

In for the Long Haul: Delivering Australian Aid to Afghanistan

The Key Take Away Messages From the Report:

1. COIN Strategy does not necessarily increase stability; development gains within such a strategy may in fact be short-term only and not sustainable.
2. The unequal distribution of aid, particularly in relation to the level of assistance being provided in the most insecure parts of the country, has 'penalised' those parts of the country considered more secure and stable. There is already anecdotal evidence to suggest that this has served to increase resentment towards the international community in the more stable parts of the country and could result in an increased level of insecurity in areas considered more secure and stable. This would lead us to the conclusion that a more equitable distribution of assistance would serve to both enhance security and generate the potential for longer term development gains.
3. Development that follows political and military objectives are problematic on a number of fronts: first, efforts that seek to extend the legitimacy and authority of a government viewed by Afghans as corrupt and illegitimate will themselves be viewed as favouring corruption and illegitimate leadership; the fall on effect is that those who deliver their assistance, by association become viewed as part of the problem rather than as part of the solution. Second, there becomes a blurring of distinctions between the notion of aid based on need and aid based on political gains. Third, in many respects Afghanistan is not a country but pockets of tribal and ethnic interests. Efforts to extend a central authority that in the best of circumstances has historically had limited reach and authority is likely to fail without an equally strong effort to build local capacity and civil society.
4. Development agendas from a whole of government perspective must be equally considered in relation to military-political-development objectives. In truth, COIN is a military strategy and this strategy has largely defined Australia's whole of government response towards Afghanistan in the past.
5. If we wish to make a difference, we must, as an international community, be in Afghanistan for the long haul and support sustainable development, governance and rule of law. And in this, we need to remember that in Afghanistan, top down approaches to development will fail. In an environment characterised by distrust towards central and provincial authority, it is the grass roots that will likely be key drivers for change, development and security. NGOs—both international and local—have a key role to play in supporting civil society.
6. Practically, it is recommended that:
 - Australia's overseas development assistance to Uruzgan Province should be capped. Uruzgan Province is not representative of Afghanistan.

- Robust monitoring and evaluation systems for assistance delivered by military and non-military stakeholders should be developed.
- The Office of Development Effectiveness should complete a review of Australia's aid assistance to Afghanistan.