resumed attacks.¹⁴⁰

The blocking of major reforms would produce a showdown between the military and civilian leaders on December 27, 1979. The civilians had threatened to resign if reforms, such as land redistribution, were not enacted. They also demanded that Defense Minister Guillermo García step down. In response, National Guard Director Colonel Vides Casanova stated bluntly, “Colonel García is the man from whom we take orders, not the junta. We have put you into the position where you are, and for the things that are needed here, we don't need you. We have been running the country for 50 years, and we are quite prepared to keep on running it.”¹⁴¹ By January 4th, most of the cabinet members and all three civilian members of the junta resigned.¹⁴² The United States did not view this as particularly alarming. The civilian leaders of the junta were viewed as too far to the left, with several officials having ties to El Salvador’s Communist party.¹⁴³ Even before the junta’s collapse, America would be looking for a more moderate set of leaders that it could support.

A new junta would be created on January 10, 1980. The three new civilian leaders would come from the Christian Democratic Party, the same party that had lost the fraudulent election of 1972. The U.S. played a large part in the establishment of the second junta, with the U.S. embassy facilitating meetings between the PDC and military leadership. United States officials also made it clear to the military that any future aid would depend on cooperation with the Christian Democrats, which the U.S. viewed as more moderate than the previous junta.¹⁴⁴ This

¹⁴⁰ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 40-42; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 157-158.

¹⁴¹ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 174.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁴³ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 41; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 169-174.

¹⁴⁴ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 143-145.

new junta was actually seen by the right as more dangerous than the first precisely because it was more moderate, and thus had the potential for greater international support. A preliminary agreement between the military and PDC to institute land reform also contributed to a sense that this government was a real threat to the elite's power.¹⁴⁵ A coup was planned for February, but the United States soon got wind of the plot and threatened to retract aid.¹⁴⁶ As a result, the coup was abandoned. Yet ironically, this crisis was in part American-made. American military and intelligence personnel had friendly relations with right-wing security officials, with some advocating to Washington the benefits of a right-wing government.¹⁴⁷ Ambassador White, in a cable to Washington in March 1980, complained:

"This is unquestionably the most undisciplined diplomatic mission I have ever seen and a good share of our problems in El Salvador arise directly out of the mixed signals we have been sending to the various political actors here, especially to the armed forces...It would help if Washington agencies, specifically CIA and DIA, gave clearest and most forceful instructions to their representatives that U.S. policy does not countenance a rightwing solution and that every opportunity must be sought to denounce rightwing violence that threatens to radicalize the country irretrievably."¹⁴⁸

Statements made by Republicans during the presidential campaign also convinced some Salvadoran conservatives that a large portion of the United States did not care about democracy or human rights. Reagan himself said in a 1980 press conference that, "I don't think that you can turn away from some country because here and there they do not totally agree with our conception of human rights."¹⁴⁹

To counter the right's power, Ambassador White began to meet with Colonel Majano, a

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

¹⁴⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, 1977-1980*, eds. Nathaniel L. Smith and Adam M. Howard (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2016), Document 415; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 190.

¹⁴⁷ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 193.

¹⁴⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XV, Central America, 1977-1980*, eds. Nathaniel L. Smith and Adam M. Howard (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2016), Document 424.

¹⁴⁹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 58.

member of the junta, to discuss ways to increase the power of the military's reformist faction. The right-wing elements of the security forces, however, were aware of the embassy's talks with Majano and tried to have him assassinated in early April. On May 9, 1980, a rightist coup plot led by Roberto D'Aubuisson, a known death squad commander, was discovered.¹⁵⁰ The conspirators were quickly arrested but an intense standoff developed, with several conservative brigades threatening to invade the capital city of San Salvador if the coup plotters were not released. The reformists threatened back that if anybody entered the city the prisoners would be killed.

Some of the reformists urged Majano to enact their own coup and remove those in the military's high command. However, while some in the reformist faction were eager to destroy the existing military system, Majano and other more moderate reformists were less eager. The prisoners were released and, in a vote of all the officers in the military, Majano was stripped of his title as Commander-in-Chief. The United States, which had previously fought for a more reform-minded military, ultimately decided not to get involved. Pressuring El Salvador to imprison or remove officers involved in the coup attempt might have worked, but it would also have likely led to more infighting and instability within the military. The United States determined that a stable military was needed for El Salvador to fight the insurgency, even if that same military was repressive and anti-reform.¹⁵¹

Many reformist officers would be transferred to non-combat positions in September. After the transfers, the rest of the officers still in combat positions were threatened by assassinations which only strengthened the insurgency as former military officers joined rebel

¹⁵⁰ *El Salvador: D'Aubuisson's Terrorist Activities*, Document Number: 0000654928 (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, February 5, 1984), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0000654928>.

¹⁵¹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 47; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 200-206.

groups for safety.¹⁵² In early December Majano was forced off the junta by the military, ending what little influence the reformist faction had left.¹⁵³ As discussed earlier, the killing of the American nuns in December 1980 would cause aid to be suspended and only reinstated when the military agreed to transfer some conservative military officers out of command positions and make Duarte president, though this did little to change the fundamental problems with El Salvador's political system.¹⁵⁴

The 1982 election was considered by the United States to be crucial to El Salvador's legitimacy. It was also vital to El Salvador's future aid. Many in Congress were skeptical of America's participation in the country and were worried that the increasing American involvement might turn the conflict into another Vietnam. The holding of fair elections would indicate both El Salvador's progress on democratization and the quality of its security forces by protecting election centers. While the election was not a blatant power-grab as the 1972 election, it did show the continued power of El Salvador's right. The right-wing had created a new political party called Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) with Roberto D'Aubuisson as its presidential candidate. Due to the assassination of PDC officials, intimidation in the countryside, and ARENA simply being backed by the rich elite, the right would have a significant advantage in the 1982 election.¹⁵⁵

Yet despite these advantages, the Christian Democrats would win a plurality of seats in the National Assembly, El Salvador's unicameral legislature. However, when the military's own political party, the National Conciliation Party (PCN), combined their votes with ARENA, the

¹⁵² William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 207-208 and 224.

¹⁵³ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, p. 215; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁴ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 214-215; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁵⁵ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 281-282; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 158-161.

right-wing had the majority and could make Roberto D'Aubuisson president, as the 1982 election process had the president elected by the Assembly.¹⁵⁶ This worried U.S. officials who worried that a right-wing government with a known death squad commander as its president would cause Congress to cut off aid.

There then began an effort by the United States to convince the right not to elect D'Aubuisson as president. This was hampered by the fact that much of the landholding elite did not believe the U.S. would ever cut off aid, especially during the Reagan administration. Salvadoran elites had in fact celebrated Reagan's victory on election night, believing his fervent anti-communism would allow them relatively free reign. As one supporter of D'Aubuisson stated, "Reagan will never let the Communists win here. It's just a complete bluff."¹⁵⁷ In addition to the Ambassador, the U.S. would send a congressional delegation led by the House majority leader as well as General Vernon Walters to pressure ARENA not to elect D'Aubuisson.

This pressure was enough to convince the military to drop their support of D'Aubuisson. Instead of siding with ARENA, the military's National Conciliation Party combined their votes with the Christian Democrats.¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, Alvaro Magana, a businessman aligned with the military, would be elected president. In the words of William LeoGrande, "The March 1982 balloting demonstrated that El Salvador could be forced to go through the motions of holding an election, but its aftermath demonstrated with equal clarity that the election had not changed the basic dynamics of Salvadoran politics. The army was still the ultimate power behind the regime..."¹⁵⁹

The 1984 election would, again, have ARENA nominate D'Aubuisson as its presidential

¹⁵⁶ Raymond Bonner, "Salvador Politicians Heatedly Pick New Team," *New York Times*, April 13, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/13/world/salvador-politicians-heatedly-picking-new-team.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁸ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 164-165.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

candidate. The Christian Democrats meanwhile nominated Jose Napoleon Duarte and the PCN Francisco Guerrero, one of the colonels who had served on the junta. Like the 1982 election, the United States would covertly try to stop D'Aubuisson from coming to power. First by attempting to persuade ARENA not to nominate him and then by having the CIA funnel \$1.4 million to the opposition parties. USAID would also give around \$1 million to Salvadoran trade unions, most of which supported Duarte. It was also helped that the Christian Democrats had been able to build back their political infrastructure, allowing them to have a much more effective campaign. Ultimately, Duarte would win with 53.6% of the vote in a runoff election.¹⁶⁰

Yet despite a seemingly more free, if American-influenced, political process, the military was still clearly in charge. Duarte's effort to negotiate with the FMLN in 1984 failed partly due to the fact that only the military could decide the terms of peace, not Duarte and the civilian government.¹⁶¹ The U.S. did not help in these negotiations as there was still hope that El Salvador could win militarily. Negotiations in 1989 would be stalled for months due to the military's opposition and a successful peace would only be achieved due to the military's acquiescence.¹⁶²

This was the crux of the problem with reforming El Salvador's political system. Ultimately, it did not matter who won the elections. Whether ARENA or the Christian Democrats were in power, neither party could make any decisions unless the military approved, or at least did not actively oppose. No matter how fair elections were, it ultimately acted as a façade. Thus, it is not surprising that the opening up of elections and competition between political parties did not bring about a significant decrease in insurgent support. As long as the

¹⁶⁰ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 214-215; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 246-249.

¹⁶¹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 262-264.

¹⁶² William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 242-243 and 249-256; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 568-578.

military maintained their independence, the government could not convince the insurgency that there would be real, lasting reform. Salvadoran elections were, ironically, much more important in deciding American opinion to continue the war than Salvadoran opinion to end it.

While the U.S. was unable to fundamentally change Salvadoran politics, its influence did have some important effects. As can be seen with the choosing of the president in 1982, the military had begun to deviate from the demands of the agricultural elite. With the United States now their primary benefactor, the military could act more independently and decide on issues the way they deemed fit, such as long-awaited land reform.

Land Reform

Arable land has historically been concentrated among the very rich of El Salvador, and would only worsen as time went on. Due to the rise of export crops, the ability for large land owners to get proportionally larger loans than small farmers, and legislation that favored large landowners, the country's farmland would be increasingly concentrated among the wealthy.¹⁶³ William Durham estimated that the average land owned by a farmer went from 7.41 hectares in 1892 down to .38 hectares in 1971.¹⁶⁴ By 1971, 8% of farms used 73% of the land.¹⁶⁵ Landlessness (those who rented or did not have access to land) rose from 25.9% in 1971 to an estimated 38% in 1980.¹⁶⁶

The military was very aware of these facts and the implication that a peasant rebellion

¹⁶³ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty: Agrarian Transformation and Political Conflict in Central America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 23-24 and 47-48; and William Durham, "The Causes of Resources Scarcity in El Salvador," in *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1979), pp. 21-62.

¹⁶⁴ William Durham, *Scarcity and Survival in Central America: Ecological Origins of the Soccer War*, pp. 46-48.

¹⁶⁵ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 74, Table 4.1; and Richard A. Haggerty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*, p. 68.

¹⁶⁶ Mitchell A. Seligson, "Thirty Years of Transformation" p. 66; and Roy L. Prosterman, Jeffrey M. Riedinger, and Mary N. Temple, "Land Reform and the El Salvador Crisis," *International Security* 6, no. 1 (1981): 53-74. doi:10.2307/2538529, pp. 54 and 60.

could erupt from such a situation. Throughout the 1970s, the military government would attempt to pass a land reform bill to solve this issue. The first bill came in 1973, but failed due to lack of support from the land-holding right and their conservative allies in the military.¹⁶⁷ Another attempt was made in 1976 that would mainly distribute government controlled land and what privately controlled land taken would be compensated by money promised by USAID.¹⁶⁸ However, this was seen as a dangerous precedent and never passed. The 1979 reformist government would again attempt land reform, but would also meet resistance from the right. In a meeting about reforming various aspects of the country the Defense Minister, part of the conservative faction of the government, bluntly stated, "All of the shit that you have been discussing is not going to happen. We are not going to permit it."¹⁶⁹ Each time, agrarian reform would fail due to lack of support from the only demographic that the military ultimately listened to: the agrarian elite. While there was certainly a large faction within the military that wanted land reform and to increase the quality of life for rural peasants, they simply did not have the political power to enact such policies.

This would change in 1980 as the United States began to heavily invest in the country. Combined with the increasing intensity of the insurgency, this gave the U.S. a much greater position on which to pressure the Salvadoran government to enact agrarian reform. The result would be a three-phased plan announced in March 1980. The first phase expropriated estates that were over 1250 acres in size and converted them into cooperatives. These cooperatives would act much like a corporation, with each farmer having an investment in the farm and pooling their resources to better take advantage of the land. Phase I distributed around 14.7% of the country's

¹⁶⁷ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-104.

¹⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 157.

arable land.¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, this land was not always the best and more often than not was used for cattle grazing.¹⁷¹ Phase II called for expropriating land between 250 and 1250 acres in size. Constituting around 12% of the country's arable land, it was also some of the country's best, producing 35% of El Salvador's coffee, 40% of its cotton, and 20% of its sugar.¹⁷² Naturally, the agricultural elite were heavily against this part of the reform plan and it was ultimately never implemented. Phase III was not originally part of the plan but was written by the United States, with El Salvador pressured to enact it. It would give all farm renters the right to own the land they worked, up to 17 acres. This would affect 12.3% of the nation's arable land and 100,000 families.¹⁷³

Problems would rise up quickly, especially with Phase III. Many of those who gained control of their rented land were not made aware of the change and thought they were still renting.¹⁷⁴ Around 25,000 of the 100,000 families slated to gain control of rented land were forced off by their renters and because most rental agreements were verbal, there was no way for the farmers to prove they had been working the land for years.¹⁷⁵ In 1982, the legislature voted to suspend Phase III for a year and add an amendment that excluded certain types of land from being claimed. These actions caused Congress to cut \$100 million in aid slated for the next year and threatened to cut off all aid entirely if the land reforms were repealed. In response, the Salvadoran military began to return evicted renters back to their land and the president vetoed the suspension of Phase III.¹⁷⁶

In 1983, a constitutional amendment was passed that limited individual land ownership to

¹⁷⁰ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 141; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 166.

¹⁷¹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 166-167.

¹⁷² Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 141; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 167.

¹⁷³ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 141; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, pp. 167-168.

¹⁷⁴ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 168.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 168-170.

605 acres.¹⁷⁷ Owners were given three years to sell their land and, in order to avoid land holders from indirectly owning large estates, could not sell their land to family members. However, due to the fact that the largest estates had been broken up in Phase I of the agrarian reform plan and that land holders already had a tradition of dividing their assets between family members, this only would affect around 3% of the country's farms. By this point, El Salvador had reached the point at what it could realistically afford. The country was already having trouble paying for Phase I and III of the agrarian reform plan. Unlike Vietnam, the United States would not help pay for the compensation of private land forcibly taken by the government.¹⁷⁸ There was also the fact that El Salvador was a small country that had a limited amount of land. There were already problems in the implementation of Phase III where tenants had not been given enough land to sustain themselves.¹⁷⁹ Dividing the country up even further could cause more problems than it solved.¹⁸⁰ As a result, no other land reform would take place until the 1992 peace agreement between the government and FMLN, which was largely just recognition of land divided up by the FMLN.¹⁸¹

Unfortunately, land reform was not the solution it was hoped it would be. One big factor was that the number of that farmers actually benefitted from the reforms was much lower than anticipated. Even after the threat by Congress to retract aid, problems in implementation and unlawful eviction would continue. A 1984 audit by USAID showed that a third of those affected by Phase III were not benefitting due to threats or evictions.¹⁸² Others had to abandon land due to the fighting between FMLN and government forces in the area. Farmers gaining new land were

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁷⁸ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 142.

¹⁷⁹ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁰ Mitchell A. Seligson, "Thirty Years of Transformation" pp. 64-65.

¹⁸¹ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 182 and 185.

¹⁸² Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, p. 144.

required to pay back the value of the land over a period 30 years.¹⁸³ However, many found that they could not keep up with the payments. This was especially true of Phase III as a sizeable portion of the farmland that was given out was low-quality. Before, tenant farmers had practiced crop rotation, renting different plots of land every year in order to keep the land fertile. However Phase III only gave them the one plot of land they were currently working, which would quickly become unusable after a few years of use.¹⁸⁴ As a result, statistics on the number of people each phase of reform affected have to be taken with a grain of salt. While land reform did affect a large amount of the rural population, only a fraction actually benefitted.

There was also the fact that insurgent forces were creating their own cooperatives after they drove landowners out of the area. By the end of the war the FMLN had control of 18.5% of the nation's farmland and had distributed it much as the government had.¹⁸⁵ As a result, a peasant was just as likely to gain land by supporting the insurgency as by supporting the government. This obviously made the government's reform efforts less incentivizing.

There is also the fact that, while land equality was a big factor for people supporting the insurgency, it was not the only one. For her book *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, Elizabeth Jean Wood interviewed over 200 Salvadoran citizens, mainly in insurgent controlled or contested territory. Through these interviews she found that land was only one factor in a person's willingness to support the insurgency. Those who supported the FMLN were not just dissatisfied with the division of land, but also El Salvador's larger political system. The desire to gain revenge against government violence and for a greater political voice would be just as important. Thus, it would be hard to persuade insurgents to put down their weapons when

¹⁸³ Charles D. Brockett, *Land, Power, and Poverty*, pp. 142-143; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 167.

¹⁸⁴ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁵ Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, pp. 84-85 and 182-184.

violent repression and military control continued. Especially when the FMLN was not only delivering on the same type of land reform as the government, but also promising much more; a more democratic and humanitarian El Salvador.

Conclusion

The war ended on January 16, 1992 with a peace agreement between the government and FMLN. The ending of the war, though, was due less to American aid, and more to exhaustion. The 1989 offensive, sometimes called “El Salvador’s Tet Offensive”, convinced both the insurgents and the government that victory by either side was impossible, at least in the short term.¹⁸⁶ Despite receiving an estimated \$4 billion in American aid and quadrupling the size of the military, the government was not unable to make significant headway against the insurgency militarily nor were they able to turn the hearts and minds of citizens who were supporting the insurgency.¹⁸⁷ The fact that the FMLN were able to move hundreds of fighters in the capital without any of the residents notifying the government showed the lack of loyalty that people had towards the government.¹⁸⁸ The FMLN, for its part, did not have the manpower to do much other than harass government forces and, like the government, had not gained the support of as many civilians as it needed. Just like the government the 1989 offensive would be a wake-up call for the FMLN, showing that the people were not as enthusiastic in their support as previously thought.¹⁸⁹ According to Elisabeth Wood, around two-thirds of Salvadorans she interviewed did

¹⁸⁶ William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 568.

¹⁸⁷ *El Salvador: Military Assistance Has Helped Counter but Not Overcome the Insurgency*, B-242216 (Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/160/150509.pdf>, p. 20; and Jacqueline L. Hazelton, *Take the Money and Run: Stubborn Elites, Limited Reforms, Violence, and Success in Counterinsurgency Warfare in El Salvador*, Discussion Paper 2017-03 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, 2017), p. 56.

¹⁸⁸ *El Salvador after the November 1989 Offensive*, Document Number: 0000049257 (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency), https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000049257.pdf, p. 2 and 5; and William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 247-248.

¹⁸⁹ *El Salvador after the November 1989 Offensive*, p. 4.

not actively support the insurgency.¹⁹⁰

The economic and political situation had also changed dramatically since the start of the war. The agrarian elite were far less powerful. If they had not been driven off their land or forced to pay taxes by the FMLN, they had lost many of their holdings to government land reform. The decline in agriculture also meant that the industrial elite who resided in the cities gained more political power. Never having to rely on the military's protection racket to ensure their business success meant that these industrial elites had always been more open to a negotiated solution than the agrarian elites.¹⁹¹ The destruction of the agrarian elite's power and the overall damage to the economy meant that the military was far more reliant on U.S. aid than before. At the same time, the United States was less interested in the war due to exasperation with the Salvadoran military's unwillingness to change. In 1990, Congress cut aid for 1991 by 50% and required the government to negotiate with the FMLN in order to receive the rest of the aid.¹⁹²

After over a decade of civil war, the United States would be unable to change the underlying problems with El Salvador. The military, while allowing for free and fair elections, never gave up power to the civilian governments that were elected. Violence continued to be a problem and, as the 1989 offensive showed, was the default response to dealing with the opposition. Agrarian reform could be considered America's most successful achievement in the country, but even this came with flaws and was ultimately overshadowed by other issues.

It is also hard to imagine the United States being much more successful than it was. If the U.S. threatened the military's place as the country's center of power, this would in effect be the same threat that the FMLN posed, just by different means. If forced to choose losing aid money

¹⁹⁰ Wood, Elisabeth Jean. *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*, pp. 157, 159, and 229.

¹⁹¹ William Stanley, *Protection Racket State*, pp. 97-98 and 334-336.

¹⁹² Clifford Krauss, "Senate Votes to Cut Salvador Aid in a Major Policy Defeat for Bush," *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1990, <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/10/20/world/senate-votes-to-cut-salvador-aid-in-a-major-policy-defeat-for-bush.html>; and William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, p. 573.

or losing their power, the military might well have decided to take their chances with fighting the FMLN. The security forces' attacks on leftist groups in 1980-1982 destroyed the FMLN's infrastructure in the cities and the 1932 massacre showed that widespread killings in the countryside could bring about an end to a revolution. Thus, the country might have seen much more human rights abuses if the U.S. rescinded aid, as the only alternative the military had for U.S. funds was overwhelming violence.

Overall, nation-building in El Salvador had limited success. It did help to moderate behavior and decreased the power of the agricultural elite. Nation-building, combined with military aid, likely limited the appeal of insurgent propaganda and helped to create the stalemate that ultimately led to a negotiated peace. Ultimately though, it would be the sheer cost of the war combined with outside states' refusal to fund the parties involved that would actually end the war.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is the least developed country the United States has tried to exercise and assist in nation-building. Unlike in Vietnam, El Salvador, and Iraq, Afghanistan had no central government to rebuild. Decades of war and political infighting had destroyed any semblance of effective government. Even when the Taliban controlled much of the country, government services was nearly non-existent. While the Taliban could raise an army and provide law and order, it could not provide education, public utilities, civilian jobs, or healthcare. This problem was worsened by the Taliban restrictions, and eventual banishment, of international aid organizations. The Taliban could hardly claim to even be Afghani. Many aspects of Afghan culture, such as most of the arts and Nowruz (the Persian New Year), were banned for being un-Islamic. The Taliban government was in many ways more an occupying army than an actual government.¹⁹³

Yet this chaos also provided some benefits. In large part, the United States simply had to create a stable government that would keep the peace and not interfere too much in the rural villages. However, such an optimistic situation did not occur. The Afghan government soon began to show problems, just as the Taliban was regrouping. The Afghan government would have to increasingly compete with the Taliban and provide a better bargain. Yet, 18 years later, Afghanistan has not been able to do so. Nearly two decades later there are still problems with governance, corruption, the justice system, and the drug trade that hinder Afghan efforts to create a better deal.

¹⁹³ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 97-116.

Governance

The first issue addressed by the United States was the development of a legitimate government for Afghanistan. On December 5, 2001, the Bonn Agreement was signed by twenty-five prominent Afghans. The agreement would set up a timeline for the establishment of an Afghan government beginning with the Interim Authority on December 22, headed by Hamid Karzai.¹⁹⁴

Yet just because there was an official government, did not mean that the new government controlled the country. The United States and its allies did not have the forces on the ground to secure the country until a national army and police force could be trained. In February 2002, there were just 9,000 international troops, most of which were in the capital of Kabul.¹⁹⁵ What forces there were outside of Kabul were for the most part special forces looking for remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This was a deliberate decision by the United States. Many in the administration wanted a light footprint approach. As former President George W. Bush states in his autobiography, “We were all wary of repeating the experience of the Soviets and the British, who ended up looking like occupiers.”¹⁹⁶ Both former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Undersecretary for Defense Policy Douglas Feith made similar statements in their autobiographies.¹⁹⁷ The specter of the failed invasions by the British and Soviets made for a convincing argument against a large occupying force.

However, this also caused the U.S. to have to rely on local warlords. These were often

¹⁹⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 2008), pp. 95-96 and 101-106.

¹⁹⁵ Michael E. O’Hanlon and Adriana Lins de Albuquerque, *Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, January 23, 2005), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/index20050223.pdf>, p. 4.

¹⁹⁶ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), p. 207.

¹⁹⁷ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Sentinel, 2011), p. 408; and Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), p. 123.

government officials who, while technically under Karzai's control, did not answer to the central government and ran their appointed provinces as if it were their personal kingdom. This led to the new Afghanistan government receiving little to no tax and custom revenue from the provinces controlled by these warlords.¹⁹⁸ The problem became so bad that, in July of 2002, Pakistan had to deliver \$10 million to Kabul in suitcases in order to pay government workers.¹⁹⁹ This lack of control President Karzai had outside of the capital led to him being nicknamed the "Mayor of Kabul".²⁰⁰

In the first few months of 2002, the United States was content with this arrangement. The warlords did have sizeable armies that provided security and they financed a variety of reconstruction projects. There also seemed to be a sense that, even as a central government was being created, that Afghanistan was ungovernable by a central authority. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld held the opinion that Karzai should govern "the Chicago way", meaning using a combination of "patronage and political incentives" to entice warlords to follow him.²⁰¹ This led to the United States having little interest in strengthening the central government and disarming warlords.

Despite this, Karzai would make important progress. On December 3, 2002 all militias were outlawed and were given one year to disband.²⁰² In May 2003, Karzai held a meeting with 12 provincial governors and threatened to resign if they did not start to deliver tax and custom revenues.²⁰³ The money was promptly delivered. In August 2003, Karzai announced that officials could no longer hold both civil and military positions.²⁰⁴ Besides threatening to resign

¹⁹⁸ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp. 129, 182, 186-187.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 182.

²⁰⁰ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, p. 406.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 407-408.

²⁰² Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 143.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 187.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 190.

however, Karzai did not have much power to enforce such decrees. When warlords did comply, they often found ways to circumvent the objective of reforms. For example, many of the warlords turned their militias into private security companies to avoid completely disbanding them.²⁰⁵

This would change in 2004 when President Bush announced “Accelerating Success”, a change in policy that would increase investment into the country.²⁰⁶ As part of the plan, there was a greater emphasis on supporting the disarmament of warlords. The new U.S. ambassador, Zalmay Khalilzad, would personally see many of the warlords over the next two years. One notable instance was when Abdul Rashid Dostum took over the city of Maimana in northern Afghanistan. Dostum had for the last year been complaining that he had been given no government position and refused to demobilize his militia. When an Afghan National Army battalion was deployed to restore order to the city, Dostum threatened to attack the army and kill the American advisors attached to the unit. In response, the U.S. sent two B-1 bombers to fly low over Dostum’s house. Soon after, Dostum agreed to demobilize and was subsequently offered a position in the Karzai administration. A similar approach would be used with the provincial governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, who had actually attacked ANA forces. The combination of a thinly veiled threat of American military force and the promise of a government position in Kabul would secure his cooperation.²⁰⁷

This did not, though, make the central government the undisputed power in the country. Rather, a sort of alliance was created. The central government would give out administrative

²⁰⁵ Anand Gopal, *No Good Men among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2014), pp. 109 and 274-275; and Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2016), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/LessonsLearned/SIGAR-16-58-LL.pdf>, p. 18.

²⁰⁶ Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey through a Turbulent World* (Princeton, NJ: St. Martin's Press, 2016), pp. 179-180.

²⁰⁷ Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House*, pp. 184-186 and 201-204.

posts where warlords could siphon taxes, take bribes, and be given lucrative American contracts. In exchange, the warlords agreed to send some of the tax money to the central government and use their soldiers to keep order in the areas where they were positioned. There also seemed to be an acknowledgement among the warlords that the central government had the support of the international community and that it was in everyone's best interest to keep that support. This can be seen when tax revenue was immediately handed over when Karzai threatened to resign.

However, there continued to be battles between various warlords, with the central government largely staying on the sidelines. Such as when a firefight erupted between the men of Atta Muhammad Noor, the governor of Balkh province, and Asif Mohmand, a provincial councilman, at Mazar-i-Sharif International Airport. Throughout their feud the National Police refused to get involved.²⁰⁸ To put this in perspective, this would be as if the governor of California sent men to kill a state senator and got into a firefight at San Francisco International Airport.

The United States was often unwittingly drawn into these power disputes. In May 2002, U.S. special forces, working on information supplied by the Kandahar provincial governor, raided the home of Hajji Burget Khan, a leader of the Ishaqzai tribe and a respected elder of the village of Maiwand. He and fifty-five others were arrested. It was not until five days later that the American interrogators realized that none of them were Taliban or al-Qaeda. Khan had, in fact, been an early supporter of the United States. Unfortunately, he was also a potential rival to the provincial governor, Gul Agha Sherzai. By the time the Americans realized their mistake, the damage had been done. Hajji Burget Khan had died from wounds sustained during the raid and

²⁰⁸ Rod Nordland, "In Afghanistan, a Destructive 'Game of Thrones'," *New York Times*, Aug. 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/world/asia/in-afghanistan-a-destructive-game-of-thrones.html>.

the women of the house forced to come out and be hand-cuffed by American men.²⁰⁹ Upon hearing this, one woman berated her male family members saying, “You people have big turbans on your heads but what have you done? You are cowards! You can’t even protect us. You call yourselves men?”²¹⁰

Over the next few months, Gul Agha Sherzai would cement his hold over the village and its surrounding district. In August of 2002, Maiwand’s entire police force was arrested for being “al Qaeda-Taliban” and replaced with men appointed by Sherzai. Such U.S.-assisted attacks were also not unique to Maiwand. Many Afghans would use American muscle to solve grudges and political rivalries. The Americans, often ignorant of the local politics and with no independent intelligence network of their own, took information given to them at face value. These raids would kill or alienate many local leaders, the loss of which would result in the Afghan government losing much of its legitimacy in the countryside.²¹¹

The current relationship between the government and warlords can best be summarized with the example of Abdul Razziq. A former militia leader for his tribe, he later became a colonel in the border police and many members of his militia were made part of his police force. Due to his power, he was the unofficial governor of the district. When Americans talked to the official district governor, his inevitable response was “Ask Razziq.” Razziq gave a portion of the profits from his illegal activities to Karzai and other politicians and made sure that enough legal revenue came through the border to keep the government’s coffers, if not full, at least not empty. Unlike other police and army units, Razziq was an effective Taliban fighter, with his men both motivated and well paid. Yet some of those same Taliban being killed were created by Razziq, as the rival tribes around his territory had been targeted by Razziq and joined the Taliban for

²⁰⁹ Anand Gopal, *No Good Men among the Living*, pp. 103-113.

²¹⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

protection. While American officials would encourage him to reform, such efforts were ineffective as Razziq was protected from any punishment by President Karzai. There was talk of pressuring Karzai to remove Razziq, in the end his ability to secure his section of the border against Taliban incursion proved too valuable to the war effort.²¹²

Razziq is emblematic of the situation with warlords in Afghanistan. While often better at governing and providing security than Kabul's appointed governors, they are also divisive in the regions they are located and heavily contribute to the culture of corruption. Thus, a situation can develop where a warlord is creating just as many insurgents as he is killing. For its part, the central government must walk a fine line between keeping the warlords in-check, while at the same time giving them the resources to fight the Taliban.

The warlord problem is exacerbated by the unitary-style of government Afghanistan has. Despite America's light footprint approach and Rumsfeld's "Chicago-style" governance idea, Afghanistan has a very centralized government. Provincial and district (the equivalent of a U.S. state and county) governors are appointed by the national government. Town governors and provincial councils are elected, but these have virtually no power or discretionary spending.²¹³ Thus, local officials who the people know and trust are often sidelined, especially when those officials are not in the good graces of the regional warlord appointed by the central government.

It is easy to see why America was supportive of the unitary system. A system where warlords would have to compete in elections with local leaders would have required a significant American peace-keeping presence to ensure elections were fair and that warlords accepted the results. One could argue that an American presence is precisely what Afghanistan has had for the

²¹² Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War within the War for Afghanistan* (New York, NY: Knopf Publishing, 2012), pp. 258-269.

²¹³ Michael Shurkin, *Subnational Government in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2011), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2011/RAND_OP318.pdf.

last 18 years, but at the time the United States did not expect to be involved in the country for so long. Making deals with those that had the power to immediately provide security and order was the cheaper and quicker option. Long-term however, the system has proven to be anything but beneficial to the stability of the country.

Corruption

Corruption has been a continual problem for the Afghan government, with surveys showing consistently high levels of perceived corruption and personal experience with paying bribes.²¹⁴ In 2005, Afghanistan would be ranked by Transparency International as the 41st most corrupt country in the world.²¹⁵ By 2018, it moved to 8th most corrupt.²¹⁶ In 2014 General John Allen, former commander of the international forces in Afghanistan, stated “the great challenge to Afghanistan’s future is not the Taliban or Pakistani safe havens... The existential threat to the long-term viability of modern Afghanistan is corruption.”²¹⁷ It should be noted that corruption is not a problem in and of itself. Many countries, such as the other three case studies in this paper, have had problems with corruption. However, Afghanistan has been particularly affected for two reasons. One is the presence of the previously discussed warlords that extort the population for

²¹⁴ Andrew McDevitt and Ezatullah Adib, *National Corruption Survey 2018* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2018), https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/NCS_2018_English_WEB.pdf; Jean MacKenzie and Ezatullah Adib, *National Corruption Survey 2016* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2018), https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NCS_English_for-web.pdf; Mohammad Razaq Isaqzadeh and Shahim Ahmad Kabuli, *National Corruption Survey 2014* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2018), https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/executive_summary_ncs2014_english.pdf; and UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Pattern and Trends* (London, UK: Overseas Development Institute, 2018), https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Corruption_in_Afghanistan_FINAL.pdf.

²¹⁵ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2005,” Accessed July 30, 2019, https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2005/0.

²¹⁶ Transparency International, “Corruption Perceptions Index 2018,” Accessed July 30, 2019, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>.

²¹⁷ *A Transformation: Afghanistan Beyond 2014*, 113th Cong. 2 (2014), (Statement of John Allen, Retired Marine Corps General and Distinguished Fellow at Brookings Institute), https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/043014_Transcript_A%20Transformation%20Afghanistan%20Beyond%202014.pdf, p. 28.

their own benefit. The warlords also give the population an identifiable face that symbolizes the problems of the government much better than an abstruse bureaucracy. The second is the fact that the Taliban has proven to be more effective administrators than the government.

The best example of why warlords have proved to be such a problem is the case of Sharafuddin. Sharafuddin, a baker, was repeatedly arrested and tortured by the local police from 2002 to 2005. Each time his family had to pay a bribe for his release. His family would save money specifically for these bribes that they knew would have to be paid every few months. Until, that is, in 2005 when the Taliban killed the head of the governor's intelligence unit.²¹⁸ The governor of Sharafuddin's province was Gul Agha Sherzai, the same man that had killed the leadership of the village of Maiwand. Reportedly, when one of his men asked Sherzai why they don't simply kill the people they keep arresting, Sherzai replied: "There are two ways to peel this egg. One is to break it open forcefully, but then you make a mess, and you'll lose some of the yolk. The other way is to do it carefully, a number of small cracks one after the other—and you get as much as you can out of it."²¹⁹ Too many officials were like Sherzai; using their area of responsibility as a source of income which, just as the killing of local leaders, would come to alienate the population.

The problem of corruption is enabled by the unitary-style of government that Afghanistan has. As described earlier, many local officials, such as Sherzai, are appointed by the central government. As a result, it is easy for the Afghan president to appoint officials that will contribute to the network of corruption. With no elections and a lack of accountability for wrongdoing, there is also little incentive to gain the support of the population.

Unfortunately, warlords are just part of the problem. Throughout Afghanistan's

²¹⁸ Anand Gopal, *No Good Men among the Living*, pp. 116-117.

²¹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 116.

bureaucracy there is a culture of corruption which limits the government's ability to fulfill services, at a time when Afghanistan is competing with a Taliban shadow government. Nepotism and bribery have become the cornerstones of employment within the government.²²⁰ Teachers, for example, have to pay a bribe equal to their first year's salary.²²¹ This can make it hard to fulfill the demand for education as many teachers will be able to pay for to get the credentials to be a teacher, but have to save their money for a bribe. A 2017 corruption report on the Ministry of Education found that 75% of those who attained teaching credentials were unable to find employment.²²² This makes it twice as hard to recruit female teachers for girl schools as many families will not want to make such an investment on their daughter, especially if she has brothers who will also need to pay bribes to get jobs.²²³ Considering that education for girls is something that is generally desired even in conservative communities and something that the Taliban does not offer, not hiring teachers because of the inability to pay a bribe severely restricts the government's ability to offer a service that the Taliban cannot.²²⁴

Even when the government can employ qualified staff, corruption can still cause problems in terms of management. Officials are often involved in bribery networks in which they pay superiors to keep their jobs and receive promotions, creating a chain of corruption where no

²²⁰ UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Pattern and Trends* (Vienna, Austria: UNODC, 2012), https://www.unodc.org/documents/frontpage/Corruption_in_Afghanistan_FINAL.pdf, p. 6; and Manija Gardizi, *Afghans' Experience of Corruption: A Study across Eight Provinces* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2007), https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/03-afghans_experience_of_corruption_2007.pdf, pp. 35-36.

²²¹ Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government* (London, UK: Overseas Development Institute, 2018), <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12269.pdf>, p. 16; and *Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of the Ministry of Education* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, 2017), <https://curbingcorruption.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Afghanistan-Anti-Corruption-Committee-2017-Corruption-assessment-of-the-Ministry-of-Education.pdf>, pp. 25-26 and 36.

²²² *Assessment of the Ministry of Education*, p. 4.

²²³ Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*, p. 16; and *Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of the Ministry of Education*, p. 32.

²²⁴ *What Tomorrow Brings*, Directed by Beth Murphy (Surrey, UK: Journeyman Pictures, 2016), 24:20-26:20 and 41:10-41:25.

one is clean.²²⁵ The need to pay in to this bribery network causes low-level employees to have to offload these costs to the average citizen. Teachers, for example, often charge for supplies and good test scores, which leads to disappointment and resentment from parents, especially those who cannot pay for what should be a free education.²²⁶ The constant need to pay bribes and the ability for employees to be paid without actually having to work has led to the Taliban being viewed as the better option for managing these government programs. This is largely due to the fact that the Taliban are much more interested in fulfilling a service than in using a hospital for something like a money laundering scheme. Under the Taliban, employees are required to report to work, cannot extort bribes from customers, and, while priority is given to Taliban members, must attend to the needs of everyone.²²⁷ It is thus hard to convince the population to support the government when the Taliban does its job so much better.

From 2015 to 2022, the U.S. has pledged over \$36 million to be spent on anti-corruption and transparency.²²⁸ However, the problem with U.S. efforts to curb corruption is that they are solely based around supporting the Afghan government. Things like the training of prosecutors, gifting of computer systems, and the help of U.S. law enforcement are only as useful as Afghanistan's willingness to use them, of which there has been little. This unwillingness has caused generally only low-level crimes to be prosecuted. High-level arrests are rare due to push-back from the Afghan government. For example, when U.S. law enforcement worked with Afghan anti-corruption units to arrest one of President Karzai's aides, Karzai immediately had the aide released and would later restrict the amount of foreign involvement in corruption

²²⁵ Manija Gardizi, *Afghans' Experience of Corruption*, p. 27; and *Assessment of the Ministry of Education*, p. 25.

²²⁶ *Ministry-wide Vulnerability to Corruption Assessment of the Ministry of Education*, pp. 34-37.

²²⁷ Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*.

²²⁸ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *July 30, 2019 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2019), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-07-30qr.pdf>, p. 125, Table 3.24 and 126.

investigations.²²⁹

When met with such push-back, the U.S. has been loath to press the issue, causing frustration among Americans who have been tasked with anti-corruption. The director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, a U.S.-Afghan organization created to root out illegal financial networks, would articulate these frustrations saying, “We were asked to identify high-profile targets that the Administration could then push President Karzai to take action against. . . . In each instance, once President Karzai resisted, our leadership folded.”²³⁰ The problem is that too many Afghan officials are involved in corrupt dealings. To arrest all of them would be to essentially dismantle the government. There was also the idea that the United States needed to pick its battles wisely. Too much pressure on too many people could hurt America’s overall influence within the country. As one anonymous U.S. official explained, “There were a million things we were trying to do, and all of them depended on the Karzai regime as an effective partner.”²³¹

In an October 14th, 2009 meeting, President Obama articulated a goal of getting Afghanistan’s corruption to a “Bangladesh-level”, in which corruption was limited to the small bribes required to get work done.²³² In that same meeting Defense Secretary Robert Gates argued “No government in Central Asia is a democracy and delivers services well. We can’t aim too high.”²³³ Such statements were, in effect, surrenders to the institution of corruption in Afghanistan. While the United States has on occasion pressured Afghanistan to remove individual governors that were especially harmful to local stability, the U.S. has largely accepted

²²⁹ SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, p. 43.

²³⁰ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2018), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-18-52-LL.pdf>, p. 72.

²³¹ SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, p. 44.

²³² Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, (London, UK: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 239.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

the status quo.²³⁴

Justice System

From 2003 to 2015 the United States spent more than \$1 billion on improving the justice system in Afghanistan.²³⁵ However, the money was spread among four different agencies, with a 2015 SIGAR audit finding that there was no comprehensive, overarching strategy to tie the activities of these agencies together. The audit also notes that U.S. efforts have “faced pervasive corruption, lack of will, and other challenges in trying to improve the Afghan justice sector.”²³⁶

Like many aspects of Afghanistan, the justice system is hampered by corruption. Surveys by multiple organizations have all reported that Afghans view the judiciary as one of, if not the most corrupt institutions in the country.²³⁷ This is in contrast to the Taliban justice system which, while sometimes overly harsh, is generally perceived as honest by the population.²³⁸ Even when there have been instances of corruption, residents still view the Taliban as a better option, with one Afghan elder explaining, “The Taliban court is for all people of Afghanistan but Afghan court is only for rich people.”²³⁹ The court can even be more popular than the Taliban itself, with one Afghan farmer stating, “I am against the Taliban system in general and do not want them,

²³⁴ SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, pp. 24-25.

²³⁵ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Rule of Law in Afghanistan: U.S. Agencies Lack a Strategy and Cannot Fully Determine the Effectiveness of Programs Costing More Than \$1 Billion* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2015), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-15-68-AR.pdf>.

²³⁶ SIGAR, *Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, p. ii.

²³⁷ Andrew McDevitt and Ezatullah Adib, *National Corruption Survey 2018*, pp. 32 and 39; Jean MacKenzie and Ezatullah Adib, *National Corruption Survey 2016*, pp. 17 and 33; Mohammad Razaq Isaqzadeh and Shahim Ahmad Kabuli, *National Corruption Survey 2014*, pp. 71 and 34; and UN Office of Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Afghanistan: Recent Pattern and Trends*, p. 10.

²³⁸ Antonio Giustozzi, Claudio Franco and Adam Baczko, *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Integrity Watch Afghanistan, 2012), https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/shadow_justice-how_the_taliban_run_their_judiciary.pdf, pp. 27-38; Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*, p. 20; Azam Ahmed, “Taliban Justice Gains Favor as Official Afghan Courts Fail,” *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/01/world/asia/taliban-justice-gains-favor-as-official-afghan-courts-fail.html>; and Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, “Taliban Courts Filling Justice Vacuum in Afghanistan,” *NPR*, Dec. 16, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=98261034>.

²³⁹ Antonio Giustozzi et al., *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?*, p. 36.

but when we talk about their judgement, they are really judging according to Sharia law and I really respect their judgement, not their activities in Afghanistan, not their fighting and not their killing.”²⁴⁰ As discussed earlier, the United States has offered support to battle corruption in the justice sector but the lack of will on the part of the Afghan government has meant there has been little progress. Many in the State and Justice Department have come to view it as a lost cause.²⁴¹

To compound the corruption problem, the Afghan government’s judiciary also lacks the resources and legitimacy of the Taliban. In 2011, 17% of districts did not have a judge.²⁴² While some of the vacancies are undoubtedly due to security concerns, the Afghan government has also had trouble recruiting qualified judges due to the high level of illiteracy in the country. This means that in many areas, especially in the southern provinces, villagers who want their case heard have to make long trips into the provincial capital, which many do not have the time for.

The Taliban, while also having problems with recruitment, are better able to serve the community due to their judges being mobile and moving village to village.²⁴³ Cases in the government justice system also take longer.²⁴⁴ Partly this is due to the lack of judges and court staff, but it is also due to the more rigorous system of a western-style court. It should be noted, though, that the Taliban do make a great amount of effort to look for evidence in order to bring about a satisfactory verdict. When taking a district, records of land ownership and prior litigation verdicts are highly prized. When they cannot forcibly take the records, the Taliban will either

²⁴⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁴¹ SIGAR, *Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, pp. 12-13 and 19.

²⁴² Calculated using data from Antonio Giustozzi et al., *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?*, p. 35; and Michael Shurkin, *Subnational Government in Afghanistan*, p. 5.

²⁴³ Antonio Giustozzi et al., *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?*, pp. 20 and 35; Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*, p. 19; Azam Ahmed, “Taliban Justice Gains Favor as Official Afghan Courts Fail”; Kara Jensen, “Obstacles to Accessing the State Justice System in Rural Afghanistan,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* vol. 18 no. 2 (2011): pp. 930-950, <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1466&context=ijgls>, pp. 946-949; and Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, “Taliban Courts Filling Justice Vacuum in Afghanistan.”

²⁴⁴ Antonio Giustozzi et al., *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?*, p. 36.

steal them or bribe a government official.²⁴⁵

Another issue is legitimacy. Government courts are not only corrupt, but they work using a western-influenced legal system. Whereas the courts run by village elders or the Taliban use traditional tribal law or Sharia law, which are viewed as more legitimate and fair. Not all villagers may understand Sharia law, but all view it as legitimate. Whereas the government justice system, which uses more secular laws, is not well understood by the population and since it is not connected to any larger tradition, there is little legitimacy in it.

USAID funded several programs to increase the government's involvement in traditional village courts and to create a link between them and the courts in the cities.²⁴⁶ The idea being that by creating these links, villages would be more likely to view the government courts as a legitimate alternative. The biggest of these programs was the Rule of Law Stabilization–Informal (RLS-I) program, which sought to integrate Afghan law with tribal law, stop certain “harmful social practices”, and make villagers more knowledgeable about the government justice system.²⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the program's final report in 2014 showed: “Collaboration between the formal justice system and TDR actors is often one-way, with the formal justice system referring cases to TDR actors but TDR actors not referring cases to the formal justice system. Qualitative interviews indicated a generally poor perception of the formal justice system by TDR actors.”²⁴⁸

In conclusion, the government justice system has not been able to be seen as a real option among the majority of the population. The integration between tribal and government courts should have come much sooner, with more input from village elders about the system that the

²⁴⁵ Ashley Jackson, *Life under the Taliban Shadow Government*, p. 20.

²⁴⁶ SIGAR, *Rule of Law in Afghanistan*, pp. 16 and 34.

²⁴⁷ United States Agency for International Development (USAID), *Performance Evaluation of the Rule of Law Stabilization-Informal Component Program* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2014), https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jxpm.pdf, pp. 6-7.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

central government was creating. However, that is debatably a secondary problem. Unless Afghanistan can fix its bigger issues, such as corruption and lack of education, it is unlikely that the government will be able to have either the legitimacy or the physical reach to become the better alternative to the Taliban's system of justice.

Drug Economy

One of the major objectives of the Afghanistan War was to stop the country's production of opium poppies. Partly this was due to Western political pressure. Afghanistan was the largest producer of opium in the world, and thus destroying the poppy production would help to alleviate the West's own drug problems. There was also the fact that the Taliban is heavily involved in the drug trade, transporting drugs across the Pakistan border and protecting poppy farmers' crops.²⁴⁹ Creating a legitimate economy would not only deprive the Taliban of a source of funding, but also cut some of the ties that farmers had with the Taliban.

The United States, at first, was reluctant to put resources into this endeavor. The Defense Department did not think that counter narcotics was part of its mission in Afghanistan, and worried it would interfere with counter-terrorism.²⁵⁰ The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) did not even have a Foreign Service Officer until spring of 2003.²⁵¹ The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) did not open an office until February 2003, and even then could not go outside Kabul due to security concerns.²⁵² Partly this was due to the fact that the UK had been given the lead for counter-narcotics and thus such activities were deemed outside of the United States' responsibilities. However, as the cultivation

²⁴⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, pp. 318, 320, 323-324.

²⁵⁰ SIGAR, *Counternarcotics*, pp. 39-40.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

of poppies began to increase there were fears that Afghanistan would turn into a Narco-State and the curbing of illicit crops gained greater importance.

One option was eradication. The first attempt was a UK-funded program named Operation Drown. In what would later be described as “an appalling piece of complete raw naiveté”, Operation Drown would offer money in exchange for farmers destroying their poppy crop.²⁵³ However, instead of going to each farm and directly giving the money to the farmer and destroying the crop, the money was instead given to the governors and tribal leaders. This led to a vast amount of corruption and a strengthening of warlords’ power. Much of the compensation was simply pocketed with farmers having to pay bribes for their crop not to be destroyed. For those few that did receive compensation and destroyed their crop, there was no incentive to stop growing poppy beyond the year they were compensated. Such criticism would lead to future eradication compensation only occurring in areas where alternative crops were being funded.²⁵⁴

Future eradication efforts would not be much more effective. An independent force was created specifically for eradication in 2004. The force would go by several names until finally settling on the Poppy Eradication Force. However, it was never integrated into the government as planned and proved to be unable to destroy the amount of crop needed to make a difference. The force was ultimately shut down in 2009.²⁵⁵ International forces continued to rely on provincial governors for eradication who, as Operation Drown had shown, were not very reliable. By 2017, the United States had spent \$937 million on eradication efforts.²⁵⁶

Another method was interdiction, which is the targeting of opium labs and arresting of drug smugglers. The biggest problem in this effort was that, no matter how much the United

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 83.

²⁵⁴ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 321; and SIGAR, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, pp. 82-84.

²⁵⁵ SIGAR, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, pp. 49, 51, 86-89.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

States financed and strengthened Afghan law enforcement, those law enforcement agencies could do nothing if the smugglers they arrested were protected by government officials. The problem would become such a problem that in 2005 an entirely separate branch of the justice system was created to handle drug cases, known as the Counter Narcotics Justice Center (CNJC). The CNJC had its own judges and prosecutors who were carefully vetted by international forces. These measures led the CNJC to be seen as the “most capable, least corrupt justice system in Afghanistan.”²⁵⁷

Between 2005 and 2008, the CNJC convicted 1,550 traffickers.²⁵⁸ Yet the vast majority of these were low-level drug traffickers. The fact is that much of Afghanistan’s elite is involved in the drug trade. The previously discussed warlord Abdul Razziq, for example, made a lot of his money by charging drug traffickers for the ability to cross his section of the border.²⁵⁹ In 2005, the U.S. pressured Karzai to remove Sher Mohammed Akhundzada, the governor of Helmand province, because of his involvement in the drug trade. Though he then went on to become a member of the House of Elders, one of the legislative houses.²⁶⁰ Without the ability to target high-level offenders and with poppy production continuing to increase, U.S. interdiction efforts were like trying to remove water from a sinking boat with a soup spoon, while the other person on the boat is continuing to punch more holes in.

A proposed measure to plug this leaking boat was to convince farmers to grow a plant other than poppies. One of the early suggestions for an alternative crop was cotton, first suggested in December 2001 by a former USAID employee named Dick Scott. However, this effort soon ran into problems. When USAID restored one of the old government cotton gins,

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁵⁹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 258.

²⁶⁰ SIGAR, *Corruption in Conflict*, pp. 24-25.

several smaller private gins began to appear around the south in anticipation of an explosion of cotton production. The government though, did not want the competition when it had so few sources of revenue and confiscated all privately-owned gins. USAID refused to give money to a cotton industry that whose cotton gins were entirely nationalized.²⁶¹ USAID did also not like that potential cotton farmers demanded free seeds and a guaranteed purchased price. Whether USAID realized the U.S. cotton industry is also heavily subsidized by the government is unknown.²⁶²

USAID would continue to be hostile to cotton, using several excuses before finally settling on the idea that promoting cotton would violate the Bumpers Amendment, which forbids USAID from providing funds to agricultural products that might compete with U.S. products.²⁶³ In 2007, when an Afghan businessman named Yosuf Mir asked for funding to repair a textile factory that could employ up to 12,000 people, USAID refused. Mir had made the mistake of boasting that such a factory would promote thousands of farmers to grow cotton instead of poppy. In an email, USAID explained that such a promotion of cotton would violate the Bumpers Amendment, and thus was not available for American aid.²⁶⁴

USAID was far more interested in promoting nuts and fruits; as such crops were more valuable than cotton or poppy. While these were viable alternatives on paper, they sometimes did not work in practice.²⁶⁵ Nut or fruit producing trees, for example, take several years to mature and thus farmers would need an alternative form of income in the years that they wait for their farm to be productive. Yet such support was not always available, especially in rural areas where

²⁶¹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 95-97.

²⁶² Gro Intelligence, "US Cotton Subsidies Insulate Producers from Economic Loss," Last modified June 6, 2018, <https://gro-intelligence.com/insights/articles/us-cotton-subsidies#US>; Joseph W. Glauber, *Unraveling Reforms? Cotton in the 2018 Farm Bill*, (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2018), <http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Unraveling-Reforms-Cotton-in-the-2018-Farm-Bill.pdf>; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 97 and 202.

²⁶³ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 200-204.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 101-103.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 102 and 200-204.

access to jobs is limited. Aid projects often only lasted a couple of years, which impeded the long-term cultivation of licit crops. A 2018 USAID report would acknowledge this, saying:

“programs implemented over the past dozen years have in general lacked a consistent and longer-term strategic focus...Frequently the project vehicles through which programs are implemented have had short, two- to three-year life-spans—clearly inadequate to the task of fomenting sustainable stakeholder commitment to transitioning permanently away from engagement in illicit activities.”²⁶⁶

All of this is not, of course, an attempt to promote the cotton industry, but rather an example of the lack of focus in regards to counter-narcotics policy. Rather than focusing on simply providing a livelihood that would stop farmers in a region from growing poppy, USAID was thinking of how Afghanistan could best compete on the international market.²⁶⁷ As one USAID official complained to SIGAR, “No one looked at opium from a livelihoods perspective in USAID. It was about economics and value chains, not livelihoods.”²⁶⁸ In effect, USAID pursued the perfect to the detriment of the good.

Another problem was that very few of USAID’s alternative crop programs “actually considered opium poppy cultivation in their design or during implementation.”²⁶⁹ This led to projects that actually increased poppy cultivation.²⁷⁰ Part of the reason for this was that USAID was opposed to their agency being used as the spearhead for counter-narcotics and did not consider it as part of their mission. As a result, USAID did not change their development projects to target poppy cultivation and instead gave the argument that any development was alternative development.²⁷¹ According to Doug Wankel, director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force, USAID “gave the feeling they didn’t want to be in the photograph when the picture

²⁶⁶ SIGAR, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, p. 127.

²⁶⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 102.

²⁶⁸ SIGAR, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, p. 124.

²⁶⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 118.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-125.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

was taken.”²⁷²

The effectiveness of U.S. counter narcotics can be easily shown in the change in estimated poppy production from 2002 to 2018. According to the U.N., poppy cultivation was estimated at 74,000 hectares in 2002 and 263,000 hectares in 2018. Estimated opium produced from these poppies was 3,400 metric tons in 2002 and 6,400 metric tons in 2018. In 2018, eradication of poppy fields amounted to just 406 hectares, which is .0015% the size of the crop that was successfully cultivated. By any measure, it is clear that America’s attempt to transform Afghanistan’s agricultural economy and prevent the country from becoming a narco-state has failed.²⁷³

What Afghanistan’s counter narcotics needed was its own clear-hold-build strategy. Eradication immediately followed by compensation and then long-term support for an alternative crop. While the U.S. and its allies did do all of these things at one time or another, it was never part of one cohesive plan. As one Defense Department official noted, “Everyone did their own thing, not thinking how it fit in with the larger effort. State was trying to eradicate, USAID was marginally trying to do livelihoods, and DEA was going after bad guys.”²⁷⁴ This disorganization has ultimately led to the drug economy remaining a significant part of Afghan society.

Conclusion

The question of how successful the United States has been in making Afghanistan into a capable state is difficult due to the fact that it depends on how one measures it. If one compares it to pre-2002 Afghanistan than it has been a great success. By any statistical measure Afghanistan

²⁷² Ibid., p. 47.

²⁷³ UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2018* (Vienna, Austria: UNODC, 2018), https://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2018.pdf, pp. 5-7.

²⁷⁴ Quoted in SIGAR, *Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, p. 44.

has grown by leaps and bounds due to the influx of international aid. Yet if one compares it to the goals of the war against the Taliban (the building of a government which can win the loyalty of the population) it has not been such a success.

The United States has spent a total of \$132.5 billion on nation-building in Afghanistan. What the United States has received as a result of these billions of dollars is a stalemate. Currently, the government controls around 33% of the country, with the Taliban controlling 18%.²⁷⁵ Little progress has been made in curbing corruption, the power of warlords, or increasing the ability of the government to provide essential services. These deficiencies have resulted in the Taliban filling in the gaps. The Taliban provide their own court system, supervise schools, and ensure consistent electricity to villages they control. In most cases, the Taliban makes use of government infrastructure and resources, often with government permission as dealing with the Taliban is seen as the only way to ensure the Afghan people have access to healthcare and education.

In many areas the Taliban are merely one form of government. This allows citizens to choose who they go to for support. They may use government schools managed by the Taliban, use Taliban courts to supplement tribal courts, and rely on local elders to govern the community. Thus, in many areas, neither side is totally legitimate, but each provides certain benefits.²⁷⁶ This makes the Afghan government's flaws all the more frustrating, as it is clear that it could gain the loyalty of some of these communities if it only could create a government that better represented and cared for its people.

America's inability to improve Afghanistan is largely due to two reasons. One is its

²⁷⁵ Bill Roggio and Alexandra Gutowski, "Mapping Taliban Control in Afghanistan," *FDD's Long War Journal*, Updated October 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/mapping-taliban-control-in-afghanistan>.

²⁷⁶ Antonio Giustozzi et al., *Shadow Justice: How the Taliban Run Their Judiciary?*, pp. 36-37; and Ashley Jackson, "The Taliban's Fight for Hearts and Minds," *Foreign Policy*, Sep. 12, 2008, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/12/the-talibans-fight-for-hearts-and-minds-afghanistan/>.

reliance on the Afghan government. The United States cannot kick a governor out of office or prosecute a corrupt individual without the Afghan President's approval. This has caused any successes to be inconsequential. Like Vietnam, America has had a problem with the fact that it views Afghan participation to be integral to successful nation-building, but the Afghan government has not been willing to fully participate.

The second reason for America's failure is that in the initial year of involvement the United States created a very centralized political system. Historically, Afghan rulers have governed the country by either allowing a large degree of autonomy outside of the urban centers or using a large amount of violence to maintain control.²⁷⁷ The problem is that the United States has created a system which attempts to extend the central government down to the village level, using a government that is both weak and flawed. If the United States was able to coerce that government to change so that the people willingly accept the central government into their villages, the centralized system might not be a problem. As it stands though, America is in a situation where it is supporting a government that is simply unsuitable for the country it is trying to rule; especially when there is an alternative in the form of the Taliban.

²⁷⁷ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Thomas Barfield, "Dr. Thomas Barfield on State-Strengthening in Afghanistan 2001-2014," Lecture, U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, March 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pomICnvu5UU>.

IRAQ

Iraq is unique in that it can be considered both a success and a failure. The period from 2003 to 2019 can be considered a successful, if rocky, nation-building effort. The period from 2010 to 2014, in which there was a resurgence of the conflict and rise of the Islamic State, is obviously a failure of nation-building. This analysis will thus compare the eleven years between 2003 and 2014.

Much of the failure would be due to the inability for the U.S. to subdue sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims in the country. Thus, the first issue that will be discussed in this case study will be the history of sectarianism in Iraq. There will then be a discussion of some of the major decisions made during the period from April 2003 to June 2004 when America occupied the country. The results of this initial nation-building effort will be seen in the Anbar Awakening, from late 2006 to 2008. Finally, there will be a history of the events leading up to the rise of the Islamic State, which showed that the nation that America had helped formed was not as strong as initially thought.

Sectarianism

Sectarianism, or the conflict between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam, is undoubtedly Iraq's biggest problem. While there was some Shia involvement, the insurgency was largely a Sunni driven affair, with insurgent heartland located in the so-called "Sunni Triangle" of western Iraq. The Iraqi Civil War was a conflict between the Sunni Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Shia-dominated Iraq government. Some, including both regular Iraqis on the street and academics, have made the argument that Iraq had never been so divided along sectarian lines and

that the Americans had created this conflict through bad policy.²⁷⁸ Reider Visser specifically points to Bremer's policies during the first year of occupation for, "turning Iraqis into sectarian extremists of a kind completely alien to the country's long history of sectarian coexistence."²⁷⁹ Outside influences are certainly a factor. As will be discussed, De-Baathification and the dissolving of the military were seen by many Sunnis as de-Sunnification. Yet it is also clear that these divisions have existed for a long time.

One reason for this division is due to the sectarian nature of Iraqi nationalism, at least as seen by some Sunnis. Iraq has, for hundreds of years, been viewed as the battleground between the Arab and Persian cultures. Hatred and suspicion of Iran is in fact held by both Shias and Sunnis. As one example, when Bremer suggested that Hussein al-Shahristani be made Prime Minister of the Transitional Government, the idea was resoundingly rejected by prominent Shias, due to the simple fact that Shahristani had an Iranian name.²⁸⁰ However, within the Sunni community, religion has taken on greater importance when thinking about this conflict.

Due to most of the population in Iran being Shia, the very act of being a Shia was seen by some as inherently un-Iraqi and un-Arab, with Iraq's Shia being viewed as potential agents for Iran. During the late 19th century, the conversion of many Iraqis to the Shia sect would greatly alarm the Ottoman Empire, with various methods used to try and combat the spread of the Shia faith, such as increased investment in Sunni religious schools.²⁸¹ After the 1979 Iranian

²⁷⁸ Reider Visser, "The Western Imposition of Sectarianism on Iraqi Politics," *The Arab Studies Journal* 15/16 no. 2/1 (2007/2008): pp. 83-99, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27934026>; Tim Jacoby & Nassima Neggaz, "Sectarianism in Iraq: The Role of the Coalition Provisional Authority," *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11 no. 3 (2018): pp. 478-500, DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2018.1487178; and Victoria Fontan, *Voices from Post-Saddam Iraq: Living with Terrorism, Insurgency, and New Forms of Tyranny* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2009), p. 26.

²⁷⁹ Reider Visser, "The Western Imposition of Sectarianism on Iraqi Politics," p. 93.

²⁸⁰ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York, NY: Threshold Editions, 2006), p. 361.

²⁸¹ Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890–1908* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), pp. 99-126.

Revolution, Iraqi Shiites would protest and call for a revolution of their own.²⁸² Though these protests would ultimately not gain traction within the larger Shia community, it did continue the narrative that the Shias in Iraq were inherently disloyal. This distrust would lead to tens of thousands of Shiites being expelled during the Iran-Iraq.²⁸³ During the 1991 uprising in the Shia-dominated south, Saddam Hussein would justify his harsh quelling of the rebellion by labelling the revolting Shia “Iranians”.²⁸⁴ This labeling would not be helped by the fact that exiled Shias in Iran that crossed the border to support the rebellion put up posters showing Ayatollah Khomeini and demanding an Iranian-style Islamic republic.²⁸⁵

While such propaganda might be seen as ludicrous to an outsider, the state narrative of the rebellion being instigated by Iran was taken seriously by many Sunnis. When Wafiq al-Samarrai, the former Director of Military Intelligence who defected to Kurdistan in 1994, was asked why he and others did not participate in the 1991 revolts he replied, “the success of the intifada would have meant the annihilation of the Arabs from central Iraq; therefore, backing the regime was the only alternative.”²⁸⁶ Even outside of Iraq in the Arab world, the narrative of an Iranian-backed rebellion took hold, with Palestinian writer Mohammad Asa’ad Bayuth al-Timeem saying in a debate on Al-Jazeera that forces from “neighboring countries” had infiltrated the south and incited the Shia to rebel.²⁸⁷ In discussing the mass graves made during the 1991 rebellion, a former Iraqi diplomat would argue that, “the majority of the people they found in

²⁸² Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 12-13 and 51.

²⁸³ Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 31.

²⁸⁴ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 258; and Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, pp. 119-128.

²⁸⁵ Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, p. 47.

²⁸⁶ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, p. 128.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

these mass graves were Iranian secret police and Iranian Revolutionary Guards.”²⁸⁸ In large part, this acceptance of the regime’s narrative would be due to the fact that any disturbance against Iraq, whether internal or external, has a tendency to be blamed on Iran. For example, many tribal leaders in the Sunni-dominated Anbar province held the view that Al-Qaeda in Iraq was secretly funded by Iran.²⁸⁹

There was also the fact that the Ottomans, British and most recently Saddam Hussein would all put Sunnis in the leadership positions.²⁹⁰ This caused some Sunnis to feel as if they were destined to rule and that the Shia had traits that were not suited to leadership positions. A Sunni sheikh articulated this sentiment perfectly saying, “They cannot rule Iraq properly. They cannot take charge of Iraq in the same manner as the Sunnis. The Shiites are backwards.”²⁹¹ A Sunni businessman complained, “The Americans made a big mistake when they came to Iraq. Sunnis ruled Iraq for 400 years. Sunnis always worked in the security and administration of Iraq.”²⁹² Such sectarian disdain and ideas of pre-destined rule were bound to irritate the Shias, who view the power that comes as the majority of the population being unfairly withheld from them for decades.

The two groups see fundamental aspects of the Iraq nation, such as the definition of nationalism and legitimacy, very differently from each other. Iraqi nationalism has always been skewed towards its Sunni population, whose Sunni-Arab identity tended to be interlinked with Iraqi national identity.²⁹³ In the words of former Shia-Iraqi politician Ali Allawi, “The narrative

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁸⁹ Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II: Iraqi Perspectives: From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq, 2004-2009* (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009), pp. 36, 94, 97, 132, 145.

²⁹⁰ Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 62-63, 65-66.

²⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 71.

²⁹³ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, pp. 32-43.

of Iraq fashioned by its leaders and pedagogues was compromised for many of its citizens who did not share in, or resonate to, its founding symbols.”²⁹⁴ The mass killings used to quell the 1991 uprising would destroy whatever shred of legitimacy the regime of Saddam Hussein had left. Among Sunnis however, Saddam still had the minimum amount of legitimacy to stay in power due to him still being a bulwark against Iran and his upholding of Arab-Sunni domination.

These differing views of legitimacy led to very different perceptions towards the American invasion and subsequent nation-building effort. Among Sunnis, “a foreign invasion was unfathomable regardless of the shortcomings and failures of the regime; Shi’as on the other hand, according the regime no legitimacy whatsoever, regarded foreign invasion as a necessary evil.”²⁹⁵ The reality of this situation can be seen in polling. An ABC poll from early 2004 showed that the Shias were twice as likely to say America liberated Iraq rather than humiliated it, were 18% less likely to oppose U.S. military presence, and were three times less likely to approve of attacks on coalition forces.²⁹⁶ This is not to insinuate the Shia were wholly supportive of the American presence. However, they were much more likely to work with the occupation to ensure a speedy withdrawal rather than actively oppose it.

The argument that Iraq did not have serious sectarian problems before the American invasion is simply incorrect. The occupation simply brought these divisions to the fore, as the new regime threatened everything that Sunnis, both secular nationalists and Islamists, feared. Namely, “the rise of a ‘Shi’a state’, Sunni marginalisation, loss of Iraqi sovereignty and the rise of Iranian influence.”²⁹⁷ The test for America would be how it would create a unified nation when such long-held divisions existed. As will be seen, what the United States can be criticized

²⁹⁴ Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, p. 145.

²⁹⁵ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, p. 39.

²⁹⁶ “ABC News Poll: Sunni and Shia in Iraq—Where Things Stand.” *ABC News*, March 17, 2004. <https://abcnews.go.com/images/pdf/949a2SunniShia.pdf>.

²⁹⁷ Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, p. 144.

for is not fully grasping the magnitude of these divisions and how to properly deal with each side's fears.

Early Challenges

The occupation of Iraq began with the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), led by retired General Jay Garner. Within weeks of ORHA moving into Baghdad, it would be replaced by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), led by Ambassador Paul Bremer, in May 2003. These organizations would lay the groundwork for the establishment of the modern Iraqi state, as well as the insurgency that the new Iraq had to face.

The United States began the liberation of Iraq with a plethora of assumptions about the post-war reconstruction environment; many of which would prove to be false. It was assumed that there would be some amount of looting, but besides buying more furniture all government employees could begin work the day after liberation. In reality, not only were furniture and electronics stolen, but also wiring and even plumbing. Then the building was set on fire.²⁹⁸ As a result, 17 of the 23 ministry buildings were destroyed.²⁹⁹ It was assumed that Iraqi oil revenues would be able to pay for much of the reconstruction. Again, this proved to be false, with reconstruction costs far exceeding Iraq's capacity, especially since much of the infrastructure for oil production needed to be repaired or upgraded.³⁰⁰ President Bush would describe this disconnect in his autobiography, saying, "There had been no Fortress Baghdad, no massive oil field fires, no widespread starvation, no civilian massacre by Saddam, no WMD attack on our

²⁹⁸ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (Westport, CT: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2006), pp. 40-41 and 46.

²⁹⁹ Jay Garner, "Truth, War and Consequences: Interview with Jay Garner," Interviewer Unknown, *Frontline*, PBS, July 17, 2003, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/truth/interviews/garner.html>.

³⁰⁰ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 61; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, pp. 111-112 and 156-159.

troops, and no terrorist attack on America or our allies.”³⁰¹ War-planning had been focused on the potential deliberate attacks by Saddam, not self-destructive anarchy. Soon after he arrived in the country, Ambassador Bremer would observe, “it’s not that we didn’t plan. The problem is that we planned for the wrong contingency.”³⁰²

It is hard to understate the challenge America was facing in Iraq. The military did not have enough soldiers to bring law and order in the aftermath of liberation.³⁰³ The CPA was understaffed and was not receiving funds quickly enough, crippling its ability to enact swift reforms.³⁰⁴ The Iraqi people had high expectations for how America could improve their lives, and were continually disappointed in how slow progress was taking.³⁰⁵ At the same time, other Iraqis were suspicious of America’s motives. They viewed the American invasion as no more than a necessary evil to topple Saddam and wanted the occupation ended quickly.³⁰⁶ All of this created a situation where America had to stabilize and rebuild Iraq in as short amount of time as possible using the minimum amount of people. Never before had America faced so many problems needing to be solved in such a short amount of time.

De-Baathification

The Baath Party was the political party of Saddam Hussein and many positions in government required membership. In order to stop any of those who committed crimes against

³⁰¹ George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, pp. 257-258.

³⁰² Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 26.

³⁰³ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 18-19; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, pp. 41-42 and 45-46; and Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Officer, 2009), <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a493696.pdf>, p. 57.

³⁰⁴ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 113-114 and 125; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, pp. 81-82, 91-94, 212.

³⁰⁵ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq’s People in the Shadow of America’s War* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), pp. 140-141, 148-150, 151-153, 181, 210-211, 216-217, 247-248, 272, 317-318, 320-322, 326-329, 330-331, 333-337, 339.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 142, 198, 203-205, 214, 237, 264, 272, 306, 218, 326, 331, 355, 360.

humanity from gaining positions of power, the United States would “De-Baathify” the bureaucracy by making it illegal for some party members to be in government. When De-Baathification was first conceived, only those in the top two positions in the Baath Party would be removed from government.³⁰⁷ It was estimated that it would only affect one percent of the country’s two million Baath party members, or about 20,000.³⁰⁸ However, it was later changed to the top four positions, which not only affected the top leaders in the government, but also some of the middle management.³⁰⁹ Between 2003 and 2005 over 65,000 civil servants were removed from government.³¹⁰ This created serious problems with restoring governance. At the Ministry of Health, for example, a third of the employees were fired.³¹¹ At the Ministry of Finance, 19% of its workforce was fired.³¹²

De-Baathification was continually compared to de-Nazification in Germany after the end of WWII. Like de-Baathification, de-Nazification would affect a large portion of government employees and turn public opinion against the American occupation. However, there was one significant difference that helped to dilute the effect of de-Nazification, and it was the fact that when the United States gave control of de-Nazification to the Germans, the Germans were generally lenient in their prosecutions. The German public did not view Nazi party members as especially dangerous and tended to be more empathetic, leading to many former bureaucrats being able to come back into the government.³¹³

By contrast, Iraq had a significant sectarian divide and thus an Iraq-led de-Baathification

³⁰⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, pp. 79-80.

³⁰⁸ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, pp. 427-429; and Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 343.

³⁰⁹ *CPA Order Number 1*, (Baghdad, Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003).

³¹⁰ Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq* (New York, NY: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2013), p. 6.

³¹¹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, p. 82.

³¹² Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy*, p. 25.

³¹³ Aysegul Keskin Zeren, “From De-Nazification of Germany to De-Baathification of Iraq,” *Political Science Quarterly* 132 no. 2 (2017): pp. 259-290, DOI: 10.1002/polq.12618, pp. 262-274.

process did not lead to more lenient sentences. This sectarian divide would cause a hardline attitude toward former Baathists, viewing any Baathist, especially Sunni Baathists, as potentially dangerous. Iraqi politicians were heavily discouraged from promoting a more lenient policy, for fear of being voted out of office by their Shia constituents.³¹⁴ Ambassador Bremer attempted to moderate de-Baathification and would use his authority to reinstate ten thousand teachers who had lost their jobs.³¹⁵ However, even Bremer would be unable to fully reign in de-Baathification, lamenting that, “to say anything about de-Baathification would be to provoke a strong reaction from the Shia.”³¹⁶

Little progress would be made in the five years until 2008, when the Iraqi parliament would pass the Accountability and Justice Act. This law made a number of reforms to de-Baathification policy including allowing many former members to be eligible to return to government, the return of pensions, and the creation of a new de-Baathification authority, called the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC). This new commission, however, was made up of the members of the former de-Baathification organization, the Higher National De-Ba’athification Commission (HNDC). These commissioners were much more enthusiastic about de-Baathification and in the 2010 election attempted to have over 500 candidates disqualified and 376 officers in the security forces removed.³¹⁷ Although only partially successful, the attempt would fuel rising sectarian tensions. When the Bush administration started de-Baathification, it was meant to model the successes of de-Nazification while avoiding its

³¹⁴ Aysegul Keskin Zeren, “From De-Nazification of Germany to De-Baathification of Iraq,” p. 278; Embassy Baghdad, “The Limits of Cross-Sectarian Politics before the National Vote,” Wikileaks Cable: 09BAGHDAD2105_a, Dated August 5, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD2105_a.html; and Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy*, p. 17n82.

³¹⁵ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 260-261 and 343-344.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

³¹⁷ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4e3fd98f2.pdf>, pp. 10-11; and Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq*, p. 20.

failures. Unfortunately, history soon repeated itself, but this time in a society which was far more divided.³¹⁸

Security Forces

It was planned that the Iraqi military would be used after the war as a kind of Conservation Corps that would help to rebuild damaged infrastructure. However, instead of staying in their garrisons and waiting until the war was over, soldiers instead looted their garrisons and went home.³¹⁹ When this occurred, it was decided that the military had essentially “disbanded itself.”³²⁰ It was already known that the military would need to be reformed and reorganized; due to it being tainted by its use as a tool of Saddam. Thus, by the military disbanding, this was seen as a problem that had fixed itself.

On May 23, 2003 CPA Order Number 2 formally dissolved not only the military, but also all of the intelligence agencies. Pensions would still be given out and there would be a one-time payment for all employees who were not high level Baath Party members to help with the transition.³²¹ The problem was that this essentially put 500,000 people out of work at a time when the unemployment rate was around 20%.³²² To put this in context, this would be as if America dissolved the entire Department of War during the Great Depression.³²³ Except that Iraq

³¹⁸ Aysegul Keskin Zeren, “From De-Nazification of Germany to De-Baathification of Iraq,” pp. 275-290; and Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy*, pp. 9-23.

³¹⁹ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 26-27; and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, p. 78.

³²⁰ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, p. 432 and Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 57-58 and 223-224.

³²¹ *CPA Order Number 2* (Baghdad, Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003).

³²² SIGIR, *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*, p. 75; and Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit, *Iraq Labour Force Analysis 2003-2008*, (New York, NY: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2009), <http://www.unglobalpulse.org/sites/default/files/reports/OCHAIAU%20LabourForceImpactsIraq%202009.pdf>, pp. 1-2, Chart 1.

³²³ Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, *Selected Manpower Statistics: Fiscal Year 1997* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1997),

in 2003 was around five times smaller than America in the 1930s.³²⁴

Perhaps a bigger issue though with the security forces is that the new American-made security force lacked legitimacy, especially by the Sunnis. The dissolving of the military was seen as a part of de-Sunnification, especially as some Sunni officers saw their Shia comrades called back to action while they were deemed too much of a risk to reemploy.³²⁵ The military and police have consistently been accused of being dominated by the Shia who targets the Sunni population. This has not been helped by the fact that there have been documented cases of soldiers in the military, and especially in private militias, of stealing, beating, and committing other criminal acts against civilians.³²⁶

In defending his position to dissolve the military, Ambassador Bremer has pointed to the bad feelings the Shia have towards former officers in the military. In his book about his time in Iraq, he relates one instance in which members of the IGC were incensed that a former Republican Guard colonel was recruited by the Marines in Fallujah to head a paramilitary unit. He concludes that, “The violent reaction to the Fallujah Brigade was dramatic proof of the danger the coalition would have courted by trying to recall Saddam’s army, as some had proposed.”³²⁷ Yet what Bremer failed to grasp is that the military had a nuanced position in Iraqi society. The regular army, where many Shia had served, was less tainted than units like the

https://www.alternatewars.com/BBOW/Stats/DOD_SelectedStats_FY97.pdf, p. 14, Table 1-6 and p. 46, Table 2-11; and Kimberly Amadeo, “Unemployment Rate by Year since 1929 Compared to Inflation and GDP,” The Balance, Last modified July 27, 2019, <https://www.thebalance.com/unemployment-rate-by-year-3305506>.

³²⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “Historical National Population Estimates: July 1, 1900 to July 1, 1999,” Last Modified June 28, 2000, <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/1900-1980/national/totals/popclockest.txt>.

³²⁵ Victoria Fontan, *Voices from Post-Saddam Iraq*, p. 28.

³²⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman and Sam Khazai, *Shaping Iraq’s Security Forces*, pp. 56-61; and Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 100.

³²⁷ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 346.

Republican Guard, which was much more identified with the regime of Saddam.³²⁸ The army was a more nationalistic entity that cut across the sectarian divide. The fact that the Fallujah Brigade was led specifically by a Republican Guard colonel, and not a regular army colonel, is very important to understanding the Shia reaction.

It is also important to remember that not even all Sunnis were supportive of Saddam. The Republican Guard, often seen as the vanguard of his regime, was in fact not allowed inside Baghdad for fear of a coup. Only the Special Republican Guard, who were recruited from the area surrounding Saddam's hometown of Tikrit, were allowed inside the city.³²⁹ For many Sunnis soldiers, Saddam was a man they tolerated, not supported.³³⁰ Being a part of the military or intelligence service was also a part of many Sunnis' identity and, as Ali Allawi summarized, "to be suddenly and unceremoniously dumped greatly affected their sense of self-worth. Loss of dignity was added to their impoverishment, and an anxious and resentful multitude retired to their homes nursing their grievances about the new order."³³¹ Being an officer in the military or intelligence service was also recognition of the Sunnis' prestigious position in Iraqi society, and their duty as a bulwark against Iranian influence.³³² This line of thinking could not of course last in a new Iraq, but an effort could have been made to make the transition less abrupt.

Iraq's military was certainly in need of reform and reorganization. However, the method that America used had little benefit and many detriments. A more limited disbanding of

³²⁸ Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, pp. 155-159; and Ibrahim Al-Marashi, "Disbanding and Rebuilding the Iraqi Army: The Historical Perspective," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11, no. 3 (2007): pp. 42-53, https://www.academia.edu/2718523/DISBANDING_AND_REBUILDING_THE_IRAQI_ARMY_THE_HISTORICAL_PERSPECTIVE, pp. 43-47.

³²⁹ Stephen T. Hosmer, *Why the Iraqi Resistance to the Coalition Was So Weak* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2007/RAND_MG544.pdf, p. 35.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86.

³³¹ Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, p. 158.

³³² Amatzia Baram, "Who are the Insurgents?: Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq" (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr134.pdf>, pp. 3-6.

Saddam's elite units such as the Republican Guard and Fedayeen Saddam would have achieved much the same cleansing effect without the destruction of the entire military establishment.

These soldiers need not even be necessarily let go, but simply given new uniforms and integrated into the regular army. Keeping the military relatively in-tact and still employing most Sunni soldiers would have helped to alleviate Sunni fears that they were being sidelined, given a ready-available force to maintain law and order, and have kept the legitimacy of the military. While there still would have been problems with Shia fears of Sunnis officers and Sunnis feeling some humiliation at their lower prestige, these problems would be less worrisome than hundreds of thousands of angry veterans on the streets.

Government

The original plan for Iraq was to quickly hand over sovereignty to an Interim Iraqi Authority. This political body would govern Iraq until elections could be held and the United States' would be limited to a supporting role, similar to how the United States dealt with Afghanistan. There was, however, disagreement within the administration over this plan. The State Department was especially against this, thinking the United States should directly govern Iraq until it is stabilized and ready to be handed over to Iraqis. State's idea for direct control would gain momentum in the immediate aftermath of the war, when Iraq turned out to be much more chaotic and in disrepair than previously thought.³³³ This need to establish stability was the rational for the decision to give ORHA's replacement, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), "all executive, legislative and judicial authority necessary to achieve its objectives."³³⁴ Iraqi politicians were placed in an advisory role in the form of the Iraqi Governing Council.

³³³ Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism*, pp. 401-413.

³³⁴ *CPA Regulation Order Number 1*, (Baghdad, Iraq: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2003).

Another issue with establishing an interim government right away was the lack of legitimacy the exiles had. Out of the seven most prominent exiled leaders (whom Bremer would come to call the G-7), only one was an Arab Sunni, creating the impression that such a government run by exiles would be a Shia-only government.³³⁵ Yet even within the Shia community, there was resentment over these exiles that had fled to safety and now expected to come back to Iraq as leaders when they did not share in the suffering of the people.³³⁶ Muqtada al-Sadr, whose father was killed for speaking against Saddam in the 1990s, would become a powerful figure in the Shia community, in part because he was better able to connect with those that had suffered under Saddam.³³⁷ The exiles had also been unable or unwilling to recruit more members for an interim government that had such experience. This legitimacy problem would lead to the decision to create a larger 25-member Iraq Governing Council (IGC) on July 13.³³⁸ The composition of the council was based on ethnicity and religion, with the number of members that each group had based on that group's size within Iraq's population. While understandable that the United States would want everyone to be represented, this membership based on ethnicity and religiosity had the side effect of encouraging the hardening of sectarian identity, as one could only be represented as a Sunni citizen, not just as an Iraqi.

Throughout the IGC's term, the council would be frequently criticized, especially by Bremer. When it was suggested in September 2003 that the United States hand over sovereignty to the IGC Bremer protested saying, "Those people couldn't organize a parade, let alone run a country."³³⁹ The IGC had trouble coming to a consensus, to the point where instead of a single

³³⁵ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 45-46.

³³⁶ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near*, pp. 92, 273, 321-322.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 156-159, 172-175, 184-187

³³⁸ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 43, 89, 99.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

president the council had a rotating presidency between nine members.³⁴⁰ The IGC was criticized for not coming up with policy, not hiring enough staffers, frequently missing meetings, and being generally incompetent.³⁴¹ Ali Allawi, an exile that served as the Minister of Trade and later Defense in the transitional government, admitted that the exiles were not prepared for governing, saying “the reality was that Iraqi exiles had been mainly concerned with the political arrangements and structures through which they would assume or inherit power, not with the actual task of running the country on a day-to-day basis.”³⁴²

Yet, at the same time, with the real power being vested in the Coalition Provisional Authority, there was little incentive for the Iraqi politicians to invest much time and energy into governing. In a meeting with Ibrahim al-Jaafari, one of the members and rotating presidents of the IGC, Bremer complained about the performance of the Council, to which Jaafari countered, “If the Council is weak you have no one to blame but yourself...we cannot expect the council to act responsibly if it doesn’t have the authority.”³⁴³ Giving more powers to the Iraqis and setting up the council more like an actual transitional government, with a prime minister and legislative body, might have encouraged greater enthusiasm among its members and given the transitional leaders greater credibility at a time when many Iraqis were suspicious of any government created by America.

The original transition plan envisioned by Bremer would be a two year process where the United States would slowly grant increasing sovereignty to Iraq. However, both the administration’s and the Iraqi population’s aversion to a long-term occupation would destroy these plans. Ayatollah Sistani also demanded elections as soon as possible and delivered a fatwa

³⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 123-124.

³⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 171, 189, 194-195.

³⁴² Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, p. 96.

³⁴³ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, p. 201.

that any constitution had to be written by elected officials.³⁴⁴ This would cause Bremer and the United States to announce on November 15 a transition plan that would create a transitional constitution and government by June 28, 2004. At that time, the United States officially ended its occupation of Iraq.³⁴⁵

In January 2005 a transitional National Assembly was elected. However, many Sunnis had boycotted the election and those who may not have wanted to participate in the boycott were intimidated from doing so due to insurgent threats against polling stations. As a result, Sunni Arabs, which made up around 20% of the country, won just 17 seats on the 275-seat Assembly, or 6.2%. During the drafting of the 2005 constitution, Sunni members of the National Assembly complained that they were not included in backroom negotiations, leading to the Sunnis withdrawing from the constitutional committee on August 28.³⁴⁶ Due to fears that they would be marginalized by the Shia majority, the Sunnis voted heavily against the constitution but were unable to get the required two-thirds “No” votes in three provinces.³⁴⁷

The constitution would be criticized by outside analysts, who said that there was too much vagueness in some articles, such as how much power the central government had and how exactly oil revenues would be distributed.³⁴⁸ It should be noted though that Iraq has, in some cases, intentionally kept language vague as a compromise. For example, how exactly Islam should influence laws is up for interpretation. The constitution says that “No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam.” However, there are other stipulations in the constitution that potentially contradict this such as, “No law may be enacted that contradicts the

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 94, 97-98, 163-164, 189-190, 210-214.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 231, 241, 392-395.

³⁴⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, pp. 142-144.

³⁴⁷ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2011), p. 3.

³⁴⁸ Feisal Amin Istrabadi, “A Constitution without Constitutionalism: Reflections on Iraq's Failed Constitutional Process,” *Articles by Maurer Faculty* 87 (2009): pp. 1628-1655, <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3361&context=facpub>.

principles of democracy.”³⁴⁹ This stipulation was written by the Sunnis and secular Shias to ensure that a de-facto Shia Islamic republic was not created.³⁵⁰ It is also important to remember that the American constitution also has vague and contradictory language. Whether this affects the stability of the country depends in large part on the effectiveness of the political process after the constitution is written.

In December 2005, elections were held for the first four-year term government. In order to fix the imbalance of the January election and encourage Sunnis to vote, 230 of the 275-seat Council of Representatives was allocated based on population, ensuring that there would be a more even split of seats.³⁵¹ Most insurgent organizations did not threaten polling stations and in some cases even provided protection; with Al-Qaeda being the major exception.³⁵² With many Sunnis viewing their boycott of the January elections as a mistake, Sunni participation would be much higher in this round of elections, and it showed in the results. Sunni parties won 44 seats in the Council of Representatives, equating to 16% of the total.³⁵³

By 2006, despite early struggles, the United States had successfully brought about a democracy in Iraq that represented everyone. While tensions still remained, past compromises and the Sunnis’ realization that they needed to engage with the political system were significant progress in creating a unified Iraq. Throughout this process, America had served as a mediator, pushing sides to compromise and helping to find common ground. These efforts would lay the ground work for ending the insurgency which, by 2006, threatened to turn into all-out civil war.

³⁴⁹ Iraq Const. art. 2, § 1.

³⁵⁰ Paul Bremer and Malcolm McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, pp. 292-296.

³⁵¹ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 2011, pp. 4-11.

³⁵² Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, pp. 137-142, 164-167, 217-220.

³⁵³ Meghan L. O’Sullivan and Razzaq Al-Saiedi, *Choosing an Election System: Iraq’s Three Electoral Experiments, Their Results, and Their Political Implications* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Kennedy School, 2010), p. 19, Table B.

The Anbar Awakening

The biggest turning point in the Iraq War was the so-called “Anbar Awakening” from 2006 to 2007. The Awakening occurred in the “Sunni Triangle” in western Iraq. The various Sunni tribes in this region, which had previously been a part of the insurgency, allied with the central government to fight Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which had become the largest insurgent organization in the country. The tribes would switch their allegiance for a variety of reasons. Some would do so to revenge a relative killed by AQI. Others would revolt because of Al-Qaeda’s brutal policies. Others would fight due to Al-Qaeda diminishing their own power. Al-Qaeda believed the tribal system to be un-Islamic and sought to replace it with an Islamic form of government, with tribal leaders often left out. All of these motivations would come together to bring about a general antipathy towards Al-Qaeda and a re-evaluation of the new Iraqi government.³⁵⁴

The government was able to win the majority of the population’s support because, simply put, the government offered a better deal than Al-Qaeda. Regular civilians could escape from Al-Qaeda’s brutal regime and tribal leaders saw greater potential for positions of power in the government’s political system than under Al-Qaeda. While officials both in the Iraqi government and American military were hesitant to ally with former enemies, the very fact that tribal leaders were able to negotiate helped to attract tribal loyalties. Al-Qaeda, when confronted with rebellion among its tribal allies, used violence and intimidation rather than diplomacy.³⁵⁵ Thus, leaders in the Sunni Triangle were faced with a choice between an organization that increasingly diminished their power while threatening them if they did not accept their place, and a

³⁵⁴ Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory*, pp. 106-108, 127, 142-143; and Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II*, pp. 46, 55, 66, 70-72.

³⁵⁵ Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory*, p. 127; and Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II*, pp. 67-68.

government which was offering positions as leaders of their community and, perhaps in the future, even on the national stage.³⁵⁶

The United States would be integral to this Awakening, with the U.S. spending \$370 million to employ around 100,000 Sunni militiamen, called the “Sons of Iraq”.³⁵⁷ The United States would also help to smooth relations between tribal leaders and government officials.³⁵⁸ After the Awakening tribal fighters were either integrated into the police, or given civil service jobs. Tribal leaders participated in elections, winning various positions within both the local and national government.³⁵⁹ With greater security also came U.S. reconstruction contracts, which both Anbar’s population and its leaders benefitted from.

The Anbar Awakening seemed to be a success for nation-building. Yes, the United States had made several mistakes during its year of occupation that had exacerbated tensions between the Sunnis and Shias. However, despite these mistakes, the Anbar Awakening showed the creating a representative political system allows the government to take advantage of insurgent mistakes. The political system that the U.S. helped bring about gave the tribes an avenue for negotiation and cooperation against a common enemy. Just as in their efforts to create a democracy, Americans had served a pivotal role in both financing the Awakening and serving as mediators to ensure negotiations went smoothly. While the insurgency would never fully end, violence would dramatically decrease from 2008 to 2012 as former insurgents now worked with the government rather than fighting it.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁶ Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory*, pp. 108-109, 129, 130; and Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II*, p. 101.

³⁵⁷ *Learning from Iraq*, (Washington, DC: Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, 2013), p. 100.

³⁵⁸ Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory*, pp. 134-135.

³⁵⁹ Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory*, p. 165; and Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy S. McWilliams, eds., *Al-Anbar Awakening Volume II*, p. 101.

³⁶⁰ Michael E. O’Hanlon and Ian S. Livingston, *Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction & Security in Post-Saddam Iraq* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, January 31, 2011), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/index20110131.pdf>, pp. 3-5.

Rise of the Islamic State

The sectarian politics of Prime Minister Maliki's administration (2006-2014) would ultimately cause a reversal of progress. In the run up to the 2010 elections, over 500 candidates were disqualified for being ex-Baathists, with Sunni parties disproportionately affected.³⁶¹ In what would be described as a "difficult" and "strained" meeting, the U.S. Ambassador would attempt to convince Maliki to take steps to moderate de-Baathification, saying that the disqualifications looked politically motivated. Maliki countered that the disqualified candidates were treated fairly, that Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq was secretly a hardline Baathist, and "dismissed the risk of any political crisis."³⁶²

When Ayad Allawi's Iraq National Movement (INM) coalition, which included many of the Sunni political parties, won the most seats in the Council of Representatives, it was thought that Allawi would be able to form a new government. However, the Supreme Court determined that a coalition could form after the election and combine their votes, which allowed the Shia coalitions to overtake Allawi's INM. Although a power-sharing arrangement was devised in which the INM obtained ten ministerial posts, many Sunnis viewed the election as a defeat taken from the jaws of victory. To the Sunnis, they had rightfully won the election but were denied due to the Shia banding together against them.³⁶³

At the same time, the INM had won 91 seats, or 28% of the total.³⁶⁴ These numbers also do not include Sunnis who were a part of other smaller coalitions. Thus, the Sunnis were fairly

³⁶¹ Embassy Baghdad, "De-Baathification by the Numbers," Wikileaks Cable: 10BAGHDAD222_a, Dated January 28, 2010, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10BAGHDAD222_a.html; Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 2011, pp. 10-11; and Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, *A Bitter Legacy*, p. 20.

³⁶² Embassy Baghdad, "Ambassador Presses Al-Maliki on Al-Mutlaq Disqualification," Wikileaks Cable: 10BAGHDAD92_a, Dated January 13, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10BAGHDAD92_a.html.

³⁶³ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 2014, pp. 6-11; and Carter Malkasian, *Illusions of Victory: The Anbar Awakening and the Rise of the Islamic State*, p. 168.

³⁶⁴ Meghan L. O'Sullivan and Razzaq Al-Saiedi, *Choosing an Election System*, pp. 25-26, Table C.

represented in Iraq's legislature. If the Shia and the Maliki administration in particular moderated de-Baathification and continued to ensure Sunnis were part of the post-Saddam political system, conflict could be avoided. Unfortunately, this did not occur.

Persecution would increase in the next two years as Maliki sought to increase his power by promoting his allies, who tended to be Shia, and persecuting his enemies, who tended to be Sunni. This was due to his constant fear of a Sunni coup. Former Iraqi Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad recalled that, "More than once, I would meet with him, and he would tell me about elaborate conspiratorial plots on the part of Sunni Arab leaders and former Baathists, who, he alleged, were scheming to take power."³⁶⁵ In a 2009 cable, then U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker argued that Maliki's attitude toward the Sunni population is "deeply informed by the Shi'a historical experience."³⁶⁶ As described earlier, the Sunnis have historically been the leaders of Iraq, to the detriment of the Shia. Thus, while Maliki faced opposition from both the Shia and the Sunnis, he needed to pay particular attention to his Sunni opponents as they were arguably more motivated to enact a coup.

This paranoia caused Maliki to distrust much of Iraq's military and intelligence leadership. Sunni military officers were increasingly marginalized, especially in the higher ranks. In 2013, 11 of the 14 division commanders were Shia and all of the regional commands, which oversee these divisions, were led by Shias.³⁶⁷ Maliki also created the Office of the Commander in Chief (OCINC), which allowed him to circumvent the regular chain of command and give orders directly to field commanders. The OCINC is dominated by the Shia, with only four of its

³⁶⁵ Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey Through a Turbulent World*, p. 268.

³⁶⁶ Embassy Baghdad, "PM Maliki: Strengthened Center or Emerging Strongman?," Wikileaks Cable: 09BAGHDAD379_a, Dated February 13, 2009, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAGHDAD379_a.html.

³⁶⁷ Marisa Sullivan, *Maliki's Authoritarian Regime*, Middle East Security Report 10 (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2013), p. 18.

twenty-four members being Sunni.³⁶⁸

The National Police were also affected. In the city of Samarra for example, a list of successful candidates for the National Police was submitted in which 60% of the new officers would be Shia and 40% Sunni. Created by a Sunni officer, the list was meant to reflect the demographics of the city. However, the list was changed by the central government so that 87% of the incoming officers were Shia.

On December 19, 2011, an arrest warrant was issued for Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, accusing him of assassinating political opponents. Hashimi was in Kurdistan at the time and was thus beyond the reach of the central government in Baghdad. The arrest warrant and later trial in absentia was called politically motivated by Hashimi's allies. After Hashimi moved to Turkey, Interpol placed a warrant for his arrest but later retracted it after evidence given by the Iraqi government "lacked quality."³⁶⁹

On December 20, 2012, Sunni Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi's entire security detail was arrested. This event would set off months of protests, as the arrests were seen as the last straw of a long list of Sunnis arrested for supposed terrorism.³⁷⁰ As Hamid Ahmed said in a speech in Fallujah, "It was Hashimi first. Essawi now. Who knows who it will be next? The conspiracy against the Sunnis will never stop. We will not keep silent for this."³⁷¹

On April 23, 2013, the Iraqi Security Forces raided a protest camp in the city of Hawija in northern Iraq, leading to the deaths of 40 civilians and three ISF officers. In response Sunnis

³⁶⁸ Embassy Baghdad, "Maliki Reshapes the National Security Sector," Wikileaks Cable: 07BAGHDAD1593_a, Dated May 15, 2007, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/07BAGHDAD1593_a.html.

³⁶⁹ "INTERPOL cancels Red Notice against Iraq's former VP – Al Hashimi," *Middle East Monitor*, February 8, 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140208-interpol-cancels-red-notice-against-iraqs-former-vp-al-hashimi/>.

³⁷⁰ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/53d62d684.pdf>, p. 16.

³⁷¹ Duraïd Adnan and Tim Arango, "Arrest of a Sunni Minister's Bodyguards Prompts Protests in Iraq," *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/22/world/middleeast/arrest-of-al-essawis-bodyguards-prompts-protests-in-iraq.html>.

attacked and briefing occupied government checkpoints and buildings.³⁷² Sectarian tensions would increase even more when the government arrested Iraq parliamentarian Ahmed al-Alwani. This would result in a gunfight which killed 17 officers, Alwani's brother, and several of Alwani's bodyguards.³⁷³ On December 30, the government would attempt to break up a protest camp in Ramadi that would lead to fighting between tribal forces and the government. This in-fighting would allow the Islamic State, which had formally been established in April 2013, the ability to take territory in Ramadi and Fallujah just a couple days later.³⁷⁴

Politically, the protests would cause forty-four Sunni members of the Council of Representatives to resign.³⁷⁵ The 2014 elections for the Council of Representatives would see the Sunnis politically fragmented and result in a victory of only 53 seats, compared to the 91 seats in the 2010 election.³⁷⁶ The Sunnis had, for the most part, disengaged from politics and were instead voicing their frustrations on the battlefield. As Hashimi would explain, "Al Qaeda, the extremists, enjoyed this changing of identity of the youngest of the Sunni communities. They tried to recruit more of them. All of them were angry, frustrated, and lost hope in the political process, in democratic peace."³⁷⁷ During the protests, the United States had taken a largely passive role. The Obama administration reportedly did not put heavy pressure on Maliki to

³⁷² "Iraqi Sunni protest clashes in Hawija leave many dead," *Associated Press*, April 23, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-22261422>; and "Iraq: Parliament Report Alleges Officials Ordered Raid," *Human Rights Watch*, May 4, 2013, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/04/iraq-parliament-report-alleges-officials-ordered-raid>.

³⁷³ Dexter Filkins, "What We Left Behind," *The New Yorker*, April 21, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/28/what-we-left-behind>; and Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 2014, p. 19.

³⁷⁴ Michael Knights, "The ISIL's Stand in the Ramadi-Falluja Corridor," *CTC Sentinel*, 7, no. 5 (2014): pp. 8-12, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-isils-stand-in-the-ramadi-falluja-corridor/>.

³⁷⁵ Dexter Filkins, "What We Left Behind."

³⁷⁶ Kenneth Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 2014, pp. 20-21.

³⁷⁷ Priyanka Boghani, "In Their Own Words: Sunnis on Their Treatment in Maliki's Iraq," *Frontline*, October 28, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/in-their-own-words-sunnis-on-their-treatment-in-malikis-iraq/>.

reform.³⁷⁸ This was largely due to the protests being viewed as an internal matter and not cause for serious concern. By the time the U.S. realized how serious the situation had become, the Islamic State had already gained a strong foothold in the country.

Conclusion

Soon after America captured Baghdad, a crowd gathered in Firdos Square around a statue of Saddam. The Iraqis hit it with sledgehammers and tied a rope around it to try and bring it down, but were unsuccessful. After a few hours it seemed as if it would never come down; but then an American M88 recovery vehicle arrived on the scene. Attaching a chain to the neck of the statue, the vehicle easily pulled it down. Two months later, a replacement statue was erected. Made out of plaster and painted green to look as if it was aged bronze, by 2013 the statue's paint was fading away and parts of it had broken off. The toppling of the Saddam statue was an iconic moment in the invasion, being seen as symbolic of the struggles of Iraq to depose Saddam and the ease with which America would eventually do so. Yet its replacement statue is just as symbolic. Built with cheap materials in order to be completed quickly, it was painted to look like something greater than it actually was. The flaws in its construction would become ever clearer as time went on, before finally being taken down in 2013.³⁷⁹

Like the Firdos Square statue, nation-building in Iraq had at first seemed a success. While creating a new government had been difficult, the Anbar Awakening seemed to show that what America had helped to bring about was worth the effort. Although flawed, the government of Iraq offered a better alternative than what the Al-Qaeda insurgents were promising. Yet it was

³⁷⁸ *Frontline*, "Losing Iraq," Season 2014 Episode 13, Directed by Michael Kirk, PBS, July 28, 2014, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/losing-iraq/>, 1:05:00-1:21:00.

³⁷⁹ Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*, pp. 123-125; and Larisa Epatko, "Then and Now: What Replaced the Toppled Saddam Statue?," *PBS Newshour*, Aug. 26, 2010, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/saddam-statue>.

only a temporary victory. While Iraq seemed to be stable after the Awakening, cracks soon emerged that proved America had not been as successful in creating a unified nation as previously thought. Whether the initial mistakes made by the American occupation or those made by Iraqis themselves is more to blame is debatable, and in either case there is likely to be blame on both sides. What Iraq shows though is the difficulties involved in nation-building in a country where long-held divisions exist. If these divisions did not exist, Iraq might very well have been a success. However, because they did, every mistake and miscalculation made by the occupation was intensified by existing tensions. Iraq has become the nation-building example of "winning the battle but losing the war." America's efforts helped stop the initial conflict, but would lead to an even bigger conflict that ultimately puts the future stability of the country into question.

The fake bronze statue in Firdos Square would be replaced by an actual bronze monument that is three times as tall.³⁸⁰ Whether this new statue will represent Iraq after the defeat of the Islamic State is yet to be seen.

³⁸⁰ "New Artwork to Replace Iraq's Iconic Saddam Statue," *Arab News*, September 6, 2013, <https://www.arabnews.com/new-artwork-replace-iraq%E2%80%99s-iconic-saddam-statue>.

FINAL ANALYSIS

The first aspect in evaluating nation-building is the final result of the case studies. In South Vietnam, the country was invaded by the North just two years after the U.S. withdrawal. In El Salvador, the conflict ultimately ended with a peace deal. In Iraq, despite an initial victory in 2008, by 2014 the insurgency had revived even stronger than before. Afghanistan is still in conflict, though recent peace talks suggest that the war will eventually end in a draw. Thus, out of the four case studies, two are failures (Vietnam and Iraq) and two can be considered draws (El Salvador and Afghanistan).

The most successful counterinsurgency America has been involved in was in El Salvador. If one measures success by the primary objective of America's leaders, which were the prevention of a Communist government rather than necessarily the destruction of the rebel forces, then it would be considered a victory. El Salvador also only cost about \$4 billion in total which even with inflation would be less than \$10 billion.³⁸¹ Compare this to Vietnam, where just economic assistance cost over \$8.5 billion, which would equate to around \$64 billion in 2019.³⁸² The U.S. spent \$60.64 billion on reconstruction in Iraq by 2013 and Afghanistan reconstruction has cost \$132.5 billion by July 2019.³⁸³ Thus, out of the four case studies, El Salvador not only had the best result, but also used the least amount of money. However, El Salvador had already had a relatively effective government with an established security force and developed infrastructure. Thus, it did not require the level of reconstruction or development that Vietnam,

³⁸¹ Jacqueline L. Hazelton, *Take the Money and Run*, p. 56; and "January 1985 compared with August 2019," CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=1&year1=198501&year2=201908>.

³⁸² Douglas C. Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955-1975*, p. 200, Table 10.2; and "January 1968 compared with August 2019," CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl?cost1=1.00&year1=196801&year2=201908>.

³⁸³ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress* (Arlington, VA: SIGAR, 2019), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2019-07-30qr.pdf>, p. 39.

Afghanistan, and Iraq required.

In none of the cases was America fully able to transform the state it was involved in. Progress was made to varying degrees, but in only one instance was the host-nation able to convince the rebel forces to lay down their arms, which was Iraq during the Anbar Awakening. Yet even this proved temporary and was as much due to Al-Qaeda's mistakes as Iraq's successes. El Salvador eventually had a negotiated peace, but this was not a case where the government solved its core problems and convinced the rebel forces to lay down its arms. El Salvador was only able to make transformative changes when both sides realized that victory was not possible. Nation-building might have contributed to this by convincing some of those peasants who were on the fence to join the government, or at least not actively support the insurgency, but to what extent is not fully known. Vietnam, if the statistics are true, seems to have made significant progress, but whether this would have led to a victory under different circumstances is unknown as ultimately the country was conquered through conventional means. Afghanistan is the worst performing case study as after 18 years it has still not been able to dampen its internal problems.

The biggest issue with nation-building is that it requires the consent of the nation. The very fact that there is an insurgency shows that there are deeply ingrained problems with that society. Those problems often have one side benefitting and others losing, causing resistance to change. If there was great enthusiasm for changing the system, there would hardly be a need for an American presence.

There is also the fact that America is not interested in occupying a country to bring about needed reform. If America had taken direct control over Vietnam and, for example, built the Strategic Hamlets by itself and instituted the 1970 land reform bill ten years earlier, maybe the

Viet Cong would have died out in the early 1960s. However, America does not like to directly control a country's affairs like a colonial power. Even during the occupation of Iraq, there was pressure for the occupation to end quickly, both by Americans and Iraqis.

One could make the argument that if America had applied more pressure, such as threatening to retract aid if certain reform were not met, there would be greater success. However, there also is not much evidence that America is capable of successfully pressuring a country to bring about such change. Even when America is the primary benefactor, such as in El Salvador, foreign governments tend to have a limit on how much they will reform and how quickly. Yet even a limited amount of reform could be useful. If America had applied more pressure on the Iraq government after the Anbar Awakening, while sectarian tensions would still exist, perhaps those tensions would not have risen to the point of armed conflict. In the future, a quid-pro-quo policy of reforms for development aid could lead to better results, at least in some cases.

Overall, it is the conclusion of this paper that nation-building during wartime is of limited effectiveness. Devoting serious resources to it as some have suggested, is likely not to lead to a remarkable change in results. This does not mean that nation-building as a defense policy is useless. Successful nation-building does not necessarily mean outright victory. In many cases it will mean a negotiated settlement; which may be the same as victory as long as it achieves lasting peace and stability. The goal being that the government can be reformed enough so that either the insurgents view that government as tolerable to negotiate with, or the more moderate portions of the insurgency stop fighting. A similar goal has been proposed in the "Stakeholder-centric" counterinsurgency strategy, in which the objective is to create the political environment

for negotiations between the warring parties rather than for one to outright defeat the other.³⁸⁴

While such a strategy will not prove successful in every context, the mindset that nation-building's purpose is to create the foundation for change rather than to completely fix that society's ills is a better representation of what nation-building offers.

³⁸⁴ Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Karsten Friis, and Harald Håvoll, *Revising COIN: The Stakeholder Centric Approach*, Working Paper 810 (Oslo, Norway: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2012), <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/155879/WP-810-Reichborn-Kjennerud-Friis-H%C3%A5voll.pdf>.

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