

Contradictions of Counter-Insurgency and Peacebuilding: The Canadian Stabilization Efforts in Kandahar

Nathalie Labonté

Executive Summary

The Canadian intervention in Kandahar from 2005 to 2011 has mainly been based on the concept of stabilization. This is particularly true from 2009 to 2011. Stabilization had some successes in Kandahar. It also had important challenges. Contradictions remain to ensure best implementation on the ground. This article is based on firsthand experience in the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) and the Dand District Forward Operating Base (FOB). Using Kandahar as a case example, the author aims to provide policy recommendations to the Canadian Government to increase the effectiveness of future stabilization operations.

Introduction

The Canadian intervention in Kandahar from 2005 to 2011 was somewhat successful in improving the security of Afghans. The Key Village Approach used by General Vance in 2009 attracted the attention of NATO forces. The concept was later used for further military Canadian and American stabilization operations until 2011. Despite successes, important challenges remain to improve its effectiveness. The author starts by defining the concept of stabilization. She then describes successes and challenges of stabilization and concludes by formulating policy recommendations.

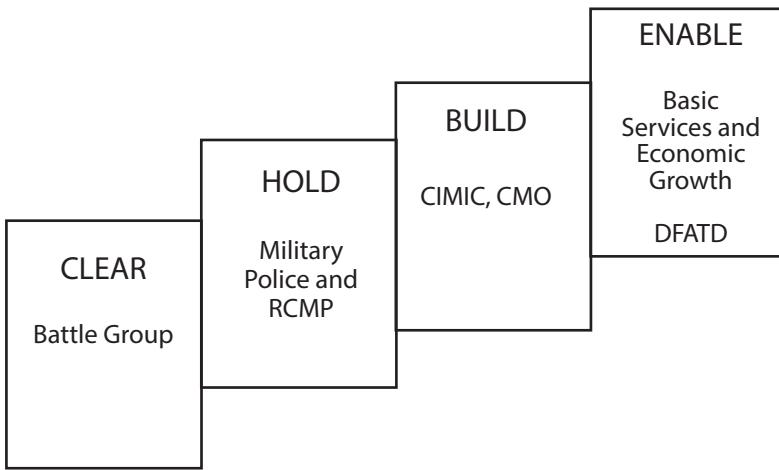
The Stabilization Concept

Stabilization efforts in Kandahar started in the summer 2009. The military operation was nicknamed OP KALAY, meaning the 'Key Village Approach'. Deployment of troops focused on the Deh-E-Bagh village in Dand district and other villages in the south.

The concept of stabilization was based from the Counter Insurgency Doctrine (COIN). It aimed to stabilize key villages near Kandahar City within a 90-day cycle. These villages had traditionally been used by the insurgency to infiltrate the city. The cycle included a one-week clear phase, with the rest of the 90 days devoted to intensive reconstruction programs. After 90 days, the stabilized communities, in partnership with the Afghan

National Security Forces (ANSF), were supposed to have developed the motivation and capacity to defend themselves against anti- government forces. The approach to civil-military coordination on the ground was first implemented by posting Civilian Stabilization Officers in the districts of Dand and Panjwayi. The operating concept was later redefined to better take into consideration stabilization efforts of U.S. and Canadian civilian public servants (see figure 1 below).

FIGURE 1: OPERATIONALIZATION OF STABILIZATION



Stabilization Of Kandahar Province: Successes And Remaining Challenges

From 2009 to 2011, the Canadian presence in Kandahar proved to have great successes. The Canadian Government increased its contacts and understanding of the political dynamics at the District Level, mainly through the Canadian Civilian Stabilization Officers posted in the district of Dand (2008-2010) and Panjwayi (2009-2010), as well as the arrival in 2009 of U.S. Civilian Stabilization Officers in the districts of Panjwayi, Arghandab, Spin Boldack, Zhari, and Maywand.

Through Weekly and Monthly District Reports implemented in 2009-2010, Stabilization Officers reported on the economic, political, and cultural dynamics driving conflict. These reports shed light on the local population's needs-based grievances. It is however quite

paradoxical that this information started to be gathered more formally at the district-level only in 2009 while Canada assumed leadership and command of the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT) in August 2005.

Efforts were made in 2006 to develop a reporting mechanism including political, social and economic information (PMESII), however no common civil-military reporting structure was created before 2009.¹ Further, the military information gathering plan mostly focused on localizing and killing key insurgents, not on grievances from the local population. Better information on these grievances could have helped secure geographic territory.

Despite military operations to try to win the heart of the Afghans, the population's support towards NATO troops declined from 66% in March 2007 to 35% in February 2009. Afghan National Security Forces and NATO forces were unable to isolate innocents from insurgents.

There are a few factors explaining the reluctance of the population to locate insurgents. Among others, whistleblowers were subject to night letters and other forms of threats. Sometimes, death was the price to pay to cooperate with foreign troops. Further, kinetic activities did not contribute to developing strong ties with the local population. Indeed, stabilization efforts started with kinetic activities from the Battle Group (BG) to secure a strategic geographic area. The Canadian civil-military cooperation body of the Canadian military (CIMIC) had then to build trust with the Afghans. The Construction Management Office (CMO) was later sent to organize cash-for-work projects.² From an Afghan point of view, seeing a Canadian Corporal threatening to shoot their neighbour makes it difficult to trust a CIMIC or CMO Officer dressed with the same uniform.

Another factor that certainly did not help win over Afghans was the underestimation of the complex economic, political and cultural dynamics at play. Implementing sustainable economic projects targeting unemployment and the creation of appropriate education opportunities takes time.

¹ Called the 'Fusion Cell', this KPRT structure took information from all sources (battle group, CIMIC, CMO, CIDA, DFAIT, etc.) and integrated it in an encyclopedia-like data. The cell comprised of less than 10 Canadian militaries and was on a military system that was hardly accessible to civilians. The fusion cell was reorganized then the encyclopedia of information was not used by U.S. troops at their arrival (U.S. created its own fusion cell).

⁶ Note that CIMIC and CMO are composed of Canadian Military Officers.

Peter J. Williams describes the challenge:

Unlike kinetic activities, the results of non-kinetic action would often take much longer in producing desired outcomes or effects. While having completed the construction of a school is a great thing, its completion, in most cases, is not the desired effect. It is but a result. Until this empty building is staffed by teachers armed with a curriculum, populated by students, and sustained over time, we have not achieved any effect at all (2010).

This resulted on the ground by an enormous gap between the implementation of CIMIC/CMO projects and that of DFATD (CIDA and DFAIT). The lack of a quick funding mechanism available to Canadian Stabilization Officers³ also played a role, coupled with the lack of sustainability of CIMIC/CMO projects⁴ and the quick changing geographic scope of the military battle space.

Further, the planning cycle and culture of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) is quite different from the Department of National Defense (DND). While the policy planning and operations of the Canadian public service tend to be linear, the multiple levels of the military planning cycle (strategic, operational and tactical) happen simultaneously.⁵ This created another challenge. As an example, the Canadian military prepared District plans in January 2010. When they asked the civilians for input, it took such a long time that new district plans were written in the summer 2010.

Planning was definitely based on different methods, and so was information collection. Data gathering, dissemination, analysis, monitoring and evaluation of desired outcomes

³ The Kandahar Local Initiative Fund (KLIP) was not rapid enough to demonstrate quick results to the Afghans despite its 2M\$ approval authority from the ROCK. Further, the KLIP was not focused on the geographic battle space nor was it specific to Stabilization Officers. It was rather used by the Education, Health and Economic Growth Officers who were at the KPRT and did not have a specific understanding of stabilization efforts at the district/village level.

⁴ For example, CMO cash-for-work projects in Dand district created conflicts amongst communities because some of them did not have new infrastructure built compared to other villages.

⁵ As described by J.H. Vance, the operational level of war 'is the mechanisms, processes and command and control architecture that exist between the strategic and the tactical levels of war, with the strategic level consisting of military and political dimensions, and the tactical level consisting of the military units and formation engaged in battles.' See 'Tactics without strategy: Why the Canadian Forces Do not Campaign' by Colonel J.H. Vance, in *The Operational Art Canadian Perspectives. Context and Concepts*, Allan English, Daniel Gosselin, Howard Coombs and Laurence M. Hickey (ed.), (Kingston, ON: The Canadian Academy Press, 2005, p. 271-272.

and benchmarks were not collected systematically by all departments.⁶ Quarterly reports to Parliament⁷ included useful information on the progress of the mission in Kandahar. However, such information was collected by three different headquarters and field staff (DND, DFAIT and CIDA). Systematic dissemination of information across a variety of stakeholders was hindered by numerous incompatible computer systems and separate analysis cells at different levels (NATO, U.S., Canadian military at KPRT and KAF, DFAIT, CIDA, etc.).

Policy Recommendations

1. Planning Canadian Stabilization Efforts Effectively: It is recommended that a joint civil-military cell be created. Its mandate would be to gather information on conflict drivers, analyze, plan, operate, implement, monitor and evaluate Canadian stabilization and operations. The cell should be comprised of Defence officials, Canadian Diplomats, International Development Officers, Royal Canadian Military Police and Correctional Service Officers.

2. Bridging Gaps between Security and Development: It is recommended that Governance Capacity Assessments of national, provincial and district level governmental structures as well as economic, infrastructural, educational and health participatory assessments be done simultaneously with military planning in order to bridge existing timeline gaps. Further, it is recommended that a Stabilization Fund be established to give Canadian Stabilization Officers the authority to disburse funding towards stabilization projects meeting specific stabilization criteria.

3. Increased Effectiveness of Existing Mechanisms (Training): It is recommended that DFATD Officers deployed in conflict zones systematically learn about the military planning cycle. It is further recommended that Commission Officers (COs) and Non Commission Officers (NCOs) from all lines of operations (CIMIC, CMO, PSYOPs, Battle Group, etc.) systematically learn about social, political, cultural and economic conflict drivers, key dimensions of sustainable development, and links between security and development.

⁶ Benchmark is the civilian appellation. The military uses the Effects-Based Operations, as in the 21 May 2004 Canadian Forces Strategic Operating Concept.

⁷ See Quarterly Reports to Parliament: Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan, www.Afghanistan.gc.ca.

Conclusion

The Canadian stabilization experience in Kandahar has attracted attention from NATO officials and has proven to be an efficient way to plan joint civil-military operations based on the COIN doctrine. However, further integration between civilian public servants and the military at all levels is necessary to increase the effectiveness of future stabilization efforts. A common and broader definition of security must be adopted to include other aspects of conflict such as governance, rule of law, basic services (health, education, infrastructure, etc.) economic growth and employment. Let us hope that the chaotic situation in Iraq will not reproduce itself in Kandahar and Afghanistan after NATO troops leave.

Bibliography

Bercuson, David J., and Granatstein, J.L. *Lessons Learned? What Canada Should Learn about Afghanistan*. Calgary, AB: Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute, 2011.

"The Army's Afghan Secrets." 2013. *Blacklock's Reporter*. Last modified June 10 2013, <http://www.blacklocks.ca/canadians-corrupt-useless-secret-military-research/>

Department of National Defence, *Counter-insurgency Operations* (B-GL-323-004/FP-003). Ottawa: Government of Canada, 2008.

Collier, Paul, and Hoeffler, Anke. *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, Washington D.C.: The World Bank, 1999.

United States Army. *Counterinsurgency*. Washington: Department of the US Army, 2006.

Derriennic, Jean-Pierre. *Les guerres civiles*. Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des Sciences politiques, 2001.

Government of Canada. *History of Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan*. Canada: Government of Canada, 2013.

Gurr, Ted Robert. *Why men Rebel?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.

Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team (KPRT). *District Plans*. Kandahar: 2010.

Labonté, Nathalie. "Liens théoriques et pratiques: le mandat de l'ACDI, la doctrine anti terroriste canadienne et la résolution de conflit." Presentation at the Carleton University 20th Conflict Resolution Symposium, Ottawa, ON, 2010.

Lewis, Ken. *Canada's Revised COIN Strategy in Afghanistan*. Kandahar: Wikileaks, 2009.

Longhurst, Major Graham M. "The Evolution of Canadian Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC)." *Canadian Military Journal* (2006-2007): 55-64.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). *The OECD Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situation*. France: OECD, 2007.

Stabilization Officers. *KPRT Stabilization District Reports*. Kandahar: 2010.

Stewart, France. "Horizontal Inequalities as a cause of conflict: a review of CRISE findings." *Overview, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity 1* (2010): 1-39.

Vance, Colonel J.H. "Tactics Without Strategy: Why the Canadian Forces Do Not Campaign." *The Operational Art Canadian Perspectives: Context and Concepts*, Ed. Allan English and Daniel Gosselin, 271-292. Kingston ON: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005.

Williams, Peter J. "Being Effective in Snake Fighting Lessons for the Canadian Forces in Effects-Based Operations Era." *Canadian Military Journal* 10.4 (2010): 19-25.