



Chapter Title: Introduction and Study Methods

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Introduction and Study Methods

Joint doctrine calls for the Army to execute Unified Land Operations in accordance with national policy. This policy generally focuses on the offensive and defensive capabilities required by combined arms maneuver. However, hybrid conflict and counterinsurgency (COIN) operations emphasize the importance of stability at the theater level and below. In this context, locally focused stability operations (LFSO), such as current Village Stability Operations (VSO) efforts in Afghanistan, can create stability through fostering security, sustainable development, and effective governance at the local level.

However, the success or failure of such efforts needs to be defined and measured. Currently, there is no standard doctrine for assessing progress in stability operations, though the *need* for assessments has been institutionalized in the operations process through doctrine (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011a). Further, many opine that existing guidance fails to adequately address how to design, plan, and execute such assessment (Bowers, 2013; Schroden, 2011; Zyck, 2011). While a variety of tools are available to assess the effects of LFSO, the complex nature of such operations makes assessment especially challenging. Theater-level events can influence progress at the tactical level, and while local context is key, theater-level assessments are ultimately required. In addition, local atmospheric and other indicators can be hard to quantify. Approaches vary even more when the ways in which the international community, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), host nations (HNs), and other stakeholders measure progress in insecure operating environments are considered.

Recognizing the challenges of LFSO assessment and the shortcomings of current attempts, the United States Army Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG) asked RAND's Arroyo Center to determine analytic frameworks, best practices, and metrics for measuring the effects of LFSO, including VSO in Afghanistan. This report documents the results of our efforts.

Locally Focused Stability Operations

It was necessary to clearly define LFSO at the onset of this project; specifically, LFSO needed to be differentiated from stability operations more widely, as well as from other kinds of operations. According to joint operations documentation, U.S. military doctrine defines stability operations quite generally as

An overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011b)¹

While there is no precise doctrinal definition for LFSO, the concept as we understand it involves small teams of U.S. or HN forces that embed in strategically located villages or similar locales to foster stability by generating and supervising locally based *security forces*, supporting sustainable *development*, and promoting effective *governance*. Our working definition is thus: *LFSO are the missions, tasks, and activities that build security, governance, and development by, with, and through the directly affected community to increase stability at the local level.*

Hence, LFSO are not just stability operations that reach down to the local level, they are stability operations that *leverage and enable local actors to create and maintain the building blocks for stability.*

¹ This definition is echoed in Army doctrine for stability operations (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2008).

Project Scope

The obvious contemporary example of LFSO is VSO in Afghanistan. Historical parallels include U.S. Marine Corps efforts with Interim Security Critical Infrastructure in Helmand, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group experience in Vietnam, and the efforts of the British in Malaya. However, this study covered a generalized concept of LFSO, and its findings are intended to be applicable to a wide range of possible future LFSO in a multitude of possible contexts.

Methods and Approach

We asked several questions to help us begin to identify and distill information that will help improve the Army's ability to measure and assess LFSO:

- What are the characteristic elements of LFSO?
- What are the desired outcomes (ends) of such operations, and through what tools (means) can they be achieved?
- How can these outcomes and costs be measured (metrics), and how can these measurements be collected (methods)?
- How should these data be analyzed and the results communicated?

We conducted a literature review and interviews with subject-matter experts (SMEs) to answer these questions and inform the analysis leading to our proposed framework.

Our review of the literature involved a considerable array of both classified and unclassified sources,² including doctrine (both joint doctrine and Army doctrine), as well as nondoctrinal Department of Defense (DoD) handbooks, publications, and reports.³ We also reviewed articles from relevant journals and periodicals, such as *Prism* and the *Small Wars Journal*, and reports and papers from other govern-

² This report is unclassified; classified materials were used only as sources for general principles or operational experiences apart from the classified details.

³ Center for Army Lessons Learned, 2010.

ment agencies and organizations, including the Department of State, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the National Defense University. We drew upon previous RAND research, as well as work from other research institutions and groups, including CNA Corporation, the Brookings Institution, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the U.S. Institute for Peace, and the Military Operations Research Society.

Interviews with more than 50 SMEs⁴ were begun concurrently with the literature review. The SMEs were identified in a number of ways: some were recommended by the sponsor (either specific individuals or organizations or units from which to seek a representative), some were individuals at RAND with relevant expertise, some were individuals contributing to the literature, and some were referrals from other SMEs and research-team members who identified representatives from organizations or units with recent relevant experience. The interviews were semistructured; they were conducted in person or by phone, and they lasted between 30 and 90 minutes.

Each interview was tailored to gather the most relevant information based on the SME's experience and area of expertise, but discussion often included the following questions: How would you define or bound LFSO? What historical examples should be included? What should be excluded? What assessment relevant to this area is being done, where, and using what methods or approaches? What lessons have you learned from managing/assessing local stability operations? How are indicators selected? What indicators are most difficult to measure? How often are assessment data collected? What is the proper balance between qualitative and quantitative assessment?

Once the literature review and the interviews were complete, notes were compiled and sorted based on recurring themes and key insights. During a series of team meetings involving all the authors of this report, key insights were distilled and synthesized. Input specific to assessment in the defense context and to assessment of LFSO

⁴ Interviewees were assured anonymity in order to foster candid discussion; their names and affiliations are therefore not cited in this report.

was integrated with preexisting team-member expertise on assessment, evaluation, and monitoring.

Organization of This Report

This report is designed with the practitioner in mind and is thus structured to facilitate ready access to answers of challenging questions. Chapter Two reviews selected assessment approaches and tools that have been used for LFSO assessment. Chapter Three notes the challenges associated with assessment and offers recommendations for practitioners to consider in moving forward. That chapter also recommends a framework for assessment design. Chapter Four presents a detailed example of the application of the framework in a notional West African LFSO scenario. Finally, Chapter Five presents our conclusions and summarizes our recommendations.

