

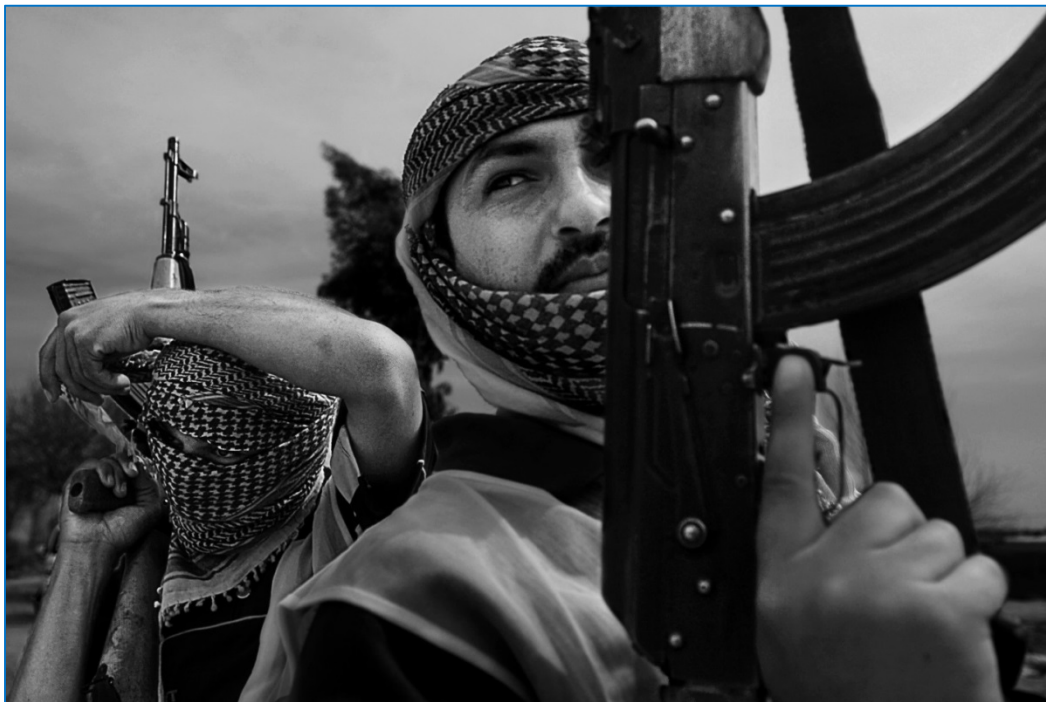
# Risky Business:

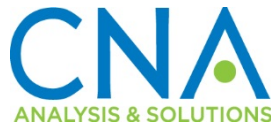
## The Future of Civil Defense Forces and Counterterrorism in an Era of Persistent Conflict

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October 2014





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**Approved by:**

**October 2014**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JSchroden'.

Jonathan Schroden, Director  
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## Preface

Since 9/11, the United States has invested billions of dollars in training and equipping foreign security forces to fight terrorist and insurgent groups abroad. Despite considerable effort and expense (including thousands of U.S. lives lost), raising military and police forces in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Mali has yielded decidedly lackluster results. As a result, there is growing recognition that the application of traditional security sector reform efforts to combat asymmetric threats such as terrorist groups in fragile or failed states is proving to be slow, cumbersome, and in some instances counterproductive. Moreover, in an era of shrinking defense budgets, a purely top-down, state-centric approach has become too costly and politically contentious to sustain on a large scale.

The Obama administration’s national security guidance for the future makes clear that large-scale stability operations will be avoided, and instead smaller-footprint, “by, with, and through” approaches will be favored.<sup>1</sup> While there is no question that security assistance, including training of friendly militaries, will remain a cornerstone of U.S. strategy going forward, the current shift away from large-scale state building means that smarter, more agile solutions must be developed to counter asymmetric threats in failed states or “ungoverned areas.”

Non-state security actors are a common feature of societies experiencing extended conflict. The U.S. military’s tentative successes with pro-government civil defense forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have popularized community-based security solutions, and suggest that under the right set of circumstances, locally recruited irregulars—alongside air strikes and drones, special operations forces, and intelligence operatives—could play a significant role in achieving U.S. counterterrorism and stability objectives in more streamlined and cost-effective ways. Indeed, current efforts in Iraq by the United States and its coalition partners to “destroy” the Islamic State are using exactly this template.

Because of the inherent dangers involved in working with non-statutory armed groups, the creation or co-option of less-than-official defense forces remains

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<sup>1</sup> See: Department of Defense’s Defense Strategic Guidance document titled “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense,” January 2012.

extraordinarily controversial. This paper examines the prospects and pitfalls of utilizing civil defense forces as part of a broader, small-footprint, “by, with, and through” strategy to combat terrorist, insurgent, or transnational criminal groups. Ultimately, we hope this effort will help policy-makers and operators understand whether, when, and how the United States should partner with non-statutory armed groups in an era of terrorism and persistent conflict.

## Executive Summary

Today, the United States faces terrorist threats from a number of militant groups operating from weak or failed states. Over the course of the last decade, the U.S. has become highly effective at killing their leaders and disrupting their operations through raids and airstrikes, sometimes working alongside foreign security forces to do so. However, efforts to further degrade and permanently dismantle these organizations and their support networks have been less successful. As a result, terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and its affiliates, the Taliban, al Shabab, and now the Islamic State, remain largely intact and continue to threaten the United States and its interests abroad.

While the panoply of extremist groups threatening U.S. interests, allies, and partners today may be labeled “terrorist organizations” for political and even legal expedience, in scope and scale they are remarkably similar to the insurgent groups the United States fought against in Iraq and Afghanistan. Groups such as the Islamic State, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Shabab, and Boko Haram have local political objectives and depend on the population for support. They embed themselves into vulnerable communities and then use these sanctuaries to recruit and launch attacks against the government. As such, it is little wonder the application of limited counterterrorism approaches to these groups has had disappointing results.

Given the continued use of under-governed areas by terrorist groups as safe havens and the recent propensity of some of these groups to seize additional territory, along with the shortcomings of many state counterterrorism partners, it is increasingly clear that in some instances, the United States will require new kinds of partnerships on the ground—perhaps with sub-state groups who have an immediate and vested interest in defeating these militant organizations.

This report examines the potential role of irregular, non-statutory, civil defense forces (CDFs) in future U.S. counterterrorism and small-footprint stability operations. In it, we analyze twelve historical case studies of the use of similar forces in Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey, Oman, Pakistan, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Our aim in doing so was to help us understand if, when, and how these types of groups could be employed in the security environment of the future as part of a broader counterterrorism toolkit.

Our case studies identified a number of opportunities and challenges associated with the employment of CDFs in states confronted by serious and sustained internal armed opposition. While our analysis suggests CDFs can initially be an effective tool against asymmetric groups which require the support or acquiescence of local populations, their autonomous nature and myriad vulnerabilities also make CDFs difficult to employ and then demobilize successfully.

According to the cases examined, CDFs offer several benefits, as shown in the table below. Because they are cheaper and easier to stand up than formal police and army units, they can quickly provide sufficient numbers of men to secure at-risk communities. In general, they have knowledge of the local population, networks, and geography that outside forces take years to develop. Moreover, as these groups are protecting their families and are beholden to their communities, they tend to be more motivated and less corrupt than many state security forces. In several cases, self-defense groups that were overseen by competent state authorities provided channels through which states could (re)introduce public services into isolated areas where they previously had little or no presence. Such groups also tended to deplete the potential recruiting pool for insurgent groups and terrorists.

Lessons from civil defense force case studies

| <i>Advantages of utilizing CDFs</i>   | <i>Pitfalls of utilizing CDFs</i>  |
|---|--|
| Are cheaper and easier to stand up than formal police and army units  | Can be unreliable, difficult to control, and capable of undermining government authority if not properly managed |
| Can quickly provide sufficient numbers of men to secure at-risk communities and free regular forces to conduct offensive operations | Can be vulnerable to defeat, intimidation, and infiltration in the absence of adequate government support        |
| Are frequently more trusted than the host nation government or its institutions and forces  | Can delegitimize the government (and third-party interveners) via abusive or self-serving behavior               |
| Have superior knowledge of the local population, insurgent networks, and geography  | Can be difficult to demobilize once created  |
| Are beholden to their communities, and tend to be more motivated than state security forces   | Can serve as long-term sources of instability and insecurity if not properly managed                             |
| Provide channels through which the state can (re)introduce public services  |  |
| Can be a mechanism for the reintegration of former insurgents into society  |  |
| Can be a welfare program to keep young men from joining anti-government groups  |  |

The case studies also revealed several pitfalls and challenges. In many of the cases, CDFs contributed to human rights abuses, predation, and crime to one extent or another. CDFs were also shown to be characteristically difficult to control, and if they were allowed to operate unsupervised, they eventually presented a challenge to the state's authority and to the rule of law. Also, while they were protective of their own communities, in some cases they were simultaneously predatory to neighboring populations. Last but not least, the CDFs we examined were particularly vulnerable when they were used as conventional forces, left to operate autonomously, or when they were not properly integrated with, or supported by, regular state forces. As a result, several CDFs were also susceptible to infiltration, hedging behavior, and defection.

Our research also yielded another important finding. When it comes to the U.S. partnering with indigenous forces on the ground, state security forces are not automatically the best option. State security forces in many post-colonial countries are not necessarily designed to promote civil order; they often exist to protect the interest of a narrow political elite; and they frequently contribute to corruption and predation on a scale far greater than CDFs ever could. Therefore, U.S. attempts to build partner capacity and employ traditional security sector reform models as part of its counterterrorism strategy in weak and failed states have in some instances proven to be ineffective and even counterproductive.

Having analyzed the past use of CDFs and identified their prospects and pitfalls, we also considered whether the nature of the extremist groups that pose a threat to the U.S. today would align with the potential use of CDFs as a countering force in the future. In looking at groups such as the Islamic State, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Shabab, the Taliban, and even Boko Haram, it is clear that these entities are much more closely aligned with a model of insurgent groups that employ terrorist tactics, as opposed to being purely terrorist organizations. As such, we conclude that a cogent argument does exist for the use of civil defense forces in future U.S. small-footprint operations designed to counter these types of extremist groups. Where such groups operate locally and depend to some degree on the population—for sanctuary, subsistence, safe transit, recruits, or weapons and other materiel—it could prove effective for U.S. forces to work with local irregulars such as CDFs.

## **Recommendations for the employment of CDFs in small-footprint operations**

In order to most effectively and safely employ CDFs as part of small-footprint operations against extremist groups, the United States should apply analytically derived best practices from real-world operations. Our comparative analysis of

twelve case studies resulted in the following “rules of thumb” for the successful employment of CDFs:

1. **Ensure that adequate government support exists for them and is sustainable.** Where CDFs are aptly controlled and supported by the state, they tend to be positive contributors to local security and other government functions. When this is not the case, CDFs often evolve into net detractors from security.
2. **Ensure community buy-in exists for them.** Whether the CDF was co-opted or created, the government or third-party intervener must ensure community buy-in exists for the group. Forced conscription will result in reduced popular support for the program and for the national government.
3. **Keep them small and expand slowly.** If they became too big too quickly, regular state security forces will have a difficult time vetting CDFs and providing them with training and logistics. Moreover, keeping CDFs small ensures that they do not later present a threat to the government.
4. **Keep them local.** CDFs are most effective on their own turf, where they know the geography, understand the human terrain, and receive support and intelligence from their community. Moreover, CDFs are most likely to serve as a source of protection for local populations when they operate close to home.
5. **Employ them as irregulars.** The role of CDFs should be as auxiliaries performing relatively tactical, static tasks so as to free regular forces for more complex operations. They should not be used as part of frontline conventional military operations.
6. **Monitor them closely.** CDFs need to be closely monitored by competent, formal security forces that are either embedded in their communities or stationed close by. This also allows regular forces to provide back-up to CDFs in a timely fashion.
7. **Lead them by example.** Well-behaved security forces promote better behaved CDFs and set standards for what is acceptable relative to the rule of law and human rights standards.
8. **Support and protect them as part of a larger state security plan.** CDFs are vulnerable to enemy attacks and intimidation. They are most effective in a security architecture that provides quick-response forces to back them up as necessary.
9. **Restrict armaments.** In order to limit inter-village violence and prevent future threats to the government, the numbers and types of weapons that CDFs can obtain should be limited. Also, detailed registers of the firearms and ammunition in their possession should be maintained by the government.
10. **Have a plan to demobilize them.** Even before creating or co-opting CDFs, the government or third-party intervening force should have a plan to demobilize the groups through inducements, or via integration into regular security forces or “national guard” type units.



While the United States was relatively successful in managing CDFs in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was able to do so under favorable conditions that included large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, numerous teams of civilian political advisors, and virtually unlimited financial resources.

In today's era of reduced resources and small-footprint operations, however, the United States has much less ability to unilaterally manage, supervise, and support CDFs. To successfully employ CDFs as part of future counterterrorism or small-footprint stability operations, the United States will need to ensure it has a reliable host nation government that is willing to, or can be convinced to, abide by the fundamental CDF best practices identified in this report. This will likely mean that the United States will also need to involve itself in training the host nation in how to properly employ CDFs. In either case, the lessons and rules of thumb identified in this report will be of paramount importance to ensuring the U.S. can use CDFs as an effective component of its counterterrorism toolkit.

In conclusion, we find that CDFs are a security tool like any other, with a number of potential benefits and risks associated with their use. Deliberations on their usage in any given situation should involve a cold calculation by policy makers as to whether the immediate advantages of dislodging bad actors from local at-risk communities outweigh the acute and long term risks associated with the proliferation of loosely controlled and semi-autonomous non-statutory armed groups.

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# Glossary

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| AAS     | Ansar al-Shari'a                                     |
| AFP     | Armed Forces of the Philippines                      |
| ALP     | Afghan Local Police                                  |
| ANAP    | Afghan National Auxiliary Police                     |
| ANP     | Afghan National Police                               |
| AP3     | Afghan Public Protection Program                     |
| AQAP    | al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula                    |
| AQI     | al Qaeda in Iraq                                     |
| BATTs   | British Army Training Teams                          |
| BOYES   | Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme                       |
| CAA     | CAFGU Active Auxiliaries                             |
| CAD     | <i>Defensa Civil Antisubversia</i>                   |
| CAFGU   | Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit              |
| CAP     | Combined Action Platoon                              |
| CDCs    | <i>Comites de Defensa Civil</i>                      |
| CDFs    | Civil Defense Forces                                 |
| CERP    | Commander's Emergency Response Program               |
| CHDF    | Civilian Home Defense Forces                         |
| CIA     | Central Intelligence Agency                          |
| CIDG    | Civilian Irregular Defense Group                     |
| CJTF    | Civilian Joint Task Force                            |
| CPP/NPA | Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army |
| CPT     | Communist Party of Thailand                          |
| CVOs    | Civilian Volunteer Organizations                     |
| DECAS   | <i>Comites de Autodefensa y Desarrollo</i>           |
| DoD     | Department of Defense                                |
| ENDS    | Every Nigerian Do Something                          |
| FATA    | Federally Administered Tribal Areas                  |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| FC    | Frontier Corps                               |
| IED   | Improvised explosive device                  |
| ISCI  | Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure |
| ISF   | Iraqi Security Forces                        |
| JTF   | Joint Task Force                             |
| LDI   | Local Defense Initiative                     |
| MACV  | Military Assistance Command Vietnam          |
| MILF  | Moro Islamic Liberation Front                |
| MNC-I | Multi-National Corps- Iraq                   |
| MNLA  | Azawad National Liberation Movement          |
| MOI   | Ministry of Interior                         |
| NDS   | National Directorate of Security             |
| PFs   | South Vietnamese Popular Forces              |
| PKK   | Kurdistan Workers' Party                     |
| PNP   | Philippine National Police                   |
| REC   | Reconciliation and Engagements Cell          |
| SAS   | U.K. Special Air Service                     |
| SCAA  | Special CAFGU Active Auxiliaries             |
| SF    | U.S. Special Forces                          |
| SOF   | Special Operations Forces                    |
| SOI   | Sons of Iraq                                 |
| VSO   | Village Stability Operations                 |

# Introduction

Over the past decade, the United States has created and employed local defense forces as part of its counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. While not without drawbacks, these local defense forces have played important roles in helping the U.S. military and intelligence agencies to dislodge entrenched insurgent networks from local populations, and ultimately to target and destroy them.

While in recent history, civil defense forces (CDFs) have been used largely in support of counterinsurgency efforts, in reality, their utility and capabilities represent a blend of missions and activities that could be used to address a wide range of irregular challenges. Under the right set of circumstances, locally recruited irregulars could potentially be powerful partners for the United States in counterterrorism and stability operations. Indeed, as of this writing, U.S. forces are preparing to help train a new Iraqi “National Guard” made up mainly of local Sunni tribal militias as part of a new counterterrorism strategy to defeat the Islamic State extremist group.

However, in its prior counterinsurgency efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States had tens of thousands of troops on the ground and was able to leverage tremendous resources to stand up, deploy, and control irregular forces such as the Sons of Iraq and the Afghan Local Police. After two unpopular wars, and given the circumscribed counterterrorism strategy developed by the White House, in the near term it is highly unlikely that the United States will commit large numbers of ground troops to play a role in foreign nations’ internal conflicts where protecting populations from bad actors is a prerequisite for success.<sup>1</sup> But, regardless of the United States’ reluctance to deploy large numbers of ground combat forces on extended stability missions, security challenges that may require American intervention—in such places as Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Nigeria—continue to arise.

Over the course of a decade, the United States military and intelligence apparatus has become highly effective at targeting terrorist leaders, as evidenced by the killing of Osama Bin Laden and attrition of the al Qaeda leadership cadre in Pakistan, and the recent killing of the leader of al Shabab in Somalia. However, efforts to work “by,

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by the President at the United States Military Academy Commencement Ceremony, U.S. Military Academy-West Point, West Point, New York, May 20, 2014.

with, and through” host militaries in weak states to further degrade and ultimately defeat militant organizations have been less successful—as evidenced most notably by the inability of the Afghan and Pakistani militaries to defeat the Taliban. In some cases, security force partners have lacked the political will or capability to deal with extremist groups, have proven to be untrustworthy, or have at times been the source of the grievances that led to the creation of these groups in the first place. As a result, terrorist organizations such as al Qaeda and al Shabab remain largely intact and continue to threaten the United States and its interests abroad. Given the shortcomings or countervailing interests of many state counterterrorism partners, the continued use of under-governed areas by terrorist groups as safe havens, and the recent propensity of some of these groups to seize additional territory, it is increasingly becoming clear that in some instances, the United States will require new kinds of partnerships on the ground.

This report examines the prospects and pitfalls of utilizing CDFs as part of a small-footprint strategy to help secure failed states or “ungoverned areas” against terrorist, insurgent, or transnational criminal groups without the use of large numbers of conventional ground forces. Ultimately, this paper is intended to inform civilian and military decision makers who are seeking to answer questions such as: Under what circumstances should less-than-regular security forces be created or engaged? What form should any assistance to such forces take? And what steps should be taken to reduce the chances that these forces might undermine the rule of law, subvert statutory authority, or perpetuate conflict in other ways?

Specifically, this report derives lessons on the use of CDFs from real-world operations and develops recommendations for their safe and effective use. We begin with an introduction to CDFs and their place on the global security landscape. We then examine case studies in twelve countries faced with serious and sustained internal armed opposition as well as a significant loss of territorial sovereignty: Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey, Oman, Pakistan, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen. The historical lessons derived from a longitudinal analysis of these twelve cases are then applied to the current operating environment, and, in particular, to counterterrorism and small-scale stability operations. From this application, we derive ten rules of thumb for the effective use of CDFs in the operating environment of the present and likely future. We conclude with general recommendations for policy makers as they consider whether to employ CDFs as part of the broader U.S. counterterrorism toolkit.

## Definitions, sources, and caveats

Before beginning, we must clarify several points pertaining to definitions, sources, and method.

The term “militia” is often used normatively. To avoid confusion, this paper will use a more descriptive phrase: civil defense forces or CDFs (for stylistic variety, the terms “self-defense forces” and “local defense forces” will also be employed). Although CDFs naturally vary from setting to setting, they often share the following important characteristics:

- They operate on behalf of the state (or in line with state objectives), or as proxies for foreigners in support of their objectives;
- Their membership is civilian and generally voluntary;
- They are recruited locally and operate in a limited geographical area, and typically serve on a part-time basis;
- Their membership is both armed and organized, but they are not professional fighters; and
- They can claim a degree of autonomy from the state that allows them to occupy an ambiguous zone between “state” and “non-state” security forces.

Using these criteria, some forces do not qualify as CDFs. These non-CDFs include rogue militias like the revolutionary brigades now operating in Libya, forces under the command of a “warlord” (e.g., Duan Qirui in China, Mohamed Ali Farrah Aidid in Somalia, or Abdul Rashid Dostum in Afghanistan), and purely offensive proxies and rebel forces (e.g., the U.S.-backed Hmong “Secret Army” in Laos, the U.S.-backed Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism in Somalia, the U.S.-supported Free Syrian Army, or the Russian-backed Yamadayevtsy militia in Chechnya).<sup>2</sup>

We define fragile or failed states as those states that no longer have the ability to fully control their territory, and that are suffering from disintegration of their security forces, the collapse of state administrative structures responsible for overseeing those forces, and the erosion of infrastructure that supports their effective operation. Examples of fragile, failed, and failing states are Libya, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, western Egypt, Yemen, and the southern Philippines.

The sources utilized in this study consist entirely of open-source material. We relied heavily on academic literature, historical accounts, and media reporting. We also used a variety of unclassified reports prepared by the U.S. government and leveraged

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<sup>2</sup> We define warlords as “local potentates who control a particular territory during or after the end of a violent conflict. They secure their power through private armies and benefit from war or post-war economies by exploiting resources and or the local population.” See: Bailes, Alyson, Ulrich Schneckener, and Herbert Wulf. “Revisiting the State Monopoly on the Legitimate Use of Force,” Policy Paper No. 24, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, 2007.

past CNA research on the subject. This study also benefited from the direct observation of CDFs and their associated programs by the author as an embedded analyst with military units in Iraq and Afghanistan. (For a full listing of sources, please see the bibliography located at the end of this report.)

Lastly, a caveat concerning the nature of the case studies is in order. These cases were selected on the basis of their scale (that is, each involved a relatively large number of forces), geographic diversity, and the relative accessibility of data. However, as with all case studies, these are necessarily qualitative, imperfect, and limited in scope. But whatever their shortcomings, they nevertheless contribute to the “concrete, context-dependent knowledge” crucial to building a more complete understanding of utilizing pro-state armed groups against internal threats.<sup>3</sup> While the resulting lessons learned may not be universally applicable, they should nevertheless be useful in helping decision makers and operators to create their own frameworks for understanding the utility and risks associated with partnering with a specific non-statutory armed group.

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<sup>3</sup> Flyvbjerg, Bent. “Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no.2 (April 2006): 219-245.

# Civil defense forces and their place on the global security landscape

Although CDFs have only recently been made popular by counterinsurgency scholars, they have been a fixture in unconventional and proxy warfare and a common, if under-researched, means of providing human security in the developing world during peacetime.<sup>4</sup> In fact, most conflicts since World War II have involved civil forces in one capacity or another.<sup>5</sup> And even today, in nations with weak central governments, customary, non-statutory, or hybrid police institutions continue to provide the majority of local security.<sup>6</sup> According to a recent study, over the last thirty years, governments in 88 countries established or supported more than 300 non-statutory armed groups to provide security to local communities.<sup>7</sup>

According to the literature on non-statutory armed groups, there is enormous diversity in the types of CDFs that exist and the functions they play—so much so that they defy generalization. What these groups do have in common is that they tend to emerge during the breakdown of civil authority, when the regular army or police cannot offer adequate protection to the citizens of the state.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Innes, Michael A., ed. *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: Surrogates & the Use of Force* (Potomac Books: Washington, D.C., 2012); Carey, Sabine, Bronia Flett, and Neil J. Mitchell. “The Nature, Structure and Environment of Pro-Government Militias: Notes from Peru, Spain, and the Former Yugoslavia,” paper presentation, *Understanding Order, Cooperation, and Variance among Non-State Armed Groups Workshop*, Queens University, Canada, 19 September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Diane E. and Pereira, Anthony W. ed. *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> For example, in Somaliland, the fusion of customary and formal state authority, has been credited with making this territory the most secure, peaceful and lawful zone of Somali East Africa over the past ten years.

<sup>7</sup> Oswald, Bruce. “Civil Defense Groups: Developing Accountability,” United States Institute of Peace Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, August 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Baker, Bruce. “Nonstate Providers of Everyday Security in Fragile African States,” in *Fragile States and Insecure People? Violence, Security, and Statehood in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Some CDFs are spontaneous and short lived, while others are permanent pre-existing fixtures in a community. Some are independent and allowed to operate autonomously, while others are specifically created and supported by the government. Some are proxy forces co-opted or created by third-party interveners to assist in a conflict with or without the approval of a host government. In some cases, such as Afghanistan and Yemen, the civil defense groups evolve into organizations that fall under government structures and therefore become formal representatives of the state.

Many CDFs perform a defensive role, and are geared to protect at-risk populations from predation by criminals and limit infiltration or intimidation by insurgent and terrorist groups, or to protect critical infrastructure. These groups typically use small arms to guard their home communities by manning road blocks and checkpoints, undertaking patrols, detaining suspicious people, and providing information to the government about local actors.<sup>9</sup> Less numerous are offensively-inclined groups (which may also play tandem defensive roles), which actively seek out and target bad actors.

## The logic of partnering with non-statutory security forces

### The debate over the use of CDFs

Despite their pervasiveness on the global security landscape, the creation or co-option of less-than-official local defense forces during interventions abroad remains extraordinarily controversial. Western security and development experts have tended to eschew their use as “anachronistic” and “uncongenial to international norms and best practices for security sector reform.”<sup>10</sup> Critics characteristically charge that creating or co-opting local self-defense forces fuels cycles of conflict by enhancing the violent capacity of local actors, and in so doing, increases the levels of predation

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<sup>9</sup> Oswald, Bruce. “Civil Defense Groups: Developing Accountability,” United States Institute of Peace Special Report, United States Institute of Peace, August 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Sedra, Mark. “Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan: An Instrument of the State-Building Project,” in *Fragile States and Insecure People? Violence, Security, and Statehood in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).



and the prospects for extrajudicial killings and other human rights abuses.<sup>11</sup> Adding to the complexity of the phenomenon is the fact that in many conflict environments it is impossible to draw sharp distinctions between “good” and “bad” local defense forces. These forces can often be “Janus faced,” serving simultaneously as sources of security and insecurity.<sup>12</sup>

A bias towards liberal interventionism and a poor understanding of the nature of state formation and violence consolidation in the third world has meant that third-party interveners rely on CDFs only as a last resort, when attempts at building regular security forces have proven insufficient (as was the case in Iraq, Afghanistan, and most recently, Mali).<sup>13</sup> Many scholars and policy-makers conflate CDFs with warlordism or independent militias and associate them with lawlessness and the decay of a state’s monopoly on coercive power.<sup>14</sup>

However, there is growing recognition that applying state-centric stabilization strategies or providing traditional security assistance to failed or failing states is too time- and resource-intensive, is politically divisive, and is not altogether effective. This has led to increased attention on pre-existing, organic, bottom-up security solutions. Non-state security experts, such as Bruce Baker, Ken Menkhaus, and Ariel Ahram, argue that devolving state power to alternate systems, while not without drawbacks, is often the only way to quickly improve human security in weak states, maintain the support of the population, and avoid creating recruitment opportunities for adversaries. Because bottom-up solutions such as CDFs are cheaper and easier to stand up than formal police forces, they can quickly provide sufficient numbers of men to secure at-risk communities. Moreover, the creation of CDFs tends to increase the ability of state forces to expand and sustain their presence within a territory,

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<sup>11</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch, “‘Just Don’t Call it a Militia’: Impunity, Militias, and the ‘Afghan Local Police,’” 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Stepputat, Finn, Andersen, Louise, and Møller, Bjørn, “Introduction: Security Arrangements in Fragile States,” in *Fragile States and Insecure People? Violence, Security, and Statehood in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 11.

<sup>13</sup> In Mali, the militia group, Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNL), formerly aligned with Islamists before supporting the Mali government forces and the French military, has undertaken law and order functions by detaining militant Islamists. See: “French Mission Has Killed Hundreds of Islamists: Minister,” *SpaceWar.com*, February 5, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, Phil. “Violent Non-State Actors and National and International Security,” *International Relations and Security*, (2008); and Koonings, Ed Kees and Kruijt, Dirk ed. *Armed Actors, Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America*, (New York: Zed Books), 2004.

protect village officials, and enhance the degree of collaboration from the local population.<sup>15</sup>

## The limits of partnering with regular forces

The Obama administration's Defense Strategic Guidance makes very clear that large-scale counterinsurgency or stability operations will be avoided going forward; instead, smaller-footprint, "by, with, and through" approaches will be favored. In what is now being called the Obama doctrine, American forces have changed their tactics in combating al Qaeda and its affiliates, relying more on allied or indigenous troops and limiting the American ground combat role. While Special Operations Forces (SOF) continue to carry out precision raids against high-value targets, under "1206 authority", the Pentagon is providing training, equipment, intelligence, and logistical assistance to foreign troops, so that the latter can counter bad actors on their own territory.<sup>16</sup>

The "by, with, and through," approach is not new. Since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States (and particularly during President George W. Bush's second term), bolstering security forces and implementing security sector reform programs in weak or failed states to help counter transnational terrorism has been a pillar of U.S. national security policy. Since 2006, the Department of Defense (DoD) has spent about \$2.2 billion in more than 40 countries to train and equip foreign troops in counterterrorism and stability operations, according to the Congressional Research Service.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as experiences in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Mali show, there are a number of limitations to partnering with foreign forces which can severely hamper the effectiveness of this approach.

Given current trends, the United States is likely to find itself engaged in counterterrorism, security sector reform, and small-scale stability operations in large

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<sup>15</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton. "Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010; Joes, Anthony James. *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> In 2005, the DoD asked Congress for authority to create its own train and equip program to supplement Department of State security assistance efforts. The Global Train and Equip program, or Section 1206 of the 2006 National Defense Authorization Act, is the first major DoD authority to be used expressly for the purpose of training foreign military forces. The program aims to fill gaps in security assistance, respond to emerging threats, and ultimately reduce the necessity for U.S. troop deployments.

<sup>17</sup> Schmitt, Eric. "U.S. Strategy to Fight Terrorism Increasingly Uses Proxies," *New York Times*, 29 May 2014.

parts of Africa, the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and perhaps Latin America.<sup>18</sup> Generally speaking, countries in these regions suffer from post-colonial politics, weak state institutions, oligopolies of violence, corruption, and center-periphery conflict—realities that inhibit the development of effective state security institutions.

According to detractors of liberal interventionism, traditional security sector reform models (e.g., enhancing human security by transforming institutions to make them more professional and more accountable) have been premised on false assumptions about the historical process of state formation and on the ability of interveners to effectively consolidate violence in the hands of dysfunctional states.<sup>19</sup> Detractors also argue that proponents of security sector reform often overestimate the will of a regime—not simply its inherent capacity—to assume security functions while at the same time underestimating the power of strong societies to resist the state or provide alternative services.<sup>20</sup>

In many cases, security forces in post-colonial nation states are not designed to promote civil order, and exist mainly to protect the interest of a narrow political elite. Official security forces in these countries have at times been a major source of insecurity and corruption. Thus, according to some scholars, the assumption that the presence of government security forces correlates to increased security and the rule of law is often wrong and has led to “ineffective interventions fraught with contradictions.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, the international community’s reliance on foreign forces has at times undermined public security by promoting abusive or non-functioning state systems over functioning informal systems, and empowering illegitimate, predatory, and self-interested regimes.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, there is an additional limitation on U.S. forces working with foreign security forces in weak states. Under the Leahy Amendment of 1977 to the 1961 Foreign Assistance Act as amended, the United States is prohibited from training or equipping foreign troops or units if there is “credible information that such unit has

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<sup>18</sup> *National Strategy for Counterterrorism*, 28 June 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Guistozzi, Antonio. *The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Patrick, Stewart. *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats and International Security*, CFR books, (Oxford University Press, 2011); and Migdal, Joel S. *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Ahram, Ariel I. “Learning to Live with Militias: Toward a Critical Policy on State Frailty” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 5, no.2 (2011): 175-192.

<sup>22</sup> Paris, Roland. *At War’s End: Building Peace after Civil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

committed a gross violation of human rights.”<sup>23</sup> In countries that have become safe havens for terrorist or insurgent groups, crimes committed by poorly trained security forces may legally preclude the United States from cooperating with them.

While there is no question that security assistance to friendly militaries will remain a cornerstone of U.S. strategy, the inherent limitations of this approach in weak, politically divided, and failing states dictates that in some circumstances, non-state, bottom-up solutions must be developed to counter asymmetric threats such as terrorist or guerilla groups. Partnering with local defense groups can provide a mechanism to outflank political and organizational limitations of weak or uncooperative states by working directly with communities whose interests may more closely align with U.S. security objectives.<sup>24</sup>

With an understanding of the arguments for and against the use of CDFs generally, we now turn to history to identify specific lessons pertaining to the use of such groups in twelve different cases.

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<sup>23</sup> "An Overview of the Leahy Vetting Process," *HumanRights.gov*, 9 July 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Long, Austin, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus (eds.). *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012).

# Twelve case studies of civil defense forces

This section explores the origins, development, operations, and impact of community based security groups in twelve countries confronted by serious and sustained internal armed opposition in order to identify a common set of challenges and opportunities. The case studies are divided into two categories: Examples where national governments employ CDFs independently (Yemen, Turkey, Nigeria, Peru, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand), and cases where an intervening force creates CDFs with the approval of a host nation government (South Vietnam, Oman, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan).

## National government employment of CDFs

### Yemen's Popular Committees

Amidst a vacuum of security in southern Yemen in 2012, civilian self-defense groups known as Popular Committees supplanted the Yemeni military in efforts to oust Ansar al-Shari'a (AAS), a local militant offshoot of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).<sup>25</sup> In April and May 2012, Popular Committees supported the military in a large-scale offensive to retake Abyan province from AAS, which had controlled the territory since 2011 and threatened to transform it into a safe-haven for transnational terrorist groups. Recognizing the utility of partnering with irregular local defense groups in fighting AAS, Yemeni president Abd Rabu Mansur Hadi met with tribal leaders and requested the formation of additional Popular Committees. Since then, the Yemeni government has been largely absent from the province and has relied almost wholly upon the Popular Committees to prevent the re-infiltration of AAS, protect critical infrastructure, and even to manage the delivery of basic services such as water, electricity, and communications.

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<sup>25</sup> Swift, Christopher. "Arc of Convergence: AQAP, Ansar al-Shari'a and the Struggle for Yemen." *CTC Sentinel* 5, no.6 (2012): 1-6.

### *The rise and fall of Popular Committees in Abyan province*

In March 2011, AAS assumed control of Abyan province. The area quickly descended in to open conflict and thousands of civilians fled the province. In an effort to win hearts and minds and legitimize its cause, AAS began to provide a number of public services (e.g., justice, water, and electricity), many of which the central government had never been able to provide in that area.<sup>26</sup> Despite these basic improvements, many locals became disillusioned with AAS's brutality and predicted that the militants would eventually be driven out of the province by U.S.-backed Yemeni military forces.<sup>27</sup> These locals banded together under the banner of "Popular Committees" and, throughout 2011 and 2012, conducted a guerilla war against AAS.<sup>28</sup> In May 2012, the Popular Committees partnered with the military in "Operation Golden Swords," to finally oust AAS from its strongholds in the major urban centers of southern Yemen.<sup>29</sup>

After the operation, and at the request of President Hadi, Popular Committees began to expand throughout the province. Although most units were tribally based and were motivated to protect their own communities, others simply stood up in order to receive the salaries promised by the government. In addition, many members were in fact defectors from AAS.<sup>30</sup> Whatever the motivation, Popular Committees became prolific in southern Yemen in the wake of "Golden Swords."

The Committees became increasingly formalized as the government pulled its regular troops out of the region. The government sent large amounts of arms and other resources to the Popular Committees, and their members started to receive regular monthly stipends (30,000 rials, or approximately \$140) from the Ministry of Defense.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Popular Committees were augmented by local enlisted Yemeni military and security forces that were permitted to return home to fight for the

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<sup>26</sup> Jamjoom, Mohammed. 2012. "Amnesty details 'horrific abuses' in southern Yemen." *CNN World*, 4 December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Coombs, Casey. "Echoes of Iraq: Yemen's War Against al-Qaeda Takes a Familiar Turn." *TIME*. 10 August 10 2012; Raghavan, Sudarsan. "In Yemen, tribal militias in a fierce battle with al-Qaeda wing," *Washington Post*, 10 September 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *The Popular Committees of Abyan, Yemen: A Necessary Evil or an Opportunity for Security Reform?* Middle East Institute. 5 March 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Arrabyee, Nasser. "'Golden Swords' in Yemen." *Al-Ahram*. 20 November 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon, Sasha. "Abyani Tribes and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen," American Enterprise Institute Critical Threats Project, 25 July 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Coombs, Casey L. "Yemen's Use of Militias to Maintain Stability in Abyan Province." *CTC Sentinel* 6, no.2 (2013):5-7.; and Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *The Popular Committees of Abyan, Yemen: A Necessary Evil or an Opportunity for Security Reform?* Middle East Institute. 5 March 2014.

Committees.<sup>32</sup> The Committees transitioned from enablers of the government security forces to the sole security providers in the province. State rule of law institutions, including the police and the courts, remain largely absent or dysfunctional.

The security challenges in Abyan proved to be beyond the capacity of the Popular Committees to manage alone. Attacks by AAS continued, in the form of targeted killings of military officials and Popular Committee leaders, suicide bombings, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and assaults on infrastructure.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, reports of Committee members looting, extorting cash at road checkpoints, and engaging in tribal infighting began to surface.<sup>34</sup> It became increasingly difficult to hold Popular Committee members accountable as dispute resolution was often tasked to the Committees themselves due to the lack of a formal judiciary. According to one Yemeni scholar, the tribal leaders in charge of the Committees wanted to “extract as much as possible from the situation.”<sup>35</sup>

The relationship between the government and the Popular Committees became strained when the president’s promises to transition Popular Committee members into the regular security forces went largely unfulfilled.<sup>36</sup> As a result, Committee leaders have issued statements threatening that their allegiance could potentially shift to other power brokers in the area if they are not properly accommodated.<sup>37</sup>

### *Insights from the Yemeni experience*

Popular Committees played an important role in ousting the AAS insurgency from power in certain areas of Yemen in May 2012. Despite early tactical success in dislodging AAS, overreliance on and misuse of the Committees by the government has resulted in continued violence. Rather than capitalize on the momentum and restore security and basic services to Abyan province, President Hadi chose to empower the Popular Committees so that the Yemeni government could focus its efforts elsewhere. At best, the strategy provided a mildly more secure environment in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Gaston, Erica, Nadwa al-Dawsari. “Waiting for Change: The Impact of Transition on Local Justice and Security in Yemen,” United States Institute of Peace, 9 April 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Coombs, Casey L. “Yemen's Use of Militias to Maintain Stability in Abyan Province.” *CTC Sentinel* 6, no.2 (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *The Popular Committees of Abyan, Yemen: A Necessary Evil or an Opportunity for Security Reform?* Middle East Institute. 5 March 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Coombs, Casey. “Echoes of Iraq: Yemen's War Against al-Qaeda Takes a Familiar Turn.” *TIME*. 10 August 10 2012.

southern Yemen since Popular Committees successfully kept AAS fighters from regaining urban footholds. The Popular Committees proved to be an imperfect solution, though, since they lacked the capacity to restore sustainable security throughout the province. AAS found relatively unencumbered refuge in the mountainous regions of Abyan, and the Popular Committees posed a threat in themselves due to their susceptibility to tribal infighting and political thuggery.

## Turkey's Village Guard System

The Village Guard System (*Geçici ve Gönüllü Köy Korucuları*) was established as a government-led effort to quell the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) insurgency in Southeastern Turkey. When the PKK unleashed a low-intensity guerilla offensive in the mid-1980s, the use of civil defense forces (composed primarily of Kurdish volunteers) was adopted in order to protect towns and villages against attacks and insurgent reprisals and to assist regular security forces by providing local knowledge. Initially, the strategy enabled the Turkish government to address the PKK threat without needing large-scale military troop deployments. Village guards operated outside of the military command structure and were given arms and paid monthly salaries by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>38</sup> The size of the guard force reached its peak in the mid-1990s with 93,000 guards operating in 22 eastern and southeastern provinces.<sup>39</sup>

### *Development of the Guards system*

Community defense groups were thought to be a better solution to the PKK threat than the regular Turkish army because of both the perceived nature of the threat and the army's relative lack of experience and competency in counter-insurgency operations. The government described the PKK insurgents as "thieves and bandits," highlighting the national government's low level of motivation to invest in solutions to the problem. The traditional army, moreover, was primarily organized to conduct external warfare and was not suited for a task where local knowledge was a key to success.<sup>40</sup> These reasons, combined with the historical precedent of militia groups in southeastern Turkey, led the State to lean heavily on the village guards as a potential security solution.

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<sup>38</sup> Whitman, Lois. "Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey," Helsinki Watch, Division of Human Rights Watch, September 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Essiz, Veysel. "The Mardin massacre and the village guard system in Turkey," online, *Open Democracy*, 28 May 2009.

<sup>40</sup> Balta Parker, Evren. "Village Guard System in Turkey: Causes and Consequences" *Mellon International Conference on Security*, CUNY, The Graduate Center, New York, 2004.



The first village guards were established along the Turkish-Iraqi border in 1985. The process of establishing a village guard for a certain province began with a proposal by the governor for such an establishment and approval of the proposal by the minister of internal affairs. The proposal would denote the requirement for guards based on the local security environment. If approved, the Ministries of Internal Affairs and Finance and Customs would provide the tribal chieftain, or *agha*, with arms and a salary, respectively, for each enlisted guard.

Rapid recruitment was possible due to such factors as high regional unemployment and coercion from chieftains who had been co-opted by the government. At the outset, several of the chieftains who were selected to establish village guard units were well-known smugglers, chosen for their knowledge of the local terrain. The government offered these chieftains a high degree of independence, often allowing them to continue cross-border smuggling and turning a blind eye to other criminal activities. By September 1986, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had implemented the system in 13 cities, appointed 7,933 guards, and distributed 3,679 long-barreled weapons. By November 1990, the village guard system had expanded to 27,250 individuals.<sup>41</sup>

The village guards were tasked with denying PKK guerrilla fighters access to or passage through their districts.<sup>42</sup> They also served in cross-border operations in northern Iraq as scouts for the *gendarmerie*, the military force that polices the countryside.<sup>43</sup>

In these operations, village guards were under the command of the *gendarmerie* but nevertheless continued to answer administratively to their own chieftains.<sup>44</sup> Because chieftains had the ability to exercise violence at their discretion, they often used village guards under their control to reassert their local dominance.<sup>45</sup> This command structure and a general lack of discipline led to a number of human rights violations. In addition, due to their vulnerability, some units offered covert support to the PKK out of fear of revenge attacks. Nevertheless, while the guards were in many cases

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<sup>41</sup> Ozar, Semsal, Nesrin Ucarlar, Osman Aytar. *From Past to Present: A Paramilitary Organization in Turkey: Village Guard System*. (Istanbul: Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research [DISA] Publications, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Van Bruinessen, Martin. "Kurds, states and tribes," in Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod (eds.), *Tribes and power: nationalism and ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi. 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Evren Balta, *Causes and Consequences of the Village Guard System in Turkey*. Mellon Fellowship for Humanitarian and Security Affairs Conference. 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Sevim Songun, "The first village guards." *Hurriyet Daily News*. 15 September 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Kurds, states and tribes*. Edited by Faleh A. Jabar and Hosham Dawod, *Tribes and power: nationalism and ethnicity in the Middle East*. London: Saqi. 2002.

operationally incompetent, they did play a significant role in pacifying the region by effectively separating pro-state and pro-PKK populations. Ultimately, empowering individual chieftains effectively hindered the PKK from forming a unified front and consolidating control over large areas of land.

Despite some tactical successes, by the early 1990s it became apparent that the village guard system was, on its own, unable to substantially diminish the insurgent threat in southern Turkey. At that point, the central government changed its approach and tasked the military to deal with the insurgency. By 1993, approximately one-third of the Turkish military was deployed to the region and most of Turkey's Special Forces were stationed there as well.<sup>46</sup>

The relationship between the government and the village guard units also changed during this period. In many instances villagers were coerced or forcibly conscripted into the guard system. Those that refused were subject to evacuation. This contributed to the rise in the number of village guards, from 27,250 individuals in 1990, to 62,186 in 1995.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, voluntary village guard units that were unpaid but sometimes provided with arms were established, driving the total number of village guards as high as 93,000 according to some estimates.<sup>48</sup> Many peasants refused to join the village guards, resulting in nearly a million internally displaced refugees.<sup>49</sup>

The state of emergency in Southeastern Turkey was lifted in 2002, but the village guard system has continued to operate (though recent indications are that the government plans to disband the groups). The extensive duration of the village guard program has led multiple generations of Turkish Kurds to rely on the system for their livelihoods. Between 50,000 to 90,000 village guards are still present in southeastern Turkey. Thus, some Turkish analysts fear that if the village guards are disbanded without a well-formulated reintegration plan, the result could very well be large-scale criminality as the village guards attempt to hold onto their power and guns.

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<sup>46</sup> Balta Parker, Evren. "Village Guard System in Turkey: Causes and Consequences" *Mellon International Conference on Security*, CUNY, The Graduate Center, New York, 2004.

<sup>47</sup> Ozar, Semsal, Nesrin Ucarlar, Osman Aytar. *From Past to Present: A Paramilitary Organization in Turkey: Village Guard System*. (Istanbul: Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research [DISA] Publications, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Essiz, Veysel. "The Mardin massacre and the village guard system in Turkey," online, *Open Democracy*, 28 May 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Evren Balta, *Causes and Consequences of the Village Guard System in Turkey*. Mellon Fellowship for Humanitarian and Security Affairs Conference. 2004.

### *Insights from the Turkish experience*

The Turkish state was able to reduce the PKK insurgency threat to some extent by strengthening tribal authority and creating civil defense forces. Village guards prevented the PKK from gaining a unified support base, but proved ineffective in ending the conflict completely. Their mixed results were achieved at the high price of forced migration, mass village executions, involuntary recruitment, and eventual large-scale military involvement. Reports of abuses and forced conscription have been well documented since the inception of the village guard system, causing many human rights organizations to plea to disband the guards. While the PKK threat has subsided, the Turkish government has been left with a self-created predicament of how to disband the guard force, which now more closely resembles a welfare program.

## Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force

At the time of this writing, a group of volunteer civilians, commonly referred to as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) (for its connection to the military's Joint Task Force), has joined the government of Nigeria to combat an ethno-religious militant group known as Boko Haram bent on establishing an Islamic state in northern Nigeria. The CJTF primarily operates in and around Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in the northeast of the country, but has also conducted operations in outlying regions of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. Since the group's inception in the summer of 2013, the CJTF has grown to include thousands of men, women, and children who share the common goal of bringing an end to the violence caused by Boko Haram. These groups are now working with Nigerian state security forces to protect their neighborhoods and villages and reduce instances of collateral damage and civilian deaths during military operations.<sup>50</sup> The civilians are equipped with self-purchased knives, machetes, sticks, and small arms, and government-supplied vehicles. The CJTF maintains checkpoints, assists with arrests, and provides the government troops with intelligence on insurgent members and their locations. Media reports suggest that the groups have had some success in improving security in the capital city of Maiduguri.

### *Formation of the Civilian JTF*

After a series of high-profile attacks by the Boko Haram insurgent group, Nigeria's President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, and

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<sup>50</sup> Blanchard, Lauren Ploch. "Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions," CRS Report for Congress, Congressional Research Service, 10 June 2014.

Adamawa states in May 2013. Among other things, the declaration resulted in an increase in government troop presence in these states from 3,600 to 5,600 soldiers and the creation of the Joint Task Force (JTF)—a unit comprising army, police, and customs officials specifically designed to combat Boko Haram. As the government ramped up its military activities in the northeast states, groups of young men in Maiduguri also began to organize themselves to protect their communities against Boko Haram and assist the new security forces deployed to the region.

Vigilante efforts by these youth quickly led to a series of civilian-assisted arrests. In the months that followed, the role of these civilians expanded beyond static local defense to include intelligence gathering, surveillance and tracking, and raids on homes of known and suspected members of Boko Haram. These operations were unofficially conducted on behalf of the government, and the volunteers became known as the Civilian Joint Task Force.

Under the supervision of the Nigerian military, CJTF members were given identification cards and were organized into units under the control of JTF neighborhood sector commands.<sup>51</sup> Although the CJTF were volunteers, the government was able to exert leverage by providing members with salaries, paying for treatment of injuries sustained in encounters with Boko Haram, and giving financial assistance to the families of those killed in action.<sup>52</sup> In an area rife with underemployment, a paid CJTF workforce offered an alternative to youth who otherwise might have fought for Boko Haram.

Reports of CJTF members overstepping their operational jurisdiction, however, led the government to issue warnings against vigilante justice.<sup>53</sup> In addition, residents have complained that the CJTF members have harassed motorists at checkpoints and have committed assaults and other abuses, to include burning suspected Boko Haram members alive and ransacking the home of the chairman of the Borno state's ruling party, whom they suspected of being involved with the group.<sup>54</sup> Some communities fear that the CJTF could eventually become another source of insecurity.

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. *The Popular Committees of Abyan, Yemen: A Necessary Evil or an Opportunity for Security Reform?* Middle East Institute. 5 March 2014.

<sup>52</sup> International Crisis Group. "Curbing violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," *Africa Report No. 216*, 3 April 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Sawab, Ibrahim. "Nigeria: Boko Haram Hunters Burn Another Sect Member in Maiduguri," *Daily Trust*, 27 July 2014.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Dawsari, Nadwa. 2014. *The Popular Committees of Abyan, Yemen: A Necessary Evil or an Opportunity for Security Reform?* Middle East Institute. 2014.

CJTF personnel also proved extremely vulnerable to Boko Haram's retaliatory strikes, and their operations have provoked an increase in insurgent reprisal attacks against communities that cooperate with or house members of the self-defense force. Moreover, it appears that the group has been infiltrated by Boko Haram spies on a number of occasions.<sup>55</sup>

Recognizing their vulnerability and potential for abusive behavior, and desiring a means to professionalize and eventually demobilize the vigilante groups, the government launched the Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme (BOYES) in October 2013. The program, aimed at CJTF members age 20 and over, consisted of counseling, guidance, and skills acquisition training.<sup>56</sup> However, the program appears to have been discontinued in late 2013 or early 2014—probably due to the government's failure to continue funding the initiative.<sup>57</sup>

Some youth have expressed dissatisfaction with the government's imposition of limitations on their operations. To these CJTF members, what was originally an organic, community-led initiative was forcibly transformed into a subsidiary arm of the government's poorly executed security operations in northeastern Nigeria. Despite the government's efforts to institutionalize the group, the CJTF appears to have maintained a high degree of autonomy from the government, and, as a result, members have received little in the way of additional financing and equipment.<sup>58</sup> Non-governmental organizations, such as Every Nigerian Do Something (ENDS), have made minor contributions to CJTF forces in lieu of equipment provision from the government.<sup>59</sup>

### *Insights from the Nigerian experience*

The presence of the CJTF has significantly contributed to the dislodgement of Boko Haram's foothold in Maiduguri. Also, it appears that the success of the CJTF may have contributed to the insurgency's shift to operating in the countryside. While the

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<sup>55</sup> Omona, Stella, Patience Ogbodo, Danjuma Mohammed, and Aramide Oikelomo. 2014. "Nigeria: Boko Haram - Military Beams Searchlight on Civilian JTF, Others," *Daily Independent (Lagos)* 6 July 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Abubakar, Sadiq. "Nigeria: Civilian JTF - Courage Amid Rising Danger." *allAfrica*. September 8, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Author's Interview, Atta Barkindo, Nigeria security expert, conducted in Washington, DC, 23 July 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Buba, Adamu. "Civilian JTF Commander Speaks on Boko Haram War." April 8, 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Buba, Adamu. "Civilian JTF Commander Speaks on Boko Haram War." April 8, 2014.

CJTF has also expanded operations to villages, the CJTF members who operate outside of Maiduguri are far less well equipped and much less successful tactically.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the group's successes, the CJTF has had a mixed impact on the overall security environment of northeastern Nigeria. CJTF activities have also elicited changes in Boko Haram's strategy, such as the targeting of civilian areas under CJTF control. Boko Haram also appears to have successfully infiltrated the CJTF as a means of gathering intelligence on government operations. Lastly, the group has been cited for numerous accounts of violent vigilante justice outside of their operational jurisdiction. Residents fear that the group could be co-opted by politicians and used for political thuggery in the 2015 elections.

## Anti-Guerilla forces in the Peruvian highlands

Community defense forces are widespread in Peru's modern-day security landscape, providing security to peasants from criminals, drug smugglers, as well as anti-government guerrillas. In the 1980s, a number of village-based self-defense groups stood up in Peru's highlands to protect locals from the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) Maoist insurgent group. By the mid-1990s, close to 120,000 volunteers had joined rural defense groups such as the *Comites de Defensa Civil*, the *Defensa Civil Antisubversia*, and the *Comites de Autodefensa y Desarrollo*. As the military developed better strategies to manage and support them, Peruvian CDFs became extraordinarily effective at clearing areas, preventing infiltration, and even targeting the *Sendero Luminoso* insurgent network.

### *Evolution of the Peruvian CDFs*

In late 1982, Peruvian Marines fighting in the "emergency zone" of the Apurimac River valley began assuming authority over pre-existing, organic community self-defense groups such as the *Iquichan* village defenders in the Huanta. These co-opted grassroots village defense groups were given the name *Comites de Defensa Civil* (CDCs). Each village unit was commanded by a *junta directiva*, but there was very little coordination beyond that.<sup>61</sup> Initially, the Peruvian security forces remained garrisoned in larger towns and cities and did not try to monitor or control these units directly.

During this period, the expansion of village forces proceeded slowly. Despite their hatred for the *Sendero Luminoso*, many villagers were hesitant to join the CDC units

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<sup>60</sup> Author's interview, Jacob Zenn, via phone interview, 23 July 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Fumerton, Mario. *From Victims to Heroes: Peasant Counter-Rebellion and Civil War in Ayacucho, Peru, 1980-2000* (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 2002).

for fear of revenge attacks, and were weary of the “foreign” Peruvian military whose officers came from the cities and coastal areas.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, they often lacked weapons with which to defend themselves. Confrontations between the CDCs and the guerillas often resulted in large numbers of casualties for the peasant defenders. Consequently, many CDC units refused to patrol and in some instances would allow guerilla columns to freely pass through their territory in order to avoid being attacked.

In 1989, the military began to reorganize CDCs into a cohesive, regionally focused force in order to improve their survivability and effectiveness. With the help of the Peruvian marines, village units were incorporated into the *Defensa Civil Antisubversia* (DECAS), a hierarchical network of regional, district, and village self-defense committees. The Apurimac River valley was divided into administrative zones, each controlled by its own peasant coordinator and overseen by a supreme commander (a fighter rumored to have been a *Sendero* defector). As part of the DECAS program, village defenders shifted from a static defensive force to a mobile force designed to pacify entire valleys, not just individual villages.

In order to professionalize their fighting forces, each administrative zone formed a *Comandos Especiales* unit. These elite units were composed of the best of the DECAS volunteers. The DECAS also took steps to avoid re-infiltration of cleared areas by controlling access into and out of the valleys and limiting unnecessary travel between villages. Through the use of clandestine peasant operatives, DECAS commanders were able to root out hidden insurgent cadres from occupied villages. A formalized amnesty program helped the DECAS recruit insurgents into their ranks; these insurgents provided intimate knowledge of *Sendero* tactics, the strength and movement of rebel forces, the locations of supply caches, and the identity of spies.<sup>63</sup>

Reorganization and additional military support allowed the DECAS program to pacify the entire Apurimac River valley in a matter of months. Centralized leadership, good coordination between villages, and the imposition of strict discipline further consolidated gains. Yet its relative autonomy and strong village leadership also

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<sup>62</sup> Fumerton, Mario and Simone Remijnne, “Civil defense forces: Peru’s Comites de Autodefensa Civil and Guatemala’s Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil in comparative perspective,” in *Armed Actors, Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America*, ed. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (New York: Zed Books, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Quinn, Joe and Fumerton, Mario A. “Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective,” Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

contributed to the rise of “jungle warlords” who used the DECAS as their own private militias, sometimes in support of lucrative drug-smuggling operations.<sup>64</sup>

In the early 1990s, newly elected President Alberto Fujimori adopted a new counterinsurgency strategy aimed at “winning the hearts and minds” of the rural population. Having seen the effectiveness of the DECAS units, as well as their drawbacks, the new administration sought to expand the program while increasing accountability and government control. As part of this initiative, the DECAS program was renamed *Comites de Autodefensa y Desarrollo* (CAD). It was given statutory recognition, and placed under the control of the armed forces. Village units were also supplied with defensive armaments as part of the new program.

In order to gain control over village commanders and discourage predatory and criminal behavior, the military set about imposing a series of innovative administrative and bureaucratic controls over the CAD units. CAD commanders were required to submit weekly reports that detailed their activities and summarized intelligence that had been collected. In addition, the Peruvian security forces conducted random inspections and issued identification cards to promote accountability and prevent infiltration.<sup>65</sup> In order to limit inter-village violence and prevent future threats to the government, the military limited the numbers and types of weapons that self-defense groups could obtain and kept detailed registers of the firearms and ammunition in their possession.<sup>66</sup>

Closer cooperation between village defenders and the military brought dramatic improvements in the relationships between the armed forces and the peasantry in general. The CAD was credited not just with providing local security, but also with enabling the return of much-sought-after aid and development to the countryside. According to one Peru watcher, the CAD even contributed to the development of civil society in the poor and previously neglected highlands.<sup>67</sup> Many self-defense groups transformed themselves into community police, and some CAD leaders transitioned

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<sup>64</sup> Fumerton, Mario. *From Victims to Heroes: Peasant Counter-Rebellion and Civil War in Ayacucho, Peru, 1980-2000* (Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Goampietri, Sergio M., and John H. Stone, “A Counterinsurgency Study: An Analysis of Local Defenses,” Master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, September 2004.

<sup>66</sup> Fumerton, Mario. “Rondas Campesinas in the Peruvian Civil War: Peasant Self-Defense Organizations in Ayacucho,” paper presentation, LASA2000, Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Miami, Florida, 16-18 March 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Starn, Orin. *Nightwatch: The Politics of Protest in the Andes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).



into politics as advocates for indigenous communities.<sup>68</sup> Highlighting their continued relevance within Peru's security landscape, the government recently pledged to strengthen and empower remaining CAD groups and has asked them to help quell drug trafficking and crime.<sup>69</sup>

### *Insights from the Peruvian experience*

Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, Peru's military learned hard lessons about mobilizing community self-defense forces against the Shining Path Maoist insurgent group. Early on, Peruvian military officers fighting the insurgency were opposed to working with armed peasants and few made any systematic attempt to utilize the self-defense groups.<sup>70</sup>

The steps taken by the Peruvian authorities to control and support these groups yield some valuable lessons worth examining. Initially, without an official government policy or military plan in place, efforts to work with local defense groups floundered. Peasant volunteers feared retaliation by the insurgents, lacked weapons to defend themselves with, and were weary of cooperating with the military. Volunteers suffered high numbers of casualties and some were involved in abuses themselves. This changed when the Peruvian government began to integrate local defense groups as official auxiliaries of the state in a broader counterinsurgency strategy. As the military developed better means to support them, village defenders became extraordinarily effective at defending themselves, clearing areas, and preventing re-infiltration.

## Counter-Narco forces in Michoacán, Mexico

Since 2006, the Mexican government, police, and military have been engaged in a nationwide campaign to disrupt and destroy various "drug cartels" or violent criminal organizations which thrive, in large part, by controlling the trafficking of

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<sup>68</sup> Fumerton, Mario and Simone Remijne, "Civil defense forces: Peru's Comites de Autodefensa Civil and Guatemala's Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil in comparative perspective," in *Armed Actors, Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America*, ed. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (New York: Zed Books, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Stone, Hannah. "Peru's Next President Calls on Vigilantes to Quell Drug Trafficking," *Insight-Organized Crime in Latin America*, 14 June 2011.

<sup>70</sup> Quinn, Joe and Fumerton, Mario A. "Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

illegal drugs (among other goods, and persons) into the United States.<sup>71</sup> Mexico's war on drugs (estimates put the death toll at 100,000 or higher) has consisted mostly of fighting among different cartels, and between the cartels and police or military. In early 2013, however, a significant new participant in the conflict emerged in the violence-plagued state of Michoacán: voluntary, community-based self-defense forces. These forces formed with the purpose of driving out the Knights Templars (*Caballeros Templares*) cartel, the dominant criminal force in the state. Over the following year, these self-defense forces, with support from the military and federal police, methodically cleared the Knights Templars from their communities. In 2014, the Mexican government offered them legitimacy as units of the government-approved Rural Guard (*Guardias Rurales*) forces. Many community self-defense forces agreed, registering their arms and members; but others did not. Many questions remain about the nature of these forces, their relationship to the state and federal government and security forces, and the role(s) they will play—if any—in Michoacán's future.

*The uncertain origins and nature of Michoacán's community self-defense groups*

Community self-defense forces, and community police, are not uncommon in Mexico's rural communities. They exist because throughout its history, the Mexican government has struggled to provide services (including security) in much of its territory. The constitution guarantees indigenous communities the right to organize and operate their own local public security forces in line with traditional practices and norms. The Rural Guards (*Guardia Rural*), local defense forces with quasi-legal relations with state and federal police, have existed across Mexico for over a century.

Assessments of Michoacán's self-defense forces indicate that most of them emerged through legitimate voluntarism in response to community outrage over the violence and extortion wreaked by the Knights Templars. Some, however, appear to have ties to influential local business owners (who sought protection from extortion by the Knights Templars), to competing criminal organizations, or to factions of the Knights Templars themselves.<sup>72</sup>

From the beginning, members of self-defense groups in Michoacán raised suspicions by toting AK-47s, AR-15s, and .50 caliber sniper rifles, unusual weaponry for farmers

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<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, "Peña Nieto's Challenge: Criminal Cartels and Rule of Law in Mexico," Latin America Report No. 48, 19 March 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Althaus, Dudley and Steven Dudley. "Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias," Wilson Center Mexico Institute and InsightCrime.org, (Washington, D.C.), no date.

and shopkeepers.<sup>73</sup> They claimed to have captured them from the cartels; however, some reports trace them to local business leaders, while others tie them to rival criminal cartels. Indeed, several leaders of self-defense groups have known ties to the former *Familia Michoacána* cartel.<sup>74</sup> Despite these ties, local reports and surveys strongly suggest that most self-defense groups are part of an organic anti-drug-violence movement and have widespread support within local communities and across Mexico.

In January 2013, the federal government took action to address Michoacán's security situation, sending in troops and announcing an effort to take charge under its own commissioner. The growing military and federal police presence in Michoacán occasionally clashed with self-defense members, but for the most part they left one another alone. However, as the groups gained national attention for their armed campaign against the Knights Templars, the military and police began to cooperate with them. The self-defense groups blocked off roads and footpaths, provided local intelligence, and operated as foot soldiers in support of broader military operations.

In January 2014, the government formalized its relationship with the self-defense groups by reaching an agreement to allow them to transition to Rural Guard forces, with rights to bear arms and defend their communities, albeit under the command of the federal police and military. Eventually, the self-defense groups would voluntarily disband and members in good standing could join local police forces. In recent months, this program seems to have worked, as over 3,000 members have received training, uniforms, and equipment as members of official Rural Guard forces.<sup>75</sup>

By all accounts, Michoacán's self-defense groups have been an effective fighting force. In just over a year after their formation, self-defense groups operating in concert with the federal police and military drove the Knights Templar from their rural communities (though not necessarily from the major port of Lázaro Cardenas or the regional urban center Apatzingán). Hundreds of alleged cartel members have been arrested in joint operations. In March 2013 alone, the military announced that they had killed the legendary founder and leader of the Knights Templar, and one of his top operatives.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> El Universal, "De 38 detenidos por *Michoacanazo*, 37 libres," online, ElUniversal.mx, 28 September 2010.

<sup>75</sup> "Autodefensas registran más de 6 mil armas en Michoacán," *Notimex*, 8 May 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Althaus, Dudley and Steven Dudley. "Mexico's Security Dilemma: Michoacán's Militias," Wilson Center Mexico Institute and InsightCrime.org, (Washington, D.C.), no date.

The future of the self-defense groups is far from clear, however. They continue to man checkpoints and conduct patrols in their areas, and remain heavily armed. Members interviewed purport to be wary of a return of the Knights Templar. They say they will rejoin their communities once the threat is gone and the government is doing its job of providing reliable security.<sup>77</sup> A significant number have been integrated into the state and federal police as Rural Guard forces; others have not.

The government recently announced that, as of May 13, 2014, any self-defense member bearing arms unregistered with the government, and not participating in the transition to joining the Rural Forces, will be arrested. In late June, the government arrested 83 self-defense group members, including the only prominent self-defense leader who refused to join the Rural Guards.<sup>78</sup>

### *Insights from the Mexican experience*

Reports suggest that at a tactical level, Michoacán's self-defense groups have been surprisingly effective at protecting communities from drug related violence. These self-defense forces were able to form and mobilize remarkably quickly and for all intents and purposes, dismantled the Knights Templar cartel, at least within the rural areas of Michoacán. Remarkably, the self-defense groups waged their aggressive campaign without attracting much criticism for excessive violence or human rights violations.

Nevertheless, over the longer term, the success of these groups is uncertain. Despite attempts by the government, many of these groups have yet to reconcile their status vis-à-vis state security forces. In addition, it is alleged that there are ties between self-defense members and local criminal organizations, or that some self-defense groups have begun to extort businesses and commit other crimes in their communities. Due to their relative newness, a definitive assessment of these groups and their effectiveness is several years off.

## Civil defense forces in the Philippines

Civil defense forces have long been a feature of the Philippines security landscape, particularly on the archipelago's southern island of Mindanao. Local defense forces played a significant role in counter-guerrilla operations during the Spanish colonial period (1565-1898), in the Philippine-American War (1898-1902), during the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), in counter-guerrilla operations during the Hukbalahap

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<sup>77</sup> Siscar, Majo. "Autodefensas de Michoacán siguen armadas, aunque gobierno lo prohíba," *AnimalPolitico.com*, 25 July 2014.

<sup>78</sup> "México: Arrestan a 83 miembros de autodefensas," *AnimalPolitico.com*, 28 June 2014.

Rebellion (1946-1954), and in more contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns against the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA) and Muslim separatist groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

Local defense forces have proliferated since the 1970s and form an often-bewildering array of "less-official" and quasi-public security structures. The size of the official security forces is relatively modest. In a country of more than 93 million people, with multiple insurgencies underway, the army fields a mere 86,000 men, while the Philippine National Police (PNP) maintain a force of only 40,500 men.<sup>79</sup> However, as of 2010, more than one million Filipinos were serving in civil defense forces, according to one estimate.<sup>80</sup>

### *Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (CAFGU)*

Founded in the late 1980s to counter a growing CPP/NPA, the CAFGU are locally recruited, part-time units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Deployed primarily in Mindanao, the 55,000-man CAFGU is a successor to the Civilian Home Defense Forces (CHDF). Created by the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship (1965-1986), the CHDF were notorious for their abuses (ranging from chicken stealing to extrajudicial killings), corruption, and incompetence.<sup>81</sup>

The CAFGU has two components: the CAFGU Active Auxiliaries (CAA), and the Special CAFGU Active Auxiliaries (SCAA). Both are recruited locally, typically by government officials. The CAA is trained and paid by the army and is under its direct supervision. The SCAA hold a more ambiguous status. Although sometimes trained and equipped by the AFP, SCAA members are typically paid by local companies to provide "static" defense for plantations and other commercial enterprises.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], *The Military Balance 2011* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>80</sup> Kraft, Herman Joseph S. "The Foibles of an Armed Citizenry: Armed Auxiliaries of the State and Private Armed Groups in the Philippines," in *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippine*, ed. Diana Rodriguez (Quezon City, Philippines, and Geneva: South-South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement, and Small Arms Survey, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Espino, Irineo C. "Counterinsurgency: The Role of Paramilitaries," master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, December 2004.

<sup>82</sup> Institute of Bangsamoro Studies [IBS], and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue [HD], *Armed Violence in Mindanao: Militias and Private Armies* (Geneva: HD, 2011), 19.

### *Civilian Volunteer Organizations (CVOs)*

With an estimated 800,000 members, CVOs are by far the single largest element of the Philippines' less-formal security structure. Descendants of vigilante groups that operated during the 1980s, CVOs function primarily as unarmed neighborhood (*barangay*) watch groups. According to a United Nations report, "When strangers or anyone who does not live in the [*barangay*] comes in, their name and reason to visit is recorded in a log." The contents of that log are shared regularly with the AFP.<sup>83</sup>

Nominally under the command and the control of the security forces, CVOs, like the SCAA, are recruited by local government officials and paid on an ad hoc basis that varies from district to district. These *barangay* watch groups also function as intelligence collectors for the security forces and as auxiliaries in high-threat environments where they can be armed and deputized by the PNP.<sup>84</sup>

### *Private armed groups*

Adding to the complexity of the security landscape in the Philippines is the proliferation of various unofficial security forces, which, according to one authoritative estimate, number more than 100.<sup>85</sup> Those forces are sometimes called "private armies," but that term is rather misleading, since many of these groups operate on behalf of the state. Indeed, in Mindanao, the AFP and PNP have deployed these armed groups in offensive counterinsurgency operations.<sup>86</sup>

Privately maintained armies, typically operating under the patronage of powerful families and clans, may employ full-time soldiers and policemen on a part-time basis. At the same time, these security units are tools for settling private and inter-clan disputes (*rodas*), as well as instruments for accumulating ill-gotten gains through drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping for ransom.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Alston, Phillip. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions: Mission to the Philippines*, A/HRC/8/3/Add.2, (New York: United Nations, 16 April 2008), 12.

<sup>84</sup> Estabillo, Allen V. "Gov Fuentes Warns Against Possible Abuses by CVOs," *MindaNews* (Davao City, Philippines), October 25, 2006 (Open Source Center [OSC] SEP20061025093001).

<sup>85</sup> "Number of Private Armies Growing: Commission," *abs-cbnNews.com* (Manila), 21 April 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch [HRW], *"They Own the People": The Ampatuans, State-Backed Militias, and Killings in the Southern Philippines* (New York: HRW, November 2010), 11, 21.

<sup>87</sup> Amnesty International, *Shattered Lives: Beyond the 2008-2009 Mindanao Armed Conflict* (London: Amnesty International, 2009), 22; and Rommel Banlaoi, "Private Armed Groups: A New Threat to Philippine Security," *rommelbanlaoi*, January 23, 2011.

### *Insights from the Filipino experience*

Civil defense forces function as “force multipliers” for the PNP and the AFP. Widely deployed and relatively cheap, these auxiliary forces have enabled the Filipino state to employ “high-density” counterinsurgency tactics that attempt to suppress armed groups by saturating threatened areas, rooting out guerrilla forces with intensive military operations, and then “holding” secured sectors with civil defense units.<sup>88</sup> In the view of the Philippine armed forces, the CAA’s intimate knowledge of the local environment makes them particularly valuable in a counterinsurgency context.<sup>89</sup> According to a senior AFP leader, CAA groups “are locals of the area they are assigned in . . . [T]heir personal and comprehensive knowledge of local conditions . . . contribute significantly to our operations.”<sup>90</sup>

More broadly, self-defense forces represent an attempt by the state to assert its authority in regions where it has traditionally had little presence. Indeed, these local units are a response to, and a product of, security and governance vacuums in which armed groups have flourished. Unlike insurgent or out-and-out criminal groups, civil defense organizations can lay claim to what one scholar calls “an explicitly legal status or at least a grudging tolerance of agents of the state.”<sup>91</sup>

Local self-defense units have a role in counterinsurgency that extends beyond the kinetic. In recent years, the AFP has stressed development programs that are intended to pull up the roots of rebellion.<sup>92</sup> Civil defense forces are aid emissaries and service providers for military-initiated programs designed to pacify the restive denizens of conflicted islands such as Mindanao.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> IBS and HD, *Armed Violence in Mindanao*, 29.

<sup>89</sup> Felter, Joseph H. “Taking Guns to a Knife Fight: Effective Military Support to COIN,” US Army War College Civilian Research Paper, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 31 March 2008.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Victor Reyes, “Militia Groups Vital in Fighting Rebels, says AFP,” *Malaya Online Edition* (Manila), December 21, 2009.

<sup>91</sup> Kraft, Herman Joseph S. “The Foibles of an Armed Citizenry: Armed Auxiliaries of the State and Private Armed Groups in the Philippines,” in *Primed and Purposeful: Armed Groups and Human Security Efforts in the Philippine*, ed. Diana Rodriguez (Quezon City, Philippines, and Geneva: South-South Network for Non-State Armed Group Engagement, and Small Arms Survey, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> Romero, Alexis. “AFP: ‘Bayanihan’ Security Plan Will Not Stop Armed Groups,” *Philstar.com* (Manila), 16 May 2011.

<sup>93</sup> “Battalion Commander Visits CAFGU Detachments,” Philippine Information Agency, Presidential Communications Operations Office, 5 March 2011.

These local defense forces can be described as occupying ambiguous and fluid positions that are difficult to characterize as strictly public or truly private, thereby making accountability for abuse and predation an elusive goal. Recruitment is often a highly politicized affair that allows local notables to enlist individuals to serve private and personal interests.<sup>94</sup>

Ultimately, CAAs, SCAAs, and CVOs present a decidedly mixed picture (for their part, private armed groups appear to play an almost entirely negative, predatory role). Training appears to be relatively poor; there is considerable potential for abuse; and accountability and oversight remain limited. At the same time, civil defense forces have demonstrated considerable local knowledge; they have in some cases succeeded in “holding” cleared areas; and at least some of these units have functioned reasonably as force multipliers for the AFP and PNP.

## Local defense forces in Thailand’s deep south

Civil defense forces have long been a feature of Thailand’s security apparatus. They have played a prominent role in the Thai government’s counterinsurgency strategy—first in the campaign against the Communist Party of Thailand’s (CPT’s) “people’s war” during the 1960s and 1970s, and more recently in operations against separatist/nationalist Malay-Muslim insurgents in the country’s far south (namely, the provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and four districts of Songkhla province). The state has delegated many security responsibilities to CDFs. This is not a function of a shortage of troops—the Royal Thai Army has some 190,000 active-duty personnel—but rather a product of the army high command’s traditional focus on Bangkok politics coupled with an institutional disinclination to engage in internal security operations.<sup>95</sup> Thailand has a baffling multiplicity of local security forces and for most residents of the far south, these CDFs represent an “undifferentiated paramilitary jumble.”<sup>96</sup>

### *Volunteer Defense Corps (Or Sor)*

The largest civil defense force in Thailand, the *Or Sor*, is deployed in each of the country’s provinces, districts, and sub-districts. Approximately 5,400 men serve in

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<sup>94</sup> Reyes, Danilo. “Policies Arming Civilians a Product of Vigilantism,” *Ethics in Action* 2, October 2008.

<sup>95</sup> The figure is from IISS, *Military Balance*, 275.

<sup>96</sup> Ball, Desmond and David Scott Mathieson. *Militia Redux: Or Sor and the Revival of Paramilitarism in Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2007).



the deep south.<sup>97</sup> Serving on a voluntary basis (as the name implies), the *Or Sor* are full-time civilian employees of the interior ministry. The Village Defense Corps have an assortment of security responsibilities, to include maintaining road checkpoints and protecting schoolteachers, an important target for insurgents. While they have no legal powers, these forces frequently support the police in law enforcement operations such as crowd and riot control. The *Or Sor*'s knowledge of local conditions and actors makes it an important source of knowledge for provincial governors. As a ready reserve of trained manpower, these units are also called upon to support raids and other security operations conducted by the military. Finally, the Village Defense Corps is responsible (at least on paper) for training other local defense forces.

#### *Village Development and Self-Defense Volunteers (Chor Ror Bor)*

Established in 1985, the *Chor Ror Bor* is the direct descendent of the Village Security Teams, a locally based self-defense force created by the CIA in the mid-1960s during the early days of the Thai government's campaign against the CPT.<sup>98</sup> The *Chor Ror Bor* overlaps considerably with the *Or Sor* in terms of security responsibilities. Operating in every village in the far south, the Village Development and Self-Defense Volunteers maintain a considerable presence, with 47,000 men deployed.<sup>99</sup> Each village unit is typically made up of 30 men (although there are many reports that child volunteers also serve), who are armed with a mixture of shotguns and automatic weapons.<sup>100</sup> While normally serving in stationary or static roles such as manning checkpoints, these units also guard teachers, gather intelligence, support the police by identifying suspects, and participate in military operations, such as joint patrols and cordon-and-search counterinsurgency operations with the army and police.

#### *Village Protection Volunteers (Or Ror Bor)*

Operating in minority Thai-Buddhist communities, the *Or Ror Bor* is a de facto sectarian civil-defense force with the implicit mission of defending these communities from attack by Malay-Muslims, who form the majority of the population

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<sup>97</sup> Whangni, Abdullah. "Or Sor: Another Soft Target for the Militants in the Far South?" Isara Institute, Bangkok, 12 January 2010.

<sup>98</sup> Tanham, George K. *Trial in Thailand* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, Inc., 1974).

<sup>99</sup> International Crisis Group, "Southern Thailand: Moving Towards Political Solutions?" Asia Report No. 181, 8 December 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and Justice for Peace Foundation, "Priority to Protect: Preventing Children's Association with Village Defense Militias in Southern Thailand," March 2011.

in the far south. Reflecting Thai-Buddhist perceptions of vulnerability, the *Or Ror Bor* has a distinctly ethno-nationalist tinge.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, these civil defense forces, whose membership totals roughly 10,000, operate under the patronage of the (Buddhist) queen of Thailand. The existence of the Village Protection Volunteers and its ethno-nationalist complexion has created widespread unease among Malay-Muslims, who have formed their own local defense forces to defend interests they believe are challenged by Thai-Muslim protectors of the “motherland.”

### *Insights from the Thai experience*

The capabilities of local defense forces operating in Thailand’s restive south vary considerably from organization to organization. By most accounts, the *Or Sor* is the most proficient of the CDFs. The Volunteer Defense Corps have a well-developed sense of purpose, rooted in a belief that the units exist to help and protect the population. Moreover, the *Or Sor* enjoys an appreciably better human rights record than either the army or the police.<sup>102</sup>

That said, neither the *Or Sor* nor any of the CDFs have demonstrated any particular competence as security providers. While costing relatively little relative to the RTA or the police, and possessing local awareness and knowledge of local insurgent networks, the Thai CDFs operate with hindrances that limit their performance considerably. Training and equipment is generally considered poor, and units are sometimes fielded against militants without adequate support.

In some cases, they appear to be used as operational tripwires. For example, one village volunteer told a reporter in March 2011 that each time he was assigned to joint patrols with security forces “he would be put on the front and would be first to take the blow if anything went wrong.”<sup>103</sup> In the view of one leading scholar of the conflict in the deep south, the “[c]asualties inflicted on members of the *Chor Ror Bor* and other militias [illustrate] the inability of the Thai state to protect its village-level adjutants.”<sup>104</sup> Ultimately, concludes the International Crisis Group, “the contribution of various village militias to security is negligible.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sarosi, Diana and Janjira Sombutpoonsiri. “Rule by the Gun: Armed Civilians and Firearms Proliferation in Southern Thailand,” Nonviolence International Southeast Asia, May 2009.

<sup>102</sup> Ball, Desmond and David Scott Mathieson. *Militia Redux: Or Sor and the Revival of Paramilitarism in Thailand* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> “4,500-Baht Employment Project,” ISARA Institute, Bangkok, March 29, 2011.

<sup>104</sup> McCargo, Duncan. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 123.

<sup>105</sup> International Crisis Group, “Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries,” Asia Report No. 140, 23 October 2007.

This could in fact understate the problem—local defense forces may be net contributor to public *insecurity*. Ill-disciplined, inept, or corrupt local forces allow insurgents and criminals easy access to weapons. Moreover, CDFs in the deep south are readily co-opted by local strongmen and potentates and wielded by various “dark influences” (*itthiphon meut*) to serve private, criminal or familial rather than public interests.

Communal defense forces—although a response to a profound lack of security—serve as an additional accelerant in a conflict-riddled environment. Although a significant number of Malay-Muslims participate in the *Chor Ror Bor*, they are widely regarded with disdain by co-ethnics who consider them “traitors” (*munafik*) serving “Siamese” interests. The existence of sectarian forces has prompted out-group members to form their own self-defense units. Malay-Muslims have established their own unofficial and unsanctioned community defense forces in response to perceived threats. Finally, the creation of the *Or Ror Bor*, rather than alleviating security concerns, has led some Thai Buddhists to believe that the state has not done enough to protect their interests, which has contributed to the growth of vigilante-style defense groups. In the words of one Buddhist monk in Khok district, Pattani province, “guns reassure your safety.”<sup>106</sup>

## Third-party employment of CDFs

### Village defense forces in South Vietnam

During the 1960s and 1970s, the CIA and the U.S. military established several CDF programs in South Vietnam in an attempt to combat insurgent infiltration from the North. Two of the largest and most important programs were the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) led by the CIA and the U.S. Marine Corps’ Combined Action Platoon (CAP) program. These programs focused on the defense of rural or isolated villages and were often centered on specific tribal or minority ethnic groups. By the time the CIDG program was transitioned to U.S. military control in 1963, it had grown to over 61,000 members, consisting of 43,000 village defenders and an 18,000-man mobile strike force.<sup>107</sup> At its zenith, the CAP program consisted of 114 Popular Force (PF) platoons, containing 35 villager defenders each.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Sarosi and Sombutpoonsiri, “Rule by the Gun,” 21.

<sup>107</sup> “Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-71,” Department of the Army, CMH Publication 90-23, Washington, D.C. 1989 (First Printed, 1973).

<sup>108</sup> U.S. Marines Combined Action Platoons (CAC/CAP) Web site, <http://www.capmarine.com/>.

### *Civilian Irregular Defense Group*

The CIA launched the CIDG in 1961 as a covert program to counter Viet Cong influence in South Vietnam's Central Highlands by convincing Montagnard tribesmen and other minority groups to defend their villages against infiltration. The CIDG saw its first major success at Buon Enao village in Darlac province. In exchange for weapons, training, and developmental assistance, the Rhade tribe agreed to side with the South Vietnamese government.

The establishment of a community defense force at Buon Enao village attracted wide attention in other tribal settlements, and the program expanded rapidly across the entire province. Green Beret A Teams assigned to the CIA began moving into villages to set up CIDG camps or "Area Development Centers." The United States equipped CIDG units with basic small arms and trained the units to use them.<sup>109</sup> The village chief, as well as other recruits, vetted candidates in order to prevent Viet Cong infiltrators.<sup>110</sup> While local defenders manned static positions in the villages, well-trained, full-time (and paid) mobile strike forces patrolled outlying areas and rallied to villages that came under attack. Once a village was pacified, it served as a training camp for others. By August 1962, the area under CIDG development encompassed 200 villages.

While relatively successful in reducing insurgent influence at the village level, the U.S. military felt that the CIDG units and their Special Forces mentors were not being used to their full, offensive potential. Under Operation Switchback, starting in 1963, the CIDG program was transferred from the CIA to the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV). Units were ordered to forgo village defense in favor of more conventional operations such as border surveillance and interdiction.<sup>111</sup> As a result of Operation Switchback, CIDG's forces began operating outside of their home areas, and were pitted against larger and better armed enemy forces.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Piasecki, Eugene G. "Civilian Irregular Defense Group: The First Years: 1961-1967," *Veritas* 5, no.4 (2007): 24-36.

<sup>110</sup> "Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-71," Department of the Army, CMH Publication 90-23, Washington, D.C. 1989 (First Printed, 1973).

<sup>111</sup> Ives, Christopher K. *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: Military innovation and institutional failure 1961-1963* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>112</sup> Nagl, John A. "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: American Organizational Culture and Learning," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008).

### *The U.S. Marine Corps' Combined Action Program*

In 1965, the U.S. Marine Corps created the Combined Action Program (CAP) to bolster the South Vietnamese Popular Forces (PFs) — a pre-existing paramilitary force under the control of the South Vietnamese military. Under CAP, U.S. Marine squads were combined with PF platoons.<sup>113</sup> To gain the trust of the communities in which they operated, Marine squads embedded themselves with their Vietnamese counterparts and lived alongside them in the villages. This arrangement facilitated both the training and civic action aspects of their mission (e.g., construction of schools, provision of medical services).

At the height of the program, 114 CAP platoons were operational, all located in the highly contested Military Region 1, south of the North Vietnamese border.<sup>114</sup> U.S. Marines taught basic defense tactics and instilled discipline, while the PFs provided the Marines with language training, familiarization with local customs, and valuable information regarding Viet Cong operations.<sup>115</sup> The Viet Cong saw the program as a substantial threat to its control over the population and thus frequently attacked CAP platoons. Eventually, high casualty rates among embedded CAP units led to a more mobile approach to the program, with units moving between villages and spending the night in the field.

### *Insights from the American experience in South Vietnam*

The CIDG program was highly successful from its inception until the end of 1963. Village defenders accepted the training and weapons enthusiastically and fought well against the Viet Cong. Deliberate, well-conceived vetting procedures prevented large-scale insurgent infiltration.<sup>116</sup> Largely due to the effectiveness of the CIDG units, the Vietnamese government was able to declare Darlac province secure by the end of 1962.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Joes, Anthony James. *Resisting Rebellion: The History and Politics of Counterinsurgency* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Williamson III, Maj Curtis L. "The U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Program: A Proposed Alternative Strategy for the Vietnam War," thesis, Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Montgomery, AL: Air War College—Air University, 2002.

<sup>116</sup> "Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-71," Department of the Army, CMH Publication 90-23, Washington, D.C. 1989 (First Printed, 1973).

<sup>117</sup> Nagl, John A. "Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: American Organizational Culture and Learning," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008).

After its initial success, the CIDG program began to falter when it took on a more conventional role and offensive mission sets. The quality of training, as well as attention to vetting, fell as the program expanded. The re-supply of village defenders was often delayed.<sup>118</sup> Desertion rates increased as tribesmen grew sick of serving so far from their villages.<sup>119</sup> When units were transitioned to Vietnamese control, the government was unable — or in some cases unwilling — to support the CIDG units.<sup>120</sup> The Vietnamese government's racist views towards ethnic minorities created distrust and animosities that in some instances led units to abandon the program.<sup>121</sup> At the end of 1963, the first CIDG site at Buon Enao village fell apart. A year later, another five CIDG camps revolted against the government.<sup>122</sup>

Although always few in numbers (U.S. Marines participating in the program never exceeded 2,500), CAP platoons were largely successful in disrupting insurgent activities in the villages in which they were employed. According to most accounts, CAP platoons were more effective than their un-partnered PF counterparts.<sup>123</sup> They were cheap to operate, popular with the locals, and had a high "kill" ratio relative to the size of the units.<sup>124</sup> They allowed the U.S. Marines to engage the enemy more often than other American units involved in search-and-destroy operations.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, armed with reliable intelligence, CAP platoons were able to minimize collateral damage by forgoing the use of heavy artillery and air support in favor of small arms tactics. Also, because the PF they partnered with were able to effectively

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<sup>118</sup> Long, Austin, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus (eds.). *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012).

<sup>119</sup> Ives, Christopher K. *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: Military innovation and institutional failure 1961-1963* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>120</sup> "Vietnam Studies: U.S. Army Special Forces 1961-71," Department of the Army, CMH Publication 90-23, Washington, D.C. 1989 (First Printed, 1973).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Piasecki, Eugene G. "Civilian Irregular Defense Group: The First Years: 1961-1967," *Veritas* 5, no.4 (2007): 24-36.

<sup>123</sup> CAPs were credited with achieving a 14 to 1 kill ratio against while un-partnered PF platoons achieved a lower 3 to 1 kill ratio. CAP PFs suffered only one quarter the number of desertions relative to un-partnered PFs. That said, CAP Pf suffered twice as many fatalities compared to un-partnered PFs.

<sup>124</sup> U.S. Marines Combined Action Platoons (CAC/CAP) Web site, <http://www.capmarine.com/>.

<sup>125</sup> Moyar, Mark. *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997).

spot mines and booby traps, fewer CAP Marines died as a result of mine warfare.<sup>126</sup> In addition to security, the CAP program also facilitated government penetration into the villages. Of those villages possessing CAP platoons, 93 percent had functioning government councils, compared to 29 percent in un-partnered villages.<sup>127</sup>

Despite some success the program was too small to achieve widespread security gains. Positive effects were highly localized and often transitory.<sup>128</sup> U.S. Marine commanders failed to link disparate CAP platoons into a comprehensive local security architecture, and squads were often inserted into villages beyond the supporting range of other CAP units.<sup>129</sup> Consequently, in some cases large enemy formations overran static CAP posts.<sup>130</sup> After U.S. Marines withdrew from an area, PF performance fell dramatically and some reverted to Viet Cong control. After four years of operations, only two CAP platoons out of 114 had ever achieved a level of pacification sufficient to allow the squad to move into new villages.<sup>131</sup>

## Tribal auxiliaries in southern Oman

The Omani government employs a small force of tribal auxiliaries to provide additional security in the south of the country. *Firqats*, as they are known, are the remnants of a tribal defense force recruited by the Omani government and trained by the British military during the 1970s to help put down the Dhofar rebellion. At the end of the war, *firqat* units were incorporated into the Omani military chain of command as part of the Tribal Home Guard tasked with protecting communities,

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<sup>126</sup> Mitchell, Maj Dustin R. "Effective Local Security Forces: Some Ideas for the Counterinsurgent," master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Williamson III, Maj Curtis L. "The U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Program: A Proposed Alternative Strategy for the Vietnam War," thesis, Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Montgomery, AL: Air War College—Air University, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Kopets, Keith F. "The Combined Action Program: Vietnam," *Military Review* 82, no.4 (July/August 2002): 78-81.

<sup>129</sup> Mitchell, Maj Dustin R. "Effective Local Security Forces: Some Ideas for the Counterinsurgent," master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011.

<sup>130</sup> Moyar, Mark. *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: The CIA's Secret Campaign to Destroy the Viet Cong* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997).

<sup>131</sup> Williamson III, Maj Curtis L. "The U.S. Marine Corps Combined Action Program: A Proposed Alternative Strategy for the Vietnam War," thesis, Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Montgomery, AL: Air War College—Air University, 2002.

manning local forts, and assisting regular security forces with reconnaissance and border patrols.<sup>132</sup>

### *Firqats during the Dhofar rebellion*

During the rebellion of the 1970s, the *firqats* operated as irregular formations of lightly armed tribal fighters, working in conjunction with British Special Forces advisory teams from the Special Air Service (SAS). British Army Training Teams (BATTs) provided training, weapons, command and control, and medical aid.<sup>133</sup> They were given the responsibility of protecting government centers on the *Jebel* mountain range and of securing their own tribal areas. Twenty-one *firqat* units, numbering from 50 to 150 men each (for a total force of approximately 2,000 to 2,500), were eventually formed at 26 separate locations.<sup>134</sup> On occasion, *Firqat* units also accompanied regular Omani forces on major combat operations.

The *firqats'* most significant contribution was their knowledge of the human terrain and their ability to provide vital intelligence.<sup>135</sup> Prior to the uprising in Dhofar, the Omani military had no *Jebelis* within its ranks and had little experience operating in the south. Unfamiliar with local customs and dialects, Omani soldiers found it exceedingly difficult to engage the southern tribes and to establish intelligence networks. The *firqat*, on the other hand, were members of the communities in which they operated and had intimate knowledge of insurgent networks and tactics. Prior to joining a *firqat*, a recruit was subjected to questioning by members of the Omani military as well as his tribe. These debriefings produced a great deal of exploitable intelligence regarding insurgent hideouts, supply routes, unit strengths, and commander names.<sup>136</sup> *Firqats* also proved adept in the reconnaissance role—spotting

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<sup>132</sup> “Special Forces (Land) (Oman)” *Jane’s Amphibious and Special Forces*, 28 August 2012; and Peterson, J.E. “Oman’s Diverse Society: Southern Oman,” *Middle East Journal* 58, no.2 (2004): 254-69.

<sup>133</sup> Ladwig II, Walter C.. Supporting allies in counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no.1 (March 2008): 62-88; Gardiner, Ian. *In the Service of the Sultan: A First Hand Account of the Dhofar Insurgency* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2006).

<sup>134</sup> Beckett, Ian F.W. Beckett. “The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar 1965-75,” in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008); Akehurst, John. *We Won a War: The Campaign in Oman 1965-1975*. Salisbury: Michael Russell Ltd, 1982. pg. 42.

<sup>135</sup> Stevens, Michael. “Community Defense in Afghanistan: A Model for Future Stabilization?” *RUSI Journal* 156 (June/July 2011): 42-47.; Walter C. Ladwig II. Supporting allies in counterinsurgency: Britain and the Dhofar Rebellion, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 19, no. 1 (March 2008): 62-88.

<sup>136</sup> Higgins, Nick. “The Dhofar Campaign: Applying Lessons Learned in Afghanistan.” *The Guardian Anti-Terrorism Journal* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 3-10.



mines, detecting ambushes, and identifying insurgent positions for Omani army and SAS patrols.

The *firqat* force also provided an incredibly effective mechanism for reintegrating insurgent fighters. In fact, by the end of the war, insurgent defectors accounted for nearly 80 percent of the *firqat* force.<sup>137</sup> The first unit, the *Firqat Salahedin*, was stood up by rebel commanders who had turned against the increasingly anti-tribal and anti-Islamic insurgent leadership. The success of their high-profile defection had a cascading effect, and soon hundreds of enemy fighters began to surrender. *Firqat* members encouraged their tribesmen to join them, sometimes using the government's Radio Dhofar to reach out to their former comrades.<sup>138</sup> In addition to amnesty, the government offered cash incentives to those willing to lay down their arms. Insurgents found that joining a *firqat* unit was an honorable way to leave the insurgency, while at the same time earning an income.

The establishment of local defense forces also brought development and economic growth to the disadvantaged south. Once an area was cleared, and a *firqat* unit was stood up to protect it, British Army engineers would arrive to build wells, medical clinics, schools, roads, and power stations. The monthly salaries paid to *firqat* members brought new-found prosperity to the *Jebeli* population.

### *Insights from the British experience in Oman*

When used strictly as an irregular force and within the framework of a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy, *firqats* provided critical capabilities that the regular Omani military could not match.<sup>139</sup> In addition to holding cleared territory, the *firqats* provided situational awareness, intelligence on insurgent networks and tactics, inroads to the population, and employment to rebels wishing to leave the insurgency. On the political front, the *firqats* secured the support of the *Jebeli* tribes and helped build trust in the central government.

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<sup>137</sup> Beckett, Ian F.W. Beckett. "The British Counterinsurgency Campaign in Dhofar 1965-75," in *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare*, ed. Carter Malkasian and Daniel Marston (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008).

<sup>138</sup> Stevens, Michael. "Community Defense in Afghanistan: A Model for Future Stabilization?," *RUSI Journal* 156 (June/July 2011): 42-47.; Clegg, Will. "Irregular Forces in Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Security Challenges* 5, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 1-25; Jeapes, Tony. *SAS Operation Oman* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1980).

<sup>139</sup> *Firqat* performed poorly in conventional roles such as a screen in advance to contact. They were best used on operations of their own or with their BATTs, within an overall SAF/BATT/*firqat* plan; Jeapes, Tony. *SAS Operation Oman* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1980).

While effective, *firqats* proved difficult to control. They were self-interested, undisciplined, unpredictable, and intensely tribal.<sup>140</sup> Their primary motivation for fighting was often the retrieval of their own tribal lands and they would rarely cooperate with *firqats* from other areas.<sup>141</sup> On occasion, *firqats* refused to attack insurgents, as killing a member of another tribe would create a blood feud.<sup>142</sup> Also, because of their familial connections to the insurgency, the Omani army and SAS were often unsure of their loyalty. In order to keep the *firqats* from tipping off insurgents, the location of an operation was often kept secret from them until the last minute.<sup>143</sup>

The *firqat* required constant supervision and support in order to remain effective. Initially, the SAS had planned to quickly transition control of an established *firqat* unit to the Omani military, and move into other areas. But without their BATT advisors to lobby on their behalf, *firqat* units did not get the support or materials they needed. Transitioned *firqats* soon became ineffective, intelligence stopped flowing, and BATTs had to take back control.<sup>144</sup> At the end of the war, most *firqats* still required support from BATT advisors.

## The Sons of Iraq

In 2007, U.S. forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations in Iraq created a civil defense force to protect neighborhoods and wage proxy warfare against al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Impressed by the effectiveness of grassroots mobilization to isolate the Sunni insurgency from its bases of support, U.S. commanders attempted to expand the “Al Anbar Awakening” by creating a nation-wide, local defense program. The Sons of Iraq (SOI), as the program was later dubbed, had its origins in the tribal revolt in the Sunni stronghold of Al Anbar province, but quickly expanded throughout the country and incorporated over 100,000 volunteers.

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<sup>140</sup> Stevens, Michael. “Community Defense in Afghanistan: A Model for Future Stabilization?” *RUSI Journal* 156 (June/July 2011): 42-47.

<sup>141</sup> Green, Maj Robert L. “Key Considerations for Irregular Security Forces in Counterinsurgency,” Master’s thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011.

<sup>142</sup> Peterson, J.E. “Oman’s Diverse Society: Southern Oman,” *Middle East Journal* 58, no.2 (2004): 254-69.

<sup>143</sup> Gardiner, Ian. *In the Service of the Sultan: A First Hand Account of the Dhofar Insurgency* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2006).

<sup>144</sup> Jeapes, Tony. *SAS Operation Oman* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1980).

### *The Sons of Iraq program*

In order to expand the success of the ‘Anbar Awakening’ to other parts of Iraq, in the spring of 2007, the Multi-National Corps- Iraq (MNC-I) Commander tasked the Joint Fires and Effects Cell to create a Reconciliation and Engagements Cell (REC).<sup>145</sup> Soon after, with guidance from the REC, coalition forces stood up the “Concerned Local Citizens” program and began awarding Commander’s Emergency Response Program (CERP) contracts to community leaders to provide security in their neighborhoods and protect critical infrastructure. The program expanded rapidly and eventually became known as the Sons of Iraq.

The SOI program called for establishing community defense groups in strategically important neighborhoods that lacked sufficient Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). U.S. commanders on the ground were given the freedom to create SOI units as they deemed fit in order to overwhelm the insurgency.<sup>146</sup> They awarded security contracts to trustworthy community leaders based on the amount of influence they had in their neighborhood. Rank-and-file hiring decisions were then left to individual neighborhood commanders. In total, 779 separate SOI contracts were awarded in ten, mainly Sunni, provinces. As many recruits had been active in the insurgency, they were asked to sign oaths promising to renounce violence against the Iraqi government. In addition, coalition forces screened candidates through their electronic databases to ensure that AQI members were not infiltrating the program.<sup>147</sup>

As U.S. and Iraqi security forces cleared insurgents from a specific area, trailing elements established SOI checkpoints to hold territory.<sup>148</sup> Once an SOI unit was formed, it was given instruction on checkpoint procedures, weapons handling, rules of engagement, and detainee handling. SOI units were authorized to operate and carry personal weapons only in the neighborhoods where they lived, and were subordinated to nearby Iraqi or U.S. units. Typically, a single SOI unit was responsible for several checkpoints. While the program was intended purely for static neighborhood defense, SOI units nevertheless regularly conducted their own

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<sup>145</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton, “Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective,” Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Koloski, Maj Andrew W. and Lt Col John Kolasheski, “Thickening the Lines: Sons of Iraq, A Combat Multiplier,” *Military Review* 89, no.1 (January/February 2009): 41-53.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

targeting operations against AQI members and worked alongside coalition forces as scouts on raids and clearing operations.<sup>149</sup>

### *Insights from the American experience in Iraq*

In many instances, the program had a substantial effect on the insurgency's ability to operate and sustain itself. According to one U.S. commander, after the SOI program was initiated in his area, he saw a 50-percent drop in violence.<sup>150</sup> U.S. commanders on the ground also reported that their SOI units provided them with much-needed local intelligence.<sup>151</sup> SOI members were able to pinpoint areas to search and identify people to question.

Coalition forces found that standing up the SOI also provided several important secondary effects. Accounts suggest that the SOI program significantly decreased the insurgency's ability to recruit, by paying salaries to individuals who otherwise might have joined insurgent groups. In addition, the SOI contracts boosted the local economy by injecting much-needed cash into war-torn neighborhoods.

The SOI program, however, was not without problems. Because of the rapid rate of expansion, only a fraction of the SOI employed were ever actually trained.<sup>152</sup> In some cases, accelerated expansion also led to poor vetting and supervision of SOI units.<sup>153</sup> Accountability issues such as "ghost employees" arose, as did poor control over the distribution of payments.<sup>154</sup> In some instances, SOI units were created where there was no need for additional security.

One of the most notable deficiencies in the SOI program was the poor relationship between the SOI and the central government. Initially, the central government

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<sup>149</sup> Wilbank, Mark and Efraim Karsh. "How the 'Sons of Iraq' Stabilized Iraq," *Middle East Quarterly* 17, no.4 (2010): 57-70.; and Mitchell, Maj Dustin R. "Effective Local Security Forces: Some Ideas for the Counterinsurgent," master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2011.

<sup>150</sup> Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction. *Sons of Iraq Program: Results Are Uncertain and Financial Controls Were Weak* (Rpt. 11-010) (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011).

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Author's interview. Terry Walker, Son of Iraq trainer, conducted in Washington, DC, October 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Long, Austin, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus (eds.). *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012).

<sup>154</sup> Wilbank, Mark and Efraim Karsh. "How the 'Sons of Iraq' Stabilized Iraq," *Middle East Quarterly* 17, no.4 (2010): 57-70.

refused to recognize the SOI program and was hesitant to assume control over SOI units. The SOI was intended as a temporary measure, and recruits were promised employment in the ISF or positions in the civil service. When only half of the SOI were transitioned to permanent positions in the security services and civilian government, many SOI commanders concluded that the government had betrayed and used them. The Iraqi government further angered SOI units by confiscating weapons and issuing arrest warrants against some of their leaders. In addition to their mistreatment by the Iraqi government, SOI members suffered greatly in revenge campaigns orchestrated by Shi'a militias and al Qaeda terrorists. Hundreds of SOI members were killed or wounded in these attacks.<sup>155</sup> Although there are no firm figures, officials estimate that hundreds of SOI fighters rejoined AQI, and perhaps thousands covertly aided the insurgency.<sup>156</sup>

Despite some considerable drawbacks and mistakes made along the way, the use of non-statutory civil defense groups in Iraq played a crucial role in resolving—or at least temporarily quieting—the insurgency and creating the space necessary for a political dialogue to occur.

## Local defense forces in Pakistan's tribal hinterlands<sup>157</sup>

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, British and, later, Pakistani authorities have organized Pashtun tribesmen to provide local security in remote border areas along what is now the border with Afghanistan. The Frontier Corps (FC), manned by locals but commanded by Pakistan Army officers, is the most prominent of these groups. Under British rule, the FC was an instrument in a wider system of indirect imperial control. The Pakistani government has continued to employ the FC to police the tribal areas in order to free up the army to prepare for conventional military operations. Unlike the British, the Pakistani government has employed the FC in sustained, offensive, highly “kinetic” operations. As a result of its constant use, the performance of the post-1947 Frontier Corps has been substantially poorer than that of its pre-1947 incarnation.

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<sup>155</sup> “Gunmen Kill Four Members of Government-backed Iraqi Militia,” *Guardian* (London), 16 August 2011.

<sup>156</sup> Williams, Timothy and Duraid Adnan. “Sunnis in Iraq Allied with U.S. Rejoin Rebels,” *The New York Times*, 16 October 2010.

<sup>157</sup> This case study was derived from a larger work on the subject conducted by Dr. William Rosenau. For the full report on Pakistan's Frontier Corps please see: William Rosenau, *Irksome and Unpopular Duties: Pakistan's Frontier Corps, Local Defense Forces, and Counterinsurgency*, CNA Occasional Paper DOP-2012-U-000299, May 2012.

### *Local defense forces under the British imperial administration*

Under the British imperial administration, a variety of lightly armed and highly mobile irregular forces, including scouts, levies, and militias, were raised to provide security along the restive Afghan frontier and within the strategically important tribal regions that functioned as a buffer between the border and India's "settled" areas. Paramilitary forces were drawn from the area's Pashtun tribes and were often commanded by British Indian Army officers. When blandishments failed to gain tribal acquiescence, scouts and militias served as the Indian Civil Service political agent's "strike force" to buttress imperial authority.<sup>158</sup> Routine patrols were intended to assert and subsequently reinforce the writ of government.<sup>159</sup>

In 1907, the plethora of irregular forces operating along the frontier, including units such as the Zhob Militia, the Kurram Militia, and the Khyber Rifles, were brought together administratively as the Frontier Corps. Other, less formalized defense groups continued to operate. *Khassadars* (tribal police), who were paid but neither trained nor equipped by the imperial authorities, were described in a contemporaneous British government report as having the responsibility "to ensure the safety of communications within each tribe's territory and secondarily to act as a stabilizing element in the tribal life. The subsidies . . . are given in order to assist the elders of the tribe to control the whole tribe."<sup>160</sup>

### *The Frontier Corps today*

The Frontier Corps survived the collapse of the British Raj largely intact. The new government quickly ordered the army to withdraw from the frontier, leaving the region's security in the hands of the Frontier Corps. In addition, the government decided to split the corps along geographical lines, creating Frontier Corps-North West Frontier Province and Frontier Corps-Balochistan. Pakistan also created additional units, such as the Karakoram Scouts, for defense against India. Unlike the British, the Pakistanis used the Frontier Corps in major combat operations, including the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1948, 1965, and 1971. The Frontier Corps fought against separatists in Balochistan in the 1970s and provided assistance to the Afghan mujahidin in the 1980s.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Trench, Charles. Chenevix, *The Frontier Scouts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>159</sup> Javed Iqbal, "An Overview of British Administrative Set-Up and Strategy in the Khyber 1849-1947," *IPRI Journal* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2011), 86.

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Frank Leeson, *Frontier Legion: With the Khassadars of North Waziristan* (West Sussex, UK: The Leeson Archive, 2003), 20.

<sup>161</sup> "Pakistan: Corps is Ill-Equipped for "War on Terror,"" Oxford Analytica Profile, 11 December 2007, 1.

Today, the Frontier Corps numbers approximately 80,000. It has responsibility for law and order in three areas: along the border with Afghanistan; within the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), a semi-autonomous tribal region in northwestern Pakistan; and in Balochistan. Its key roles, missions, and functions include anti-smuggling, counternarcotic operations, and, increasingly, counterinsurgency operations against the Taliban and other violent extremist organizations.

A minimum of five 80-man “wings” are deployed in each tribal agency.<sup>162</sup> As in the period before independence, enlisted men are Pashtun recruits and officers are drawn from the Punjabi-dominated regular army. Along the border and in the FATA, enlisted men are locally recruited, while in Frontier Corps-Balochistan, most enlisted men are Pashtuns from outside the region. Although the FC is technically a part of the Ministry of the Interior, it is commanded by an “inspector general,” a post that since 1950 has been occupied by an army brigadier or major general.<sup>163</sup>

Recent U.S. policy supports a more robust (some would say more militarized) Frontier Corps capable of more aggressive and potent operations to defend the border, disrupt drug trafficking, and, most importantly, counter the Taliban, al Qaeda, and other illegal armed groups. U.S. Army Special Forces advisors have trained Pakistani paramilitary units and have helped establish a 400-man “commando unit” to hunt down Pashtun tribal militants and foreign Islamists.<sup>164</sup>

### *Insights from the British and Pakistani experiences*

During the British Raj, the use of indigenous forces and a mere handful of imperial administrators allowed the British to exercise a measure of control and maintain what one historian termed an “acceptable level of violence” in a vast and inhospitable territory.<sup>165</sup> These units were relatively low cost force-multipliers that allowed the British army to maintain a light “footprint”—an important benefit, given that the presence of “foreign” troops (such as Hindus and Sikhs) was a source of considerable irritation to local tribesmen. As one British Indian Army officer concluded in 1908, “the militia system grew up as a cheap expedient to relieve regular troops from

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<sup>162</sup> Gul, Imtiaz. *The Most Dangerous Place: Pakistan’s Lawless Frontier* (New York: Viking, 2009), 48.

<sup>163</sup> “Paramilitary Forces,” *South Asia Defence and Strategic Yearbook*, New Delhi, 1 January 2009.

<sup>164</sup> Schmitt, Eric and Jane Perlez. “U.S. Unit Secretly in Pakistan Lends Ally Support,” *New York Times*, 23 February 2009.

<sup>165</sup> Groh, Ty L. “A Fortress Without Walls: Alternative Governance Structures on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Frontier,” in Anne L. Clunan and Harold A. Trinkunas (eds.), *Ungoverned Spaces: Alternatives to State Authority in an Era of Softened Sovereignty* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

irksome and unpopular duties.”<sup>166</sup> Martial prowess, the ability to endure hardship, and esprit de corps characterized much of the FC, but these strengths had little to do with any allegiance to abstractions such as India or the British Empire more generally. The capabilities derived instead from group allegiance as well as personal fealty to those British officers who were able to inspire loyalty and affection.

While never instilling a sense of citizenship or loyalty to the British administrative authority, the Frontier Corps did offer a measure of social mobility, pride, and prestige to local tribesmen. For foot soldiers, service offered a way to provide for themselves as well as their families. Moreover, Pashtun society gave considerable standing to those who fought in the Frontier Corps, even if such service entailed the use of violence against members of one’s own tribe.<sup>167</sup>

Recruited in the areas where they would serve (with the exception of Balochistan), members of the Frontier Corps had a depth of knowledge that was almost certainly unobtainable otherwise. Although officered by the Pakistan Army, the FC—by policing the ever-restive tribal regions in the neighboring areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan—freed up the army to fix its attention on India.

Since 2003, the Frontier Corps has borne the brunt of the fighting in the FATA and nearby areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the Swat Valley.<sup>168</sup> Infrastructure programs, with American and British funds, have built more than 200 new outposts in the FATA and Balochistan. According to the U.S. State Department, these new outposts have improved the ability of the Frontier Corps and other internal security forces to “interdict militants, narcotics traffickers, and other criminal elements.”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Jules Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda* (Phoenix Mill, Gloucester, UK: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005), 212.

<sup>167</sup> “Due to the status of *izzat* (honor) with the Pashtunwali, the normative code of the Pashtuns, social prestige was associated with fighting in the Frontier Scouts, even if this involved assaults upon one’s own tribe.” Clegg, Will. “Irregular Forces in Counterinsurgency Warfare,” *Security Challenges* 5, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 9.

<sup>168</sup> Woods, Chris and Declan Walsh. “Pakistan Expels British Military Trainers As Rift With West Grows,” *Guardian* (London), 27 June 2011, 13. Among the security forces, the Frontier Corps has also borne the brunt of the casualties: in 2011, it suffered 1,004 killed or wounded while the army suffered 607 casualties and the police 581. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (Islamabad), *Pakistan Security Report 2011*, Islamabad, January 4, 2012. The figures are particularly startling when the organization’s small size (relative to the army and police) is taken into account.

<sup>169</sup> U.S. Department of State. *Pakistan Border Security Program Fact Sheet*, 23 November 2011. British military advisors, who were part of the country’s £15 million aid program to the FC, were expelled from Pakistan in June 2011, reportedly in response to the raid that killed Osama



Other assessments of the Frontier Corps are more downbeat. The frontier forces are widely acknowledged to be poorly equipped, badly trained, and poorly led. In the words of one Pakistani military analyst, regular army officers see the militiamen “dressed in *shalwar* and *qameez* (traditional loose shirt and baggy pants worn by civilians) and *chaplis* (local sandals) and... dismiss them as a rabble.”<sup>170</sup>

Heavy losses in battle and the frequent use of force against civilian Pashtuns have badly battered morale in Frontier Corps-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.<sup>171</sup> Whatever Pashtun normative code it was that accepted (or permitted) the use of violence against fellow Pashtuns during the colonial period no longer appears to hold. Divided loyalties, or simply the fear of retribution by their own tribes, have reportedly made some FC members unwilling to conduct military operations against Islamist groups.<sup>172</sup> Desertion is a serious problem, according to a 2008 report, which concluded that roughly 2,000 FC members had run away in recent years.<sup>173</sup>

Although Frontier Corps-Balochistan is engaged in “hearts and minds” activities such as building schools and providing medical assistance, it has earned an unenviable reputation for heavy-handedness, corruption, and incompetence. Its members are ethnic outsiders in a province dominated by Balochi-speaking tribes and are therefore cut off from detailed local knowledge. Widely seen as intruders, the Frontier Corps faces widespread public hostility. Moreover, press reports suggest that the FC has been “captured” and manipulated by local political and business interests.<sup>174</sup>

## Local policing in Afghanistan

Since the creation of the modern Afghan state, weak central governments have had to rely on traditional tribal militias to provide local security and to put down insurrection. Abdur Rahman Khan, the father of the modern Afghan state,

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bin Laden. Woods, Chris and Declan Walsh. “Pakistan Expels British Trainers of Anti-Taliban Soldiers,” *Guardian* (London), 26 June 2011.

<sup>170</sup> Hussain, Hamid. “Spit and No Polish: Soldiering with Scouts,” Chowk.com, 4 September 2008.

<sup>171</sup> Lalwani, Sameer. *Pakistani Capabilities for a Counterinsurgency Campaign: A Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: New America Foundation, September 2009), 37.

<sup>172</sup> Johnson, Thomas H. and M. Chris Mason, “No Sign Until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier,” *International Security* 32, no. 4 (Spring 2008): 76.

<sup>173</sup> “US Begins Training Pakistan Frontier Corps,” *Jane’s Country Risk Daily Report*, 27 October 2008.

<sup>174</sup> Mateen, Amir. “A Drive Through Troubled Balochistan,” *The News Online* (Islamabad), 15 November 2011.

established an independent army but relied heavily on tribal forces in Pashtun areas to maintain order. During the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—a stable period in Afghan history, with arguably the greatest degree of state penetration into the periphery—the government continued to utilize tribal police to supplement the national army and police forces.<sup>175</sup> During the insurgency of the 1980s, the Communist government and its Soviet backers relied on civil defense forces, militias, and tribal border forces to provide local defense and conduct offensive operations against the Mujahedeen. At one point, these irregular forces greatly outnumbered the 50,000-man regular army.<sup>176</sup>

Unable to quickly stand up effective state security forces to combat the current Taliban-led insurgency, starting in 2006, the Afghan government and its U.S. partner began experimenting with several bottom-up local security programs. These initial efforts achieved decidedly mixed results, and most were terminated quickly. The latest incarnation, a nation-wide initiative called the Afghan Local Police (ALP), is designed to replace precursor local defense programs such as the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP), the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3), the Local Defense Initiative (LDI), and the Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure (ISCI) program.

### *Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police*

In 2006, the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI) launched the ANAP to provide community policing to the southern provinces, where the government had recently been routed by a full-scale assault by the Taliban. The ANAP's numbers reached 11,271 men in late 2006, but only 9,000 recruits were deployed before the program was terminated in 2008.<sup>177</sup> On paper, the ANAP were integrated into the Afghan National Police (ANP) structure as a separate unit at both district and provincial levels. The provincial chief of police served as the ANAP commander and was responsible for recruitment and logistics. According to the MoI, provincial and district governors would also play a role but would not command ANAP.<sup>178</sup> The ANAP completed a 14-day training course that included weapons handling and shooting, unarmed combat, search techniques, evidence collection, witness statements, and general law.

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<sup>175</sup> "Afghanistan: A History of Utilization of Tribal Auxiliaries," Tribal Analysis Center, August 2008.

<sup>176</sup> Oliker, Olga. "Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime: The Soviet Experience," RAND Corporation, 2011.

<sup>177</sup> Lefevre, Mathieu. "Local Defense in Afghanistan: A review of government-backed initiatives," Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 June 2010.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

When the program was terminated, on paper the men of the ANAP were transferred to the regular police. In reality, most of the ANAP personnel deserted or joined the insurgency; a mere 3,200 coalesced into the ANP.<sup>179</sup> One senior ANP general working in the south at the time estimated that most of the weapons, uniforms, and equipment were never returned or accounted for.<sup>180</sup>

### *Afghan Public Protection Program*

In March 2009, the MoI and U.S. Special Forces (SF) launched a pilot community-policing program called the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3) in Wardak province. The intent of the program was to secure the population, deny insurgent safe havens, and establish the conditions for greater development.<sup>181</sup> The program was slow to start, and ultimately only 1,200 of the intended 8,000 men were hired onto the force.

In order to ensure community buy-in, the program called for volunteers to be selected by local councils made of tribal elders and other community leaders. Initially, Pashtun elders refused to participate and only Tajiks and Hazaras joined the program, eager to access weapons to use in tribal feuding. Because of these recruitment problems, SF appointed local Pashtun strongman and former Taliban militant Ghulam Muhammad Hotak to lead the AP3. Considered an unpopular choice by most of Wardak's tribal elders, Ghulam was nevertheless well regarded by SF because he was able to recruit Pashtun men into the force (500 of his militia were automatically transferred into AP3 without vetting) as well as facilitate discussions with Taliban members. Ghulam was replaced in 2010, but many of his men are now members of the ALP.<sup>182</sup>

### *The Local Defense Initiative*

In reaction to the slow development of the AP3 program, in 2009 SF planners began experimenting with a village protection concept called the Community Defense

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<sup>179</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton, "Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

<sup>180</sup> Lefevre, Mathieu. "Local Defense in Afghanistan: A review of government-backed initiatives," Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 June 2010.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Human Rights Watch, "'Just Don't Call it a Militia': Impunity, Militias, and the 'Afghan Local Police,'" 2011.

Initiative, later re-named the Local Defense Initiative.<sup>183</sup> LDI was run by SF units, which would embed themselves in village communities and, through negotiations with local elders, raise and train a village defense force of 20-30 protectors. Under the supervision of SF embed teams, all LDI recruits were vetted through village councils to ensure community buy-in and limit the potential for abuse and infiltration. No weapons were provided; volunteers instead relied on existing armaments.

LDI was designed to be a far more organic, bottom-up approach to local security than previous CDF programs. Site selection for LDI included the requirement for a history of resistance against the Taliban, and the presence or willingness to accept the *arbakai* (traditional tribal policing) model of village council led community policing. LDI sites were focused around one village or community. Although payments were sometimes made, SF embed teams believed that the primary incentive should be not an individual salaries but rather development projects that benefited the community as a whole.

### *Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure*

In 2010, the U.S. Marines stood up the Interim Security for Critical Infrastructure program in several districts across southern province of Helmand. ISCI was a temporary CERP funded local defense program that employed local guard forces to protect critical infrastructure in their villages and to man checkpoints. ISCI participants were selected by elders but reported to the district chief of police. They were trained by the Marines for 18 days in basic policing and ethics. Unlike LDI, they were paid a monthly salary of \$150 and wore uniforms.<sup>184</sup>

### *The Afghan Local Police*

In order to allay Afghan government fears of U.S.-backed local defense forces turning into rogue militias, in May 2010, SF planners created Village Stability Operations (VSO), a bottom-up counterinsurgency program that served to integrate all pre-existing and future local defense forces into the MoI chain of command and place additional emphasis on local governance and development efforts.<sup>185</sup> The ALP program, which is currently ongoing as of the writing of this report, was the security

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<sup>183</sup> Madden, Dan. "The Evolution of Precision Counterinsurgency: A History of Village Stability Operations and the Afghan Local Police," RAND Corporation, CFSOCC-A Commander's Initiative Group, 30 June 30 2011.

<sup>184</sup> McClaine, Maj TLU. *Afghan Local Police - A Primer*, HQ RC(SW) C-5 Plans (Winter 2011).

<sup>185</sup> Hulslander, Robert and Jake Spivey. "Village Stability Operations and Afghan Local Police," *Prism* 3, no.3 (2011): 125-138.

component of VSO. ALP units are made of local volunteers that operate only in their home districts. Typically each village is eligible for 30 ALP defenders, and each district is allowed a maximum of 300. They provide basic security, early warning, and support to ANP and other Afghan security force elements. While they cannot investigate crimes on their own, ALP members have citizen's arrest authority and can detain people to turn over to the Afghan National Security Forces.<sup>186</sup>

The ALP is administratively controlled by the MoI and by district and provincial chiefs of police. Operational control and direct supervision is provided by the district chief of police and his deputy. A village ALP unit has its own leader, who is chosen by village elders and approved by the ANP regional or district commander.<sup>187</sup>

The program melds aspects of traditional Pashtun *arbakai* village defense with state-based policing. ALP recruits receive salaries and answer to the ANP district chief of police but they are required to live in their villages and remain accountable to their local elders. ALP candidates are nominated by local village council and are vetted by the MoI and the National Directorate of Security (NDS). ALP members are provided with uniforms, small arms, vehicles and other equipment, and receive 21 days of training.

### *Insights from the American experience in Afghanistan*

Because they had not been recruited locally, ANAP volunteers were ill suited to do community-based policing. In many instances they could not speak the language of the people they were supposed to be protecting. The MoI and NDS had very little ability to conduct background checks of ANAP individuals, which resulted in infiltration by Taliban eager to access salaries and resources. Estimates suggest that as many as one in ten ANAP recruits were Taliban agents.<sup>188</sup> Managing the ANAP increased the workload of an already overstretched MoI and ANP. Long delays in payment and shortages of food, equipment, and accommodations, resulted in massive desertions in the first few months of the program.<sup>189</sup> On at least one

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton, "Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

<sup>188</sup> Lefevre, Mathieu. "Local Defense in Afghanistan: A review of government-backed initiatives," Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 June 2010.

<sup>189</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton, "Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective," Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

occasion, the ANAP was blamed for fueling the insurgency after a largely Tajik ANAP force harassed Pashtun communities, which then sought protection from the Taliban.

The AP3 had similar vetting and logistics problems to the ANAP. The MoI and NDS simply did not have the capacity or the time to vet every candidate and struggled to provide payment and equipment to them. The AP3 were quickly released into the fight with limited ANP supervision and a tenuous connection to village councils.<sup>190</sup> Allegations of abuse arose, in which the AP3 were accused of beatings, thefts at checkpoints, land grabbing, corruption, and taking rent from non-governmental organizations. Critically, the relationship between the ANP and AP3 was very poor: the AP3 commander refused to recognize the authority of the ANP, reporting only to the U.S. Special Forces.<sup>191</sup> Despite these shortcomings, many U.S. and Afghan officials considered the AP3 program a success, citing a reduction in insurgent attacks, improved road security, and increased employment opportunities for local men.<sup>192</sup>

In comparison to the ANAP and AP3, which depended more heavily on Afghan government oversight and logistics, the U.S.-administered LDI and ISCI programs saw substantially more success and resulted in far fewer instances of abuse, infiltration, or desertion. While there is little quantifiable data, reporting suggests that LDI saw substantive successes in and around Kandahar province. One shortfall of the program was that it was extremely time and manpower intensive, and its expansion was slowed due to a lack of available SF embed teams. Additionally, in some areas, Taliban intimidation scared off local elders who were initially receptive to the idea.

Despite some reporting of ISCI forces engaging in illegal taxation and petty theft, the U.S. Marines in Helmand province generally regarded the program as a success and credited it with improvements in security in the formerly volatile districts of Marjah and Garmsir. According to Marine commanders, ISCI worked like “ink blots” to push out the enemy and secure sections of neighborhoods one by one.<sup>193</sup> In some instances, ISCI units contributed to the capture of high-value Taliban targets. Moreover, ISCI contributed to governance development by protecting key tribal leaders who otherwise would not have stayed in their districts or supported the government.

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Lefevre, Mathieu. “Local Defense in Afghanistan: A review of government-backed initiatives,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, 14 June 2010.

<sup>192</sup> Human Rights Watch, “‘Just Don’t Call it a Militia’: Impunity, Militias, and the ‘Afghan Local Police,’” 2011.

<sup>193</sup> Author’s interview, U.S. Marines RCT 1, conducted in Helmand Province, November 2011.

According to most assessments, thus far the ALP program has met with considerable success. In his briefing to Congress on March 15, 2011, General David Petraeus noted that the ALP program was “an important addition to the overall campaign” and that the growth of the program “was a particular concern to the Taliban, whose ability to intimidate the population is limited considerably by it.”<sup>194</sup> Though the ALP have suffered high casualty rates at the hands of the Taliban, most have held their ground. Despite the fanfare, fears persist that, like many precursor programs before it, the ALP will be subverted by the Taliban, power brokers, or tribal interests, or derailed by the Afghan government’s inability to effectively support the units in the field. While there have been some reports of abuses by ALP, particularly from the north of the country, few have been corroborated.<sup>195</sup> Importantly, abuse allegations have not seriously challenged the overall positive public perception of the program in the most insurgency-prone areas, such as Helmand province.<sup>196</sup>

Although the ALP has performed relatively well to date, the risk associated with these lightly armed and poorly trained irregular units will increase as international forces finalize their withdrawal of combat forces. Many Afghans fear that, as with the ANAP and AP3, the government will be unable to effectively administer the program over the long term and that, if left alone, ALP units will go rogue or join the insurgency, if just to survive.

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<sup>194</sup> Statement of General David H. Petraeus before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 15, 2011.

<sup>195</sup> Memorandum for Record: Findings and Recommendations (AR 15-6 Investigation- Credibility Assessment of Allegations of Human Rights Violations Appearing in a Human Rights Watch Report), USFOR-A, Headquarters United States Forces-Afghanistan, Kabul Afghanistan, USFOR-A-DJ2, 6 December 2011; Interviews conducted in Kabul by authors, April 2012.

<sup>196</sup> Author’s interviews conducted in Helmand province, May 2012.

Table 1. Coding of the civil defense force case studies

| Case Study           | Voluntary or forced?                            | Assigned appropriate missions? | Effective removal of threat group manpower / avenue for re-integration? | Effective source of intel? | Self-serving behavior? | Human rights abuses / extra-judicial killings? | Adequately linked to / controlled by the gov't? | Effective gov't "off-ramp" program? | Short-term security gains? | Long-term security gains? |
|----------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Yemen</b>         | Voluntary                                       | Initially yes; then no         | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | Initially yes; then no                          | No                                  | Yes                        | TBD                       |
| <b>Turkey</b>        | Voluntary, then forced                          | No                             | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | No  | No                                  | Yes                        | No                        |
| <b>Nigeria</b>       | Voluntary                                       | Yes                            | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | No  | No                                  | Yes                        | TBD                       |
| <b>Peru</b>          | Voluntary, some coercion                        | Initially no; then yes         | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Initially yes; then no                         | Initially no; then yes                          | No                                  | Yes                        | Yes                       |
| <b>Mexico</b>        | Voluntary                                       | Yes                            | No  | Yes                        | Yes                    | Some   | Yes   | Yes                                 | Yes                        | TBD                       |
| <b>Philippines</b>   | Voluntary, highly politicized                   | Yes                            | No  | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | Yes   | No                                  | Yes                        | No                        |
| <b>Thailand</b>      | Voluntary                                       | Yes                            | No  | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | No  | No                                  | No                         | No                        |
| <b>South Vietnam</b> | Voluntary, strongly influenced by U.S. presence | Initially yes; then no         | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | No   | No  | No                                  | Yes                        | No                        |
| <b>Oman</b>          | Voluntary                                       | Yes                            | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | No   | Yes   | Yes                                 | Yes                        | Yes                       |



| Case Study               | Voluntary or forced?                            | Assigned appropriate missions? | Effective removal of threat group manpower / avenue for re-integration? | Effective source of intel? | Self-serving behavior? | Human rights abuses / extra-judicial killings? | Adequately linked to / controlled by the gov't? | Effective gov't "off-ramp" program? | Short-term security gains? | Long-term security gains? |
|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Iraq</b>              | Voluntary, strongly influenced by U.S. presence | Yes                            | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Yes  | No  | No                                  | Yes                        | No                        |
| <b>Pakistan</b>          | Voluntary                                       | Initially yes; then no         | No  | Yes                        | Yes                    | No   | Yes   | Yes                                 | Yes                        | No                        |
| <b>Afghanistan (ALP)</b> | Voluntary, strongly influenced by U.S. presence | Yes                            | Yes   | Yes                        | Yes                    | Some   | TBD   | TBD                                 | Yes                        | TBD                       |

## Lessons from the case studies

In this section, we discuss the advantages and challenges associated with the creation, co-optation, and employment of CDFs in the countries studied, and present the key lessons we derived from them. We identified these lessons by coding individual lessons for each case study as shown in Table 1, and then examining the lessons in the aggregate to identify common themes across the cases. Based on this analysis, we make recommendations for the future employment of CDFs in a subsequent section of this report.

### **CDFs tend to be effective promoters of short-term security**

Historical case studies of CDF employment during large-scale counterinsurgency and other internal conflicts show that, while not without drawbacks, CDFs are often an extraordinarily effective way to quickly improve human security in weak states, maintain the support of local communities, and reduce recruitment opportunities for adversaries.

With respect to security, the strength of CDFs is not so much in their fighting effectiveness as in keeping their members on the side of the government (or at least, off the side of the threat group) and reducing infiltration and intimidation of at-risk communities by bad actors. By raising irregular forces from local communities, the host government or third party intervener undermines the ability of hard-core insurgents to mobilize resources and infiltrate from neighboring safe havens, while increasing the ability of pro-government forces to collect intelligence and focus their resources on hunting down bad actors. Because bottom-up or hybrid solutions such as CDFs are cheaper and easier to stand up than formal police and army units, they can quickly provide sufficient numbers of men to secure at-risk communities. Moreover, the creation of CDFs tends to increase the ability of state forces to ward off insurgent offensive operations, expand and sustain their presence within a

territory, protect village officials, and enhance the degree of collaboration from the local population.<sup>198</sup>

While all but one of the CDFs we examined contributed to short-term security gains, the overall level of security improvement provided by CDFs varied across the cases. In some instances, such as the SOI program in Iraq, CDFs proved themselves extraordinarily effective in reducing violence “virtually overnight” in the communities where they were employed. In less volatile places, such as Thailand, their contribution to security seemed to be negligible and in some cases, possibly even counterproductive. As part of “high-density” counterinsurgency strategies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Philippines, CDFs were able to substantially reduce the ability of insurgent and terrorist forces to operate, recruit, and move freely between communities. In all cases examined, CDFs acted reasonably well as force multipliers by holding cleared areas and allowing regular army and police forces to better focus on offensive operations. Looking broadly across the cases and other literature, in many circumstances, CDFs were able to provide better local security than a failing or weak state could offer.<sup>199</sup>

## CDFs are highly effective at identifying and rooting out the enemy

The most important contribution that CDFs made in the cases studied was their ability to assist regular forces by providing intelligence about enemy leaders and networks. Because they tend to operate in areas in which they live, they typically understand the physical and human terrain better than formal government forces (and certainly better than third-country intervening forces). Additionally, CDFs tend to be more motivated than regular troops to aggressively root out the enemy as they are fighting for their homes and families.<sup>200</sup>

The ability of CDFs to successfully provide intelligence was uniform across all cases studied. In Iraq, for example, the SOI facilitated the capture of several high-value targets as well as numerous caches of weapons. While U.S. forces provided armored

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<sup>198</sup> Quinn, Joe and Mario A. Fumerton, “Counterinsurgency from Below: The Afghan Local Police in Theoretical and Comparative Perspective,” Discussion paper, International Security Assistance Force, November 2010.

<sup>199</sup> Ahran, Ariel I. *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>200</sup> Guistozzi, Antonio. *The Art of Coercion: The Primitive Accumulation and Management of Coercive Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

protection and firepower, the SOI were able to pinpoint areas to search as well as identify people to question. In Afghanistan, ALP units in Helmand province have been credited with assisting in the capture of individuals that U.S. forces had been seeking for some time. In the Philippines and Thailand, CDFs proved extraordinarily effective in providing regular troops with knowledge of the local environment as well as intelligence about insurgent networks.

## **CDFs are most successful in a very limited range of missions**

Because CDFs tend to be poorly trained and lightly armed, they are most effective in a fairly limited range of very tactical activities. An examination of the case studies indicates that standing checkpoints, gathering intelligence, providing indications and warning of impending insurgent attacks, and serving as emissaries to local populations are missions within the capability of CDFs. Offensive operations, independent patrols in the absence of regular armed forces, or regular police activities (e.g., serving warrants) are the types of activities that can lead to CDF failures. In South Vietnam, for example, CIDG village defense units used in conventional military operations far from their home defected and eventually revolted against the government. In the early stages of CDF development in Peru, self-defense forces were often used merely as *carne de canon* to flush out guerrillas or trigger ambushes. This initial use of the groups led to a reluctance among other communities to stand up their own CDFs or cooperate with state security forces.

When used and supported appropriately by the government, CDFs can be very effective security forces (at least, in the short term). When not used effectively as part of a layered security plan or not adequately supported with logistics and back-up, CDFs can be vulnerable to intimidation and reprisal attacks by threat groups, with resultant hedging or “flipping” behaviors. They can also be subject to infiltration by anti-government forces. For example, poor vetting in Afghanistan by already overstretched government forces led to the mass infiltration of insurgents into the ANAP and eventually its collapse.

## **CDFs can reduce the manpower available to threat groups and serve as a mechanism for reintegration of anti-government fighters**

In many of the case studies, CDF members came from the same populations that threat groups were recruiting from; therefore, CDF units served as a net reducer of

the manpower pool for anti-government forces. This was perhaps best demonstrated in the case of the SOI in Iraq: over 100,000 Sunnis were “drained from the insurgent swamp” via their employment as local security agents.

Additionally, as was seen in Oman, Iraq, and Nigeria, CDFs can be an effective mechanism for reintegrating former insurgents back into society. By offering former insurgents an opportunity to use the fighting skills they obtained via the insurgency (which in many cases may be their strongest skill set) and to demonstrate their new commitment to society, CDFs can present a face-saving means for insurgents to re-join their home communities. At the end of the rebellion in Oman, for example, 80 percent of the CDF members were former insurgents. Moreover, as was seen in Nigeria, CDFs can also serve as a gateway to vocational or other education and employment programs for youth and adults, which in turn act as a hedge against their recruitment into, or continued participation in, violent armed groups or criminal activities.

## CDFs can extend the reach of the state

An important secondary effect that CDFs appeared to provide in a number of cases was increased state penetration into “ungoverned,” peripheral, or contested areas. By working with local populations through the creation of CDFs, local government officials and state security forces were often able to deliver services into geographic areas that would otherwise have been hostile or out of reach. As such, the government was able to use these forces to increase collaboration with the population.

For example, in the Philippines, the employment of local forces as aid emissaries allowed the government to assert its authority in areas where it traditionally had little presence. In Iraq, coalition commanders found SOI networks useful for passing information to the population, coordinating political activity, and connecting the locals to the regular Iraqi security forces. In Helmand province, Afghanistan, the ISCI program contributed to good governance by protecting influential tribal elders who otherwise would not have openly joined local community councils. And in Oman, once a *firqat* unit was stood up to protect a village, British Army engineers were able to build wells, medical clinics, schools, roads, and power stations.

## In the absence of strong linkages to the government, CDFs can be unreliable, self-interested, and hard to control

The case studies suggest that CDFs with weak connections to the state are often unreliable and difficult to control. The very reasons that CDFs are needed—a dearth of regular forces and lack of state control of populations and territory—dictate that regular monitoring, let alone control of these forces, tends to be difficult. In most cases, local forces remain primarily loyal to community leaders, who tend to follow parochial interests, sometimes at the expense of the state.

For example, in Iraq, the rapid expansion of the SOI greatly contributed to their short-term effectiveness, but also led to poor vetting and supervision, ultimately resulting in corruption and the pursuit of private interests over those of the government. Moreover, the inability of the Iraqi government to effectively demobilize such a large force led to clashes with regular state forces, and, in some instances, caused SOI members to rejoin the insurgency. In Peru, the autonomous DECAS, in the remote Apurimac Valley, while extremely effective in clearing the valley of insurgents, were eventually co-opted by local “jungle warlords” as their own private armies. In South Vietnam, anti-Viet Cong village defenders in Buon Enao openly revolted against the government. And in Oman, the *firqats*’ primary motivation for fighting remained the retrieval of their own tribal lands and thus they would rarely cooperate with *firqats* from other tribes.

The case study of Peru suggests that where CDFs are strictly controlled by the state, they can prove conducive to the growth of civil society and the construction of citizenship among peripheral communities and minority groups. However, most case studies showed that where the state fails to establish or enforce legal parameters, and neglects to provide CDFs with a mandate that respects the rule of law, the building of CDFs often results in abuses and the pervasiveness of the rule of force.

Worse, CDFs that go astray from the government can effectively undermine the state’s legitimacy and control by empowering local notables at the state’s expense. In Thailand and the Philippines, for instance, CDFs increased the authority of corrupt local powerbrokers, inhibiting the ability of the government to connect to the population.

## CDFs can fuel cycles of violence

Critics characteristically charge that creating or co-opting local self-defense forces fuels cycles of conflict by enhancing the violent capacity of local actors and by disrupting the balance of power between local groups.<sup>201</sup> During the fighting in Iraq, for example, U.S. support to the pro-government Abu Mahal tribal militia pushed its rivals the Abu Karbul and the Albu Salam to join the insurgency in a bid to restore their position in the local hierarchy.<sup>202</sup>

Moreover, like all security providers whether official or unofficial, CDFs can be “Janus-faced,” serving simultaneously as sources of security and insecurity.<sup>203</sup> While CDFs are generally protective of their own communities, they may be abusive to adjacent communities.<sup>204</sup> In Oman and Yemen, for example, members of CDFs succumbed to tribal infighting. And in Peru, CDFs began to attack each other over supposed denunciations made to the guerrillas or to the government’s security forces. The Peruvian military often contributed to this cycle of violence by encouraging villagers to conduct revenge operations against suspected Shining Path sympathizers.

## CDFs tend to be abusive, but no more so than regular security forces

The available data from the cases examined suggest that in many instances, CDFs abuse the population, turn predatory, or engage in violent feuding. In the Philippines, for example, private armed groups appear to play a largely negative, predatory role. Despite these tendencies, CDFs do not appear to be notably more abusive or corrupt than the state security forces of the weak or failing states in which CDFs are typically

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<sup>201</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch, “‘Just Don’t Call it a Militia’: Impunity, Militias, and the ‘Afghan Local Police,’” 2011.

<sup>202</sup> Long, Austin, Stephanie Pezard, Bryce Loidolt, and Todd C. Helmus (eds.). *Locals Rule: Historical Lessons for Creating Local Defense Forces for Afghanistan and Beyond* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012).

<sup>203</sup> Stepputat, Finn, Louise Andersen, and Bjørn Møller. “Introduction: Security Arrangements in Fragile States,” in *Fragile States and Insecure People? Violence, Security, and Statehood in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Louise Andersen, Bjørn Møller, and Finn Stepputat (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>204</sup> Reno, *Fragile States and Insecure People?: Violence, Security, and Statehood in the Twenty-First Century*, Ed. Louise Andersen, Bjorn Moller, and Finn Stepputat, Danish Institute for International Studies, Palgrave, 2007.

used. Neither, for that matter, do they appear to be more abusive than the insurgents who might otherwise be in control of areas that CDFs secure. Thailand's *Or Sor*, for all its drawbacks, enjoys an appreciably better human rights record than either the army or the police. Despite accusations of petty theft and harassment, the ALP in Helmand province, Afghanistan, are often better liked than their counterparts in the regular police.

As two scholars concluded about abuse among CDFs in their comparative study of self-defense forces in Peru, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, and Sierra Leone, "This is not a unique phenomenon with corruption widespread in government and across societies."<sup>205</sup> Two crucial factors in relation to CDFs' compliance with the rule of law appear to be a civil defense group's degree of autonomy from state authority, and the example set by regular security forces in terms of whether the latter generally respect or flaunt and abuse the rule of law and human rights.<sup>206</sup>

## Once created or co-opted, CDFs can be difficult to demobilize

The majority of the case studies showed that once CDFs are stood up, demobilizing them is difficult and time consuming—though the difficulties varied from reluctance on the part of the CDFs to put down their arms to reluctance on the part of the government to take the political steps necessary to integrate CDF members into security forces or the working class. Whatever the reason, a failure to demobilize and integrate CDFs do so effectively can have serious consequences. The SOI in Iraq serve as a clear example of the dangers of failing to properly demobilize these types of forces. The SOI was intended as a temporary measure, and recruits were promised employment in the Iraqi Security Forces or positions in the civil service. When only half of the SOI were transitioned to permanent positions, many SOI commanders concluded that the government had betrayed them. As a result, hundreds if not thousands of SOI fighters rejoined the insurgency as part of the new Islamic State extremist group. Similarly, in Yemen, the president's promises to transition Popular

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<sup>205</sup> Ginifer, Jeremy and Hooman Peimani. "Civil Defense Forces and Post-Conflict Security Challenges: International Experiences, and Implications for Africa," in *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?* ed. David J. Francis (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 268.

<sup>206</sup> Fumerton, Mario and Simone Remijne, "Civil defense forces: Peru's Comites de Autodefensa Civil and Guatemala's Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil in comparative perspective," in *Armed Actors, Organized Violence and State Failure in Latin America*, ed. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (New York: Zed Books, 2004).54-72.



Committee members into the regular security forces went largely unfulfilled, and, as a result, Popular Committee leaders threatened to defect.

Even when peace was fully restored, as in the case of Peru, Mexico, and Oman, CDFs did not normally voluntarily dissolve. While a few of the forces originally stood up to fight Shining Path guerrillas demobilized themselves, and some turned themselves into civil society organizations, to this day many Peruvian CDFs continue to patrol their villages and man road blocks. In Oman and Mexico, CDFs remained intact but were officially integrated into government sponsored rural guard forces.

## **CDFs created by third-party interveners are difficult to transition to host nation government control**

In the cases examined where third party interveners created or co-opted CDFs, the majority of the time, the CDF program quickly collapsed – experiencing reduced effectiveness or increased defections – as a result of being transitioned to the host nation’s control. This was most often the case due to the host nation government being unwilling to take the political steps necessary to accommodate the CDFs, and a failure on the part of the third party intervener to convince or cajole the government to do so.

For example, in Iraq, the Shia government was extremely reluctant to take control of the largely Sunni SOI. Eventually, having experienced abuse and persecution at the hands of the government, many SOI members rejoined the insurgency. In South Vietnam, after U.S. Marines withdrew from an area, the performance of the Popular Forces fell dramatically and some reverted to Viet Cong control. In Oman, transitioned *firqats* soon became ineffective. Once the intelligence stopped flowing from the *firqats*, British SAS units were forced to retake control of the groups.

## **Do civil defense forces have a role beyond counterinsurgency?**

A comparative analysis of the case studies presented in this report indicates that the use of CDFs to counter asymmetric threats, particularly during large-scale counterinsurgency operations, often results in immediate, short-term security gains. The data gathered in these case studies suggest that CDFs are particularly useful in preventing bad actors from embedding themselves into at-risk communities, as well as in providing crucial tactical intelligence to state security providers. Moreover, they provide an “honorable” and potentially lucrative alternative for defectors or those considering joining anti-government groups. Our analysis shows that while CDFs come with considerable risks, if they are properly managed and supervised, and then later demobilized, they can be a powerful tool to both national governments and third-party interveners. In fact, CDF programs were among some of the most successful counterinsurgency initiatives developed by the United States in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Looking forward, the Obama administration has made clear a preference to avoid the types of large-scale stability and counterinsurgency operations in which the U.S. has recently used CDFs. As such, it is worth considering what role, if any, CDFs can play in future U.S. counterterrorism and small-footprint stability operations, which are clearly the administration’s preferred means of countering today’s asymmetric threat groups. To do so, we begin by examining the evolution of the U.S. response to asymmetric threats in weak or failed states and the differences between traditional terrorist and insurgent groups, and the types of threats the U.S. faces today. We then apply lessons from the case studies to gauge the suitability and feasibility of employing CDFs to counter asymmetric militant groups in a new era of “by, with, and through,” small-footprint operations.

## **Then and now: The U.S. approach to asymmetric threats in weak or failed states**

Over the past decade, the United States has fought insurgent organizations in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which included embedded terrorist elements. These organizations were of substantial size and depended on the local population for

personnel and materiel. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, insurgents sought to influence and control local populations through a combination of incentives and intimidation. Without some support among the population (consensual or coerced), they could not have survived for as long as they did. These organizations left a logistical footprint and a trail of local members that could be tracked and targeted through networks of facilitators and recruiters among the population.

Given the insurgents' tendencies to embed within local communities, U.S. forces needed to disperse as much as possible, patrol among the people, and improve the capacity of local governments to protect the population against intimidation.<sup>207</sup> Yet in both cases, there simply were not enough coalition and host nation troops to adequately protect the entire population. Moreover, as outsiders, these forces lacked the trust of local communities and could not get quality intelligence to effectively target insurgent and terrorist networks. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States developed local defense forces (the SOI and the ALP) to deny insurgent sanctuaries and support from the population. These local forces proved more effective than regular forces at protecting local populations and identifying networks, while leaving a lighter footprint. Over time, these efforts became an integral part of the U.S. counterinsurgency campaigns and turned out to be among the more successful efforts against AQI and the Taliban.

Over the past few years, the United States completed its withdrawal from Iraq and began scaling back operations in Afghanistan. Accompanying these changes has been a notable shift in U.S. strategy with respect to fighting groups that employ terrorist tactics. The aggressive "Global War on Terror" posture of the early 2000s has since been tempered, and the large-scale objective of eradicating terrorism around the world has been replaced with an emphasis on targeted strikes and small-footprint operations to more selectively protect and defend U.S. interests. Along with this diminished objective, has come a new strategy characterized by "direct action" aimed at killing or capturing individual terrorists and shutting down their networks through intelligence-led raids and air strikes.<sup>208</sup> When possible, this strategy has also included working by, with, and through local security forces on the ground.

This strategy works best against traditional terrorist organizations, such as al Qaeda in the 1990s, which tend to be small, highly networked entities that require relatively little in the way of men and materiel. These groups tend to have some level of

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<sup>207</sup> *Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency Operations*, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

<sup>208</sup> Counterterrorism implies the focused use of highly discriminating and lethal means such as special operations raids and drone strikes, supported by larger intelligence gathering efforts focused on penetrating secretive terrorist networks vice counterinsurgency's primacies such as protecting populations, building indigenous security institutions, and bolstering government legitimacy and capacity.

dependence on facilitators to move weapons and recruit fighters, but they tend to be more streamlined and secretive than traditional insurgent groups and are less dependent on the local population for their survival. For example, the core al Qaeda network at its height consisted of only a few hundred individuals, and it depended on a small number of loyal facilitators well versed in counterintelligence and counter-surveillance. The logic of the new U.S. light-footprint counterterrorism strategy is that countering terrorist networks that operate covertly, maintain their distance from the populace, and do not seek control over territory or populations, does not require manpower-intensive, large-scale stability operations like those utilized in Iraq and Afghanistan. And if additional long-term ground forces *are* needed, the logic goes, the United States will depend on local security forces to fill this role.

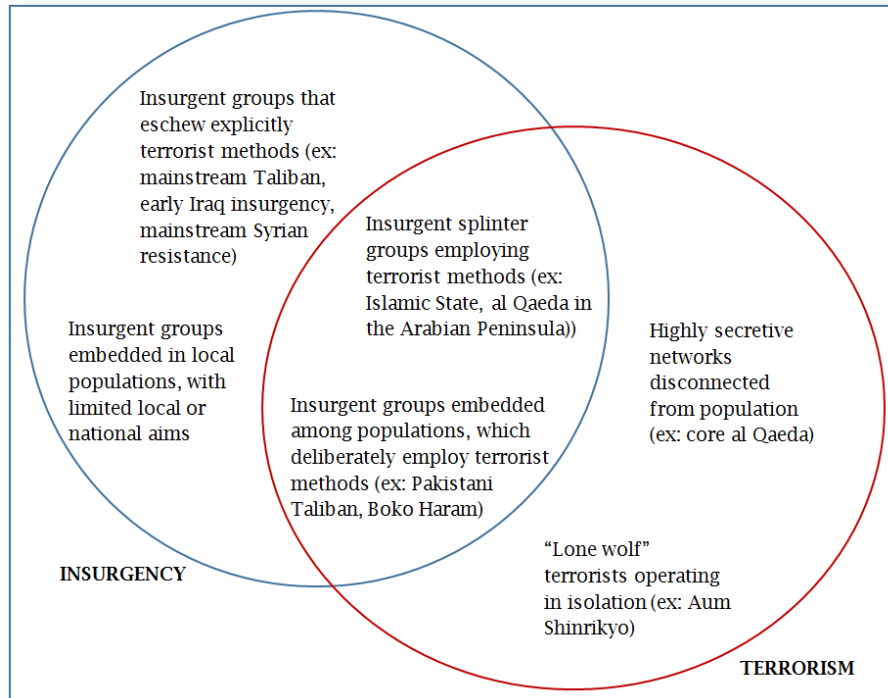
## Today's "terrorist" threats and implications for the future use of civil defense forces

In recent years, the United States' light-footprint counterterrorism strategy has succeeded in preventing attacks on the U.S. homeland by killing terrorist leaders and disrupting terrorist plots. Over a decade of raids and drone strikes have reduced the core of al Qaeda to a small number of operatives. But at the same time, the global terrorist threat has continued to evolve and has spread to new countries in the form of al Qaeda franchises or localized terrorist groups that claim to be part of al Qaeda. These new groups, while still adhering to extremist ideologies and aspiring to strike the United States, differ from traditional transnational terrorist groups such as the al Qaeda core in that their foremost aims are local, political ones.

In order to better gauge the potential suitability of CDFs as part of the United States' counterterrorism and small-footprint stability operations "toolkit," we therefore must first take a closer look at the sub-state groups that currently threaten the United States and its interests abroad. A cursory review suggests that the U.S. currently faces terrorist threats from myriad groups, such as the Islamic State, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, core al Qaeda, al Shabab, Hezbollah, and Boko Haram, among a host of other, lesser-known groups. In their pursuit of localized political aims, these groups have relied on overt, or at least tacit, support from local populations to overwhelm weak or inept state security forces. They have taken over vast amounts of territory and destabilized large portions of the Middle East and East

and North Africa. Yet, with the exception of core al Qaeda, none of these groups fit the classic terrorist mold.<sup>209</sup>

Figure 1. The blurry line between terrorist and insurgent groups



As illustrated in Figure 1, these are large-scale movements that more closely resemble insurgencies—albeit ones that employ terrorist tactics. They have local or regional political aims, they have a large cadre of fighters, and they take territory and attempt to administer it. Sometimes these actors are filling gaps left by failing states;

<sup>209</sup> Terrorist groups tend to focus on executing high-profile attacks, often against civilians, and less on controlling or influencing local populations on a large scale. Compared to insurgent groups with a substantial political following, there are fewer linkages between terrorist groups and the population. Their leaders often live in the shadows and may not even be known by name. As a result, counterterrorism operations tend to favor “direct action” aimed at killing or capturing individual terrorists and shutting down their networks through intelligence-led raids and air strikes.

other times they are providing alternatives to otherwise capable governments.<sup>210</sup> Most importantly, to some extent or another, they depend on support from—or at least acquiescence of—local populations.

The nature of today's threat groups has led many to question the long-term efficacy of the United States' low-footprint approach to countering extremist groups globally. As these groups are more closely aligned to a traditional insurgency model than pure terrorist organizations, many are starting to see the problem they pose in a larger context of disaffected and radicalized populations, increasingly interconnected national and local insurgencies, and weak or illegitimate states—issues that cannot be resolved by SOF raids, drone strikes, and other counterterrorism “actions from a distance.” In this context, tools that focus on changing the dynamics within local populations, such as the use of civil defense forces, may have a stronger role to play in future U.S. counterterrorism and light-footprint stability operations than has been presumed to date.

As our case studies illustrated, CDFs are highly effective at quickly securing populations from bad actors and at providing intelligence on enemy leaders and networks. Therefore, where threat groups operate locally and depend to some degree on the population—for sanctuary, subsistence, safe transit, recruits, or weapons and other material—working by, with, and through CDFs (in tandem with direct action and support to host national security forces) could prove an effective strategy for degrading and ultimately dismantling today's so-called “terrorist” groups.

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<sup>210</sup> Malvesti, Michele L.. “To Serve the Nation: U.S. Special Operations Forces in an Era of Persistent Conflict,” Center for a New American Security, (June 2010).

# Recommendations for the employment of civil defense forces in counterterrorism and stability operations

Our case studies identified a number of opportunities and challenges associated with the employment of CDFs in states confronted by serious and sustained internal armed opposition. In most circumstances, CDFs were able to provide better local security than a failing or weak state could offer—at least in the short term. While our analysis suggests CDFs can initially be an effective tool against asymmetric groups which embed themselves in local populations, their autonomous nature and myriad vulnerabilities often make them difficult to employ and then demobilize successfully. However, this does not mean they should not be utilized, particularly when alternatives are few and when the dangers of state collapse and extreme lawlessness outweigh the risks posed by CDFs themselves.

In order to most effectively employ CDFs, and in order to avoid the pitfalls identified in this report, national governments and third party interveners must be ready to operationalize the lessons from the successes and failures of CDFs used previously around the world. In this section, we recommend a number of fundamental “rules of thumb” based on our comparative analysis of the case studies and then discuss unique challenges and specific requirements for the successful employment of CDFs in small-footprint operations.

## Ten rules of thumb for the employment of civil defense forces

1. **Ensure that adequate government support exists for them and is sustainable.** As our cases illustrate, where CDFs are aptly controlled and supported by the state, they tend to be positive contributors to local security and other government functions. When this is not the case, CDFs often evolve into net detractors from security and stability. Given that the populations from which CDFs are formed are often the same at-risk populations that produce members of

insurgent and terrorist groups, ensuring that sustained political support exists for the establishment, employment, and transition of CDF members is critical to reaping the short-term improvements to security that these groups can bring, while mitigating possible long-term drivers of instability.

2. **Ensure community buy-in for them.** Whether the CDF was co-opted or created, the government or third-party intervener must ensure community buy-in. There must be a will to fight. Forced conscription will result in reduced popular support for the program and for the national government. Additionally, it will likely result in desertions and defections from the CDF, which can stem the flow of information and intelligence to government forces and provide threat groups with critical government information.
3. **Keep them small and expand slowly.** CDFs are often difficult to manage and control, and require the supervision and support of competent regular forces. If they become too big too quickly, regular forces will have a difficult time vetting them and providing them with training and logistics. Given the risks associated with CDFs, quality is more important than quantity. Moreover, keeping them small ensures that they do not later present a threat to the government. The employment of local security forces has been most successful when the central government has had a preponderance of power and could use regular forces to put down revolts and mediate disputes at the local level.
4. **Keep them local.** CDFs are most effective on their own turf, where they know the geography, understand the human terrain, and receive support and intelligence from their community. Moreover, CDFs are most likely to serve as a source of protection when they operate in their home territories. CDFs whose members are subject to control by social institutions are often less corrupt and predatory than other forces because they are held accountable by local leaders and remain largely dependent on community members for information and material support. When CDF members are moved to areas of operation outside their own communities, the ties that encourage proper behavior may be lost.
5. **Employ them as irregulars.** CDFs are most effective during irregular operations in remote villages and less strategic areas and as enablers to regular forces. Their role should be as auxiliaries performing relatively static tasks to provide an interface with the population and to free regular forces for more complex operations. They should only be used in local defense, small-scale raids, and as scouts and intelligence collectors as part of a broader campaign. They should not be used as “trip-wires” or as part of frontline conventional military operations.
6. **Monitor them closely.** CDFs by nature are semi-autonomous. They need to be closely monitored by competent formal security forces that are either embedded in their communities or stationed close by.



7. **Lead them by example.** CDFs often mimic regular forces in terms of abuse and self-serving behavior. Well-behaved security forces promote better behaved CDFs and set standards for what is acceptable. Corrupt or abusive security forces establish a climate antithetical to the rule of law, which CDFs can use to further local political or criminal interests.
8. **Support and protect them as part of a larger state security plan.** CDFs by their nature are extraordinarily vulnerable to enemy attacks and intimidation. Regular forces must ensure that they are supported, protected, and incorporated into a comprehensive plan. CDFs are most effective in a security architecture that provides quick-response forces to back them up as necessary. Moreover, because they are most effective as local defenders and as providers of information and intelligence, they should be closely linked to conventional forces in order to capitalize on intelligence collection.
9. **Restrict their armaments.** In order to limit inter-village violence and prevent future threats to the government, the numbers and types of weapons that CDFs can obtain should be limited and detailed registers of the firearms and ammunition in their possession should be kept by the government.
10. **Have a plan to demobilize them.** CDFs are notoriously difficult to get rid of. Before even proceeding with their stand-up, a plan to demobilize them through inducements or through integration into regular security forces or “national guard” type units should be created. Alternatively, vocational, educational, or employment and entrepreneurial programs to transition them out of the security sector and into other areas of civilian life should be planned.

## Additional recommendations for civil defense forces in small-footprint operations

While the United States was relatively successful in managing CDFs in Iraq and Afghanistan (at least initially, when these forces were under the operational control of the U.S. military), it was able to do so under favorable conditions that included large numbers of U.S. troops on the ground, teams of civilian political advisors, and virtually unlimited financial resources. This meant that the CDFs were integrated into a comprehensive security plan and received much needed support, supervision, and management—even if the host nation government was ambivalent to their stand-up.

In today’s era of reduced resources and small-footprint operations, however, the United States has much less ability to unilaterally mitigate the risks involved in utilizing CDFs. Future U.S. counterterrorism and small-footprint stability operations will most likely involve small numbers of special operations and paramilitary

intelligence teams and few, if any, conventional forces or civilian advisors. Therefore, in the future, the United States should only employ CDFs in counterterrorism and stability operations when it has a reliable host nation government that is willing to, or can be convinced to, abide by the fundamental CDF best practices identified in this report. This will likely mean that in order to effectively utilize CDFs going forward, the United States would also need to involve itself in training the host nation in how to properly employ such forces. Moreover, unlike what was done with the CDF programs in Iraq and Afghanistan, CDFs in counterterrorism and light-footprint stability operations must be small and specifically scaled to the abilities of the host nation government to supervise, support, and manage them. Additionally, the United States will need to work with host nation governments to ensure CDFs are appropriately integrated into a larger security campaign plan and that the political conditions for their formation – and eventual demobilization – are set (e.g., amnesty programs, concessions, and even the renegotiation of the social contract if need be).

While seemingly daunting, the prerequisites for the successful use of CDFs in small-footprint counterterrorism and light-footprint stability operations can indeed be satisfied. In fact, a prime example can be found in one of our case studies—the U.K. experience standing up tribal auxiliaries in Oman. In that case, small numbers of U.K. SOF were able to successfully work with the Omani government to ensure the military, political, and economic conditions were right for the formation of CDFs. As a result, these groups were largely effective and non-threatening to the state over the long term. The bottom line for U.S. policy makers is to understand the prospects and pitfalls of CDFs, and the mechanisms for successfully creating, employing, and demobilizing them. Having this knowledge in hand can then enable an informed calculation of risks and benefits regarding the use of CDFs in a variety of circumstances.

## Conclusion

Slimmed-down counterterrorism approaches appear increasingly attractive in today's environment, given the immense costs of over a decade of large-scale counterinsurgency operations and the ensuing pressures to cut the defense budget. Nonetheless, the extent to which the threat of international terrorism is related to insurgencies remains an issue of concern—particularly with the re-emergence of insurgency mixed with al Qaeda linked terrorism in Iraq and Syria. It may still be necessary to adopt counterinsurgency methods, albeit in much reduced form, in areas where localized insurgencies threaten to give strength to international terrorist networks.

One such method is the use of civil defense forces. Where terrorist networks operate locally and depend to some degree on the population—for sanctuary, subsistence, safe transit, recruits, or weapons and other materiel—it could prove effective for U.S. forces to work with local irregulars to counter these groups and provide security to at-risk communities. Just as local forces in Afghanistan and Iraq denied support and safe haven to the Taliban and AQI, analogous forces could potentially be used to similar effect in other countries—even in the absence of hundreds of thousands of U.S. and coalition ground troops. Likewise, civil defense forces have shown great propensity in the past for intelligence collection in support of terrorist targeting efforts, given their persistent presence in certain communities and their knowledge of local dynamics. There is every reason to believe such groups could serve a similar function in the future against insurgent groups that employ terrorist tactics.

Having reviewed twelve cases of civil defense force employment, the threats these groups faced, and the threats the U.S. is likely to face going forward, we conclude that there is a role for these kinds of forces beyond counterinsurgency, and there are benefits to be had via their use in counterterrorism and small-footprint stability operations. In certain, specific instances civil defense forces can be very effective at quickly securing local areas and helping to turn the tide against an insurgent or terrorist group. But given the fraught history of civil defense forces writ large, the advantages associated with the use of such groups must be weighed against significant risks. Civil defense forces will be most successful when there is political and local buy-in for them, when they are kept small and closely monitored, when they are closely tied to well-behaved state security forces, and when they are used primarily to protect at-risk local populations. Additionally, their use should be

predicated on having a pre-identified demobilization or integration plan, lest they become a net contributor to instability and a driver of more violence.

In conclusion, we find that CDFs are a security tool like any other, with a number of potential benefits and risks associated with their use. Deliberations on their usage in any given situation should involve a cold calculation by policy makers as to whether the immediate advantages of dislodging bad actors from local at-risk communities outweigh the acute and long term risks associated with the proliferation of loosely controlled and semi-autonomous non-statutory armed groups.

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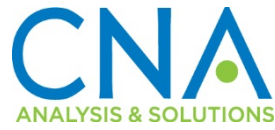
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