

EXTREME VIOLENCE AND THE RULE OF LAW: LESSONS FROM EASTERN AFGHANISTAN

RACHEL KLEINFELD AND HARRY BADER

The international community's approach to building the rule of law in situations of extreme violence can be improved. These contexts demand a strategy that reduces the strength of armed nonstate groups and restores stability so governance-building activities can take hold. Lessons from a program implemented by the Natural Resources Counterinsurgency Cell (NRCC) in Afghanistan can help inform a more holistic strategy.

Problems With the Current Approach

- International programs to improve governance in violent states rely on training foreign security services and sometimes directly intervening with military and civilian stabilization programs, including quick-return development projects.
- Most civilian rule-of-law development projects are based on a flawed assumption that there is a legitimate government in the host country seeking to improve governance and quell violence.
- In many cases of extreme violence, governments rule for self-interest, not the good of their citizens, creating a populace that views the state as illegitimate. These contexts require interventions that can turn people away from violent actors when they cannot be turned toward the government.
- International efforts also assume that most of the local population is uncommitted rather than supportive of insurgents. But citizens in disaffected communities often back violent groups, not just against the state but also toward goals inimical to rule-of-law values.
- In such situations, international development projects designed to win hearts and minds fail to address the deeper reasons citizens support violent groups.

Lessons for International Assistance Providers

Create a locally driven program based on indigenous values and psychology. The NRCC reduced violence while changing the methods of governance by creating a psychologically astute program that recognized what motivated individuals likely to be recruited as commanders of violent groups and providing them an alternative path to reach these goals.

Ensure an adequate period of time for program design. Intensive study of local cultural, socio-political, and, if applicable, battlefield dynamics should occur prior to program design.

Develop the ability to catalyze and assist indigenous civil society organizations. These groups can support local programs in areas under insurgent control or where the population is hostile to international intervention.

Integrate programs to change hearts and minds into a broader strategy. Programs aimed at turning the population away from violent nonstate groups can be integrated into an approach that features not only the use of force but also efforts to build government accountability so that citizens will eventually turn to the state as a source of legitimacy.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Rachel Kleinfeld is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace focused on issues of governance, security, and the rule of law.

Harry Bader was co-leader of the Natural Resources Counterinsurgency Cell and is currently a professor of security studies at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

CONTACT

Christopher Dockrey
Government Affairs Manager
+1 202 939-2307
cdockrey@ceip.org

Clara Hogan
Media Manager
+1 202 939-2241
chogan@ceip.org

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