

VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF  
CONGO: A SPECIAL OPERATIONS APPROACH

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Art of War Scholars

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: A SPECIAL OPERATIONS APPROACH, by MAJ Chad P. Lewis, 87 pages.

Post-war Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains a volatile nation of competing factions and unresolved conflicts. DRC's weak central government, poor economy, and limited combat power prevent a swift solution to a conflict fueled by ethnic marginalization, armed groups, and international interference. The U.S. Army has successfully employed Special Operations Forces (SOF) to support stability efforts in similar environments. From 1961 to 1971, the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program in Vietnam focused on reconciling the Montagnard minority to support the South Vietnamese government against a Viet Cong insurgency. Building on the lessons from that conflict, Army planners developed a bottom-up solution in Afghanistan to support the overall counterinsurgency effort. From 2010 to the present, SOF in Afghanistan have employed Village Stability Operations (VSO) focused on the rural populations in areas critical to the Taliban insurgency. This research explores the results and principles of the CIDG and VSO programs to determine the validity of a similar approach in DRC. It concludes that a VSO model, discerningly employed, provides an opportunity to promote lasting stability, specifically where other efforts have failed.

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## ACRONYMS

ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANAP	Afghanistan National Auxiliary Police
ANP	Afghanistan National Police
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIDG	Civilian Irregular Defense Group
COIN	Counterinsurgency
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FID	Foreign Internal Defense
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MONUC	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République démocratique du Congo</i> [United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo] 1999 - 2010
MONUSCO	<i>Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo</i> [United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo] 2010 – Present
SFA	Security Force Assistance
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UN	United Nations
VSO	Village Stability Operations

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

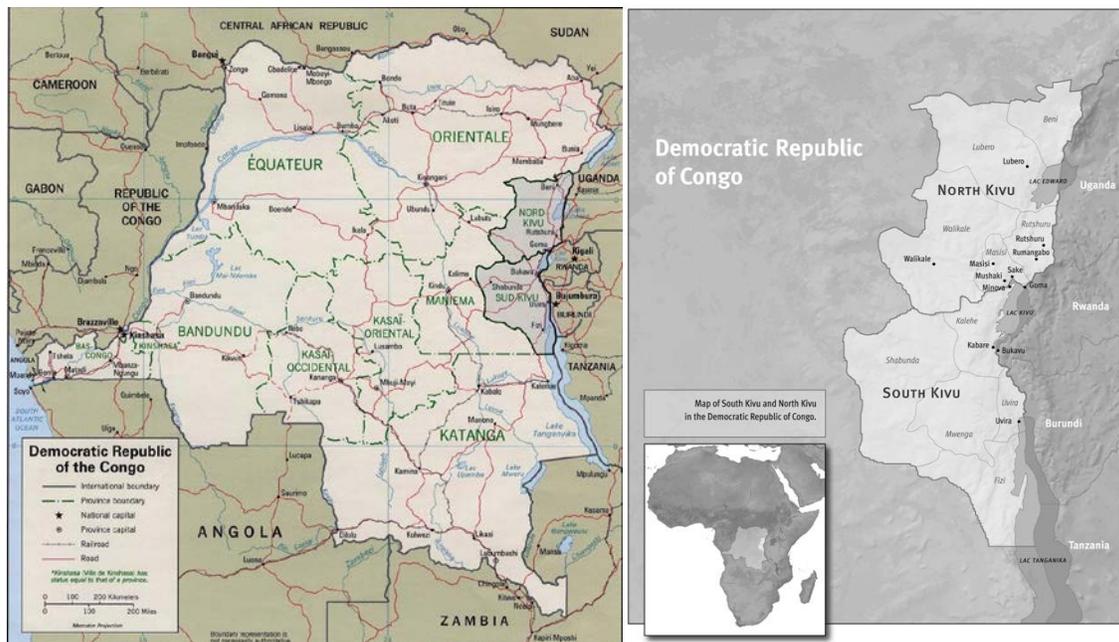


Figure 1. Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Kivu Provinces

*Source:* University of Texas at Austin, map of Democratic Republic of Congo, accessed September 4, 2014, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/congo\\_demrep\\_pol98.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/congo_demrep_pol98.jpg); Human Rights Watch, map of Kivu Provinces, accessed September 4, 2014, <http://www.hrw.org/node/84366/section/2>.

The Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are situated in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa on land that is easy to exploit but difficult to control. Since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, which prompted massive cross-border movements from the East, these Kivu provinces have been embroiled in a destabilizing regional conflict. Twenty years of state neglect, external influence, and displaced

populations have introduced a mix of ethnicities, armed groups, organizations, and profiteers that severely impede the central government's ability to administer these provinces from the capital, Kinshasa.<sup>1</sup> International efforts, led by the United Nations (UN), have been focused, appropriately, on the central government.<sup>2</sup> These top-down efforts are important and must continue. The UN has provided security forces to partner with the Congolese military and they procured international agreements to support refugee cross-border returns. Most promising, they support holistic Congolese initiatives at the provincial level that focus on improving stability.<sup>3</sup> Still, these efforts are currently insufficient to address the needs at the district level and below.<sup>4</sup> As the country moves forward, local and international voices have discussed a bottom-up approach to stability.<sup>5</sup> The idea is to support the existing local leadership structure from the village level through district level where national initiatives cannot reach. In the Kivu provinces that means enabling the traditional chiefs, elders, and local magistrates who already hold a

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<sup>1</sup> Danielle Beswick, "The Challenge of Warlordism to Post-Conflict State-Building: The Case of Laurent Nkunda in Eastern Congo," *The Round Table* 98, no. 402 (June 2009): 335-336.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2053, June 2012, accessed April 27, 2014, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2053\(2012\);](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2053(2012);) Beswick, 334.

<sup>3</sup> Francois Tuyihimbaze Rucogoza, "Planning for the future of North Kivu," *Forced Migration Review* 36 (November 2010): 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ross Mountain, "Too big to fail," *Forced Migration Review* 36 (November 2010): 26. Though it is the largest UN peacekeeping force in history, the UN's 20,000 peacekeepers must cover an area greater than 900,000 square miles.

<sup>5</sup> Ferdinand Mugumo Mushi, "Insecurity and Local Governance in Congo's South Kivu," *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (January 2013): 15, 24.

significant amount of influence in their local arenas.<sup>6</sup> This idea resembles a methodology that U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) have employed in Vietnam and Afghanistan, with some success.

Afghanistan is another country that has proven difficult to administer. The harsh terrain, multiple ethnicities, and cultural autonomy of the people create a challenge for the central government in Kabul similar to that in Kinshasa. For the last five years, U.S. SOF units have played an integral part in the greater counterinsurgency effort through Village Stability Operations (VSO), a bottom-up approach to support lasting stability. Their goal is to create holistic improvements in an area of operational or strategic importance that can be secured by a local police force and sustained by the Afghan government. SOF units partner with Afghan security forces, district leadership, and village elders to train a local civilian security force, create linkages from the village leadership to the district, and initiate sustainable development projects. These efforts initially isolate the population from the insurgent threat, but ultimately create an environment where insurgent presence or activities are untenable. VSO acknowledge the local power bases that exist and leverage them to support the central government's objectives. VSO represent a progression from and adaptation of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) program that U.S. Special Forces employed in Vietnam from 1961-1971. VSO planners drew heavily on Special Forces experience in Vietnam to create the program currently employed in Afghanistan.

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<sup>6</sup> Baptiste Raymond, "Land, IDPs and Mediation," *Forced Migration Review* 36 (November 2010): 21; Mushi, 25; Beswick, 343.

The purpose of this research is to determine whether the U.S. Army's VSO construct in Afghanistan may be adapted further to confront some of the obstacles to DRC stability. The current environment is dynamic and convoluted. Every year that passes without tangible progress towards a holistic solution adds complexity to the problem. A VSO construct provides an opportunity to address factors of conflict in the DRC in a way that current efforts do not. If discerningly employed, it could promote lasting stability in some of the most critical regions of the DRC where the central government has limited influence.

#### Primary Research Question

Is the Village Stability Operations construct a valid military option for promoting stability in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

#### Secondary Research Questions

In order to address the research question, the following secondary questions must be answered:

1. What is the origin of the conflict in the DRC and how has the conflict evolved?
2. How effective are current stability efforts? Is there a need for a new approach?
3. What is CIDG and how was it applied in Vietnam?
4. What is VSO and how has it been applied in Afghanistan?
5. How does the nature of the conflicts in Vietnam and Afghanistan compare with the conflict in the DRC? How do these conflicts differ?
6. Which principles of CIDG and VSO apply to the DRC?
7. What are the implications of employing a VSO construct in the DRC?

### Assumptions

This research assumes certain conditions that establish an analytical framework for the argument. First, the Kivu population's underlying grievances, if not addressed, will lead to continuous armed conflict in the DRC. Second, based on results over the last twenty years, the DRC central government is currently unable to provide nationwide stability without external assistance. Third, the current budget constraints on the U.S. Army will remain a significant factor, so an economical solution is not only preferable, but necessary. Finally, past employment of VSO in Afghanistan can project future validity of the construct in the DRC if key differences in the environments and conflicts are considered.

### Limitations

The greatest limitation is a lack of first-hand accounts from leaders involved in the Congolese conflict at the operational and tactical levels. There is an abundance of secondary material from those who observed the conflict and its outcomes, but who were not, themselves, taking part. Many of these sources contain interviews with actors involved, but first-hand written accounts are rare, especially at the district level and below. This research is also limited to sources published in English or French.

### Scope and Delimitations

The study will assess the validity of the VSO model, conceptually, as a U.S. Army initiative to promote stability in the DRC. The research is confined as a case study to the conflict in the DRC's North and South Kivu provinces. It relies on the concepts

and results of the CIDG program in Vietnam and the VSO program in Afghanistan. It examines the implications of a VSO construct employed in the DRC.

This study will not provide a detailed solution or operational approach to the conflict through application of the VSO model. VSO alone cannot provide stability, but may contribute significantly to overarching stability efforts. This research tests the validity of the VSO model, as U.S. Special Forces applied it in Vietnam and Afghanistan, and then assesses its validity for the DRC. This study does not cover every facet or underlying grievance of the conflict. It focuses on the key factors related to the conflict in the Kivu provinces.

### Significance

For the last two decades, DRC's instability has affected most of East and Central Africa. It is the single most contentious and destructive conflict on the continent. There have been at least eleven nations involved in the conflict as combatants, supporters, or mediators.<sup>7</sup> Some are now taking part in the UN-led solution. The number of deaths resulting from the conflict has been contested, but certainly millions have died and continue to die from its effects.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these deaths, the UN reports 2.9 million

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<sup>7</sup> The eleven nations: DRC, Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea. Crisis Group, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/dr-congo/004-africas-seven-nation-war.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> The International Rescue Committee survey in 2008 estimated 5.4 million deaths related to the conflict with 45,000 continuing to die every month. These numbers were contested by the Human Security Report Project in 2010 citing poor research quality. The two reports disagree on the number of casualties that have resulted directly from the conflict rather than general quality of life in DRC. After 18 years of conflict it is difficult to separate the two. Accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.rescue.org/special-reports/special-report-congo-y>; <http://www.hsrgroup.org/press-room/latest-news/latest->

internally displaced people and 450,000 refugees.<sup>9</sup> Continued failure in the DRC will likely spark further unrest across central Africa, provide safe haven for armed groups, allow mass atrocities to continue, and prevent economic growth and regional stability. In light of the current fiscal environment in the United States, it is critical that the U.S. Army, together with its regional partners, provide resourceful support to key actors to promote both national and regional interests. The DRC's central government is challenged in its ability to administer the far corners of an underdeveloped nation lacking sustainable infrastructure.<sup>10</sup> The U.S. military has an opportunity to engage the various factions involved and work through the Congolese military to establish a framework for stability. The VSO model has been successfully employed in similar environments involving similar conflicts. It offers a promising foundation for a bottom-up initiative that can succeed where other efforts have failed.

### Summary

This chapter provided the background and framework of the problem, then an overview of the research plan to explore a potential solution where other efforts have failed. In the absence of stability in the DRC, local and international actors will move to gain influence at the population's expense. As the international community pursues a

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news-view/10-01-20/Report\_Reveals\_that\_Human\_Costs\_of\_War\_Have\_Shrunken\_Dramatically.aspx.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Security Resolution 2147, March 28, 2014, 2, accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/mandate.shtml>.

<sup>10</sup> Mushi, 343.

solution and the U.S. Army examines options, it is important to consider ideas from all areas, including past experience.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the written record on what is known and unknown about the possibility of a VSO construct in the context of stability in the DRC. It recognizes the scholarship in each arena as a foundation for further analysis. This chapter discusses the body of work consulted for research on the CIDG and VSO programs as well as the history of the DRC conflict and current operational environment.

#### Village Stability Operations in Army Doctrine

This research first examines Army doctrinal manuals to determine where VSO fit within existing doctrinal concepts. VSO are a framework for conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) in Afghanistan. As such, VSO are not found in any Army doctrinal manual, but its methodology aligns with Army doctrine on COIN and stability.<sup>11</sup> VSO follow the Shape-Clear-Hold-Build-Transition framework as a direct method for countering insurgencies and they employ a strike force as a direct enabler to support that framework. This concept is congruent with COIN doctrine.<sup>12</sup> VSO also support Army stability doctrine as a holistic approach that incorporates security,

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<sup>11</sup>Department of the Army, FM 3-07, *Stability* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2014); Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-24, 9-1 – 9-10, 9-13 – 9-14.

governance, and development.<sup>13</sup> A VSO methodology also remains a doctrinal option to directly support a greater effort in security force assistance or foreign internal defense.<sup>14</sup>

The most significant point of departure from doctrinal literature is that VSO are military operations focused on training indigenous civilians to act in a law enforcement capacity. Neither manual specifically mentions a local civilian defense force, though such a force could align under military or police security forces depending on which host nation ministry maintains oversight. Both manuals emphasize the legal considerations and authorities required for military forces to train law enforcement personnel, in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act.<sup>15</sup> VSO employed in Afghanistan requires specific congressional authority, and any future employment of the construct would require the same.

VSO are not found in Army doctrine by name, but both COIN and stability doctrine support VSO as a methodology. These manuals provide a greater framework and specific legal considerations under which a VSO construct may be employed.

#### Civilian Irregular Defense Group, Vietnam

Research on the CIDG program in Vietnam consisted of primary source material from those who employed the program and other secondary reports on the topic. Primary materials include personal accounts from Special Forces team members who participated in CIDG operations and progress reports from the early 1960s. While there are reports

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<sup>13</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-07, v, 3-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1-16, 1-26.

<sup>15</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-24, 13-1; Department of the Army, FM 3-07, 1-17.

that outline the South Vietnamese government's view of the overarching Strategic Hamlet concept, there is a gap in literature from the local indigenous perspective at the village level. This research relies on Ronald Shackleton's *Village Defense: Initial Special Forces Operations in Vietnam*.<sup>16</sup> His detachment was the first to implement the CIDG program. Shackleton wrote the majority of his work from his notes in the field, but his book also includes post-conflict material. His insights as a senior officer looking back at his operations with a greater perspective on the overall conflict add depth to his arguments. Another U.S. Special Forces veteran, Dr. Christopher K. Ives, provides context for the CIDG program within the greater, dynamic COIN efforts in South Vietnam. His book, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam*, discusses the successes and failures of the program as operational innovation despite institutional failure.<sup>17</sup> Also helpful was Darrell W. Carr's master thesis for the Command and General Staff College, "Civil Defense Forces in Counterinsurgency: An Analysis of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group in Vietnam."<sup>18</sup> Whereas Carr provides the baseline of analysis on the CIDG program itself, this study connects its findings to VSO and the conflict in the DRC. This study informs how the CIDG program influenced VSO and what

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald Shackleton, *Village Defense: Initial Special Forces Operations in Vietnam* (Colorado: Phoenix Press, 1975).

<sup>17</sup> Christopher K. Ives, *US Special Forces and Counterinsurgency in Vietnam: Military Innovation and Institutional Failure, 1961-1963* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Darrell W. Carr, "Civil Defense Forces in Counterinsurgency: An Analysis of the Civilian Irregular Defense Group in Vietnam" (Master's Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 2012).

principles from the program may be applicable to DRC, even if they were not applicable to VSO.

### Village Stability Operations, Afghanistan

This research examines personal accounts of VSO practitioners in Afghanistan and external perspectives by others who have observed its progress and assessed its value. It studies VSO principles in the context of those who employed it, though it is limited to what is written from the American perspective. There is still a gap in literature representing the Afghan military units involved. This research includes an article by Mark J. Brown, Jr., who commanded the first Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha (ODA) to conduct VSO in Afghanistan. His ODA studied the CIDG program as they planned their initial operation in Day Kundi Province, Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> This researcher also conducted VSO as an ODA commander in Helmand Province after the program had been more refined. This experience adds a personal element to the research, but perhaps an unintentional bias as well.

For breadth on the topic, and to mitigate potential bias, this study also includes external perspectives on VSO from other military services and from non-military sources. One account represents a perspective of the U.S. State Department’s Provincial Reconstruction Team program. Dr. Daniel R. Green is a Defense Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and a reserve naval officer who has deployed

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<sup>19</sup> Mark L. Brown, “Village Stability Operations: An Historical Perspective from Vietnam to Afghanistan,” *Small Wars Journal* (March 2008): 1, 6, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/print/13939>.

twice to Afghanistan as a tribal and political engagement officer at the provincial level.<sup>20</sup> He also served as the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command liaison officer to the U.S. Embassy's Office of Interagency Provincial Affairs.<sup>21</sup> Also included is a RAND Working Paper published in 2012 by Dr. Lisa Saum-Manning that examines the program's history and its potential future. Dr. Saum-Manning is a political scientist who served for four months in Afghanistan as an analyst for the Commanding General of the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command with a focus on VSO.

#### Kivu Provinces, Democratic Republic of Congo

The crisis in the DRC has continued long enough to garner a significant amount of scholarly research, even if the world at large has failed to take notice. However, with few exceptions, the writing represents conflict observers rather than participants. Many participants who have contributed, served within the central government, at or above the provincial level. Most notable are works by Ferdinand Mushi, who served in the Congolese Presidential administration, and the controversial François Rucogoza, who served as Provincial Minister of Justice for North Kivu and later as chief negotiator for the M23 rebels. The personal involvement of these authors adds a much needed Congolese perspective at the provincial level and above. Noticeably missing is a written record from the district level and below, involving combatants and civilians that face the reality of instability every day.

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel R. Green, "A Tale of Two Districts: Beating the Taliban at Their Own Game," *Military Review* 94 (January 2014): 26-31.

<sup>21</sup> The Washington Institute, "Visiting Fellows," accessed September 29, 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/green-daniel>.

There is a wealth of knowledge on the conflict's origins and its effects over the last eighteen years. Much has also been written about top-down approaches to solve some of the key issues. The UN has led this effort focusing on improving the central government's capability. The MONUSCO website provided valuable insight into the most recent UN programs and their progress. Most useful were the Security Council Resolutions pertaining to their mission in the DRC and other official documents that highlight specific issues in the Kivu provinces.<sup>22</sup> Still, recent research has been calling for a bottom-up approach that addresses grievances at the root of the problem in critical areas of the country outside the influence of Kinshasa and conspicuously within the influence of warlords and international actors.<sup>23</sup> This concept has been discussed by Congolese officials and international organizations alike, and many of the suggested approaches mirror the VSO construct.

Many of the books and articles for this research were written by third parties who have spent a significant amount of time in the Kivu provinces interacting with the conflict's participants. The most notable book is Jason K. Stearns' *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*.<sup>24</sup> In 2008, UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, selected Stearns to lead the UN Group of Experts on the DRC to investigate the conflict in eastern Congo. He has worked for over ten years in Bukavu, South Kivu Province. His research provides

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<sup>22</sup> United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, "MONUSCO Mandate," accessed April 27, 2014, <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/monusco/mandate.shtml>.

<sup>23</sup> Mushi, 24; Beswick, 343.

<sup>24</sup> Jason K. Stearns, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters: The Collapse of the Congo and the Great War in Africa* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2012).

extensive insight into the underlying causes of conflict. Séverine Autesserre, an awarding winning researcher from Columbia University, wrote articles that identify how local factors are the true source of national conflict.<sup>25</sup> Autesserre has traveled regularly to the DRC since 2001 to conduct her research.

Other authors highlighted sources of conflict. These include land, minerals, international intrusion, armed groups, and atrocities. Oumar Sylla and Baptiste Raymond participated in the United Nations' plan for resolving land disputes with internally displaced peoples.<sup>26</sup> Their reports stress the importance of land as an underlying root cause of conflict. UN reports and an International Peace Information Service editorial added depth to other articles highlighting the role of minerals.<sup>27</sup> Phillipe Le Billon, a research associate for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, discusses how minerals in the DRC contribute to sustained instability in the Kivus.<sup>28</sup> Adding breadth to the controversy of international intrusion, this research includes reporting from within the Congo as well as across the border. Major Patrick Sebudandi's Master's Thesis for the Command and General Staff College provides a Rwandan army officer's perspective.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Séverine Autesserre, "Local Violence, National Peace? Postwar 'Settlement' in the Eastern D.R. Congo," *African Studies Review* 49 (December 2006): 1-29.

<sup>26</sup> Oumar Sylla, "Land and Property Disputes Impeding Return and Reintegration," *Forced Migration Review* 36 (November 2010): 18-19; Raymond, 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> Ken Matthysen and Andrés Zaragoza Montejano, *'Conflict Minerals' initiatives in DR Congo: Perceptions of local mining communities* (Antwerp: IPIS, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Phillipe Le Billon, Adelphi Paper 373, *Fuelling War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts* (London: Routledge for IISS, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Patrick B. Sebudandi, "Failure to End the Kivu Conflict: Rwanda's Security and Stability at Stake?" (Master's Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 2011).

For context on armed group groups, this research relied heavily on Danielle Beswick's article, "The Challenge of Warlordism to Post-Conflict State-Building," a case study on Laurent Nkunda's armed group in the Kivus. Additionally, Ferdinand Mushi described the interaction of armed groups and the local population in the absence of government presence.<sup>30</sup> Maria Eriksson Baaz, a Swedish researcher from Göteborg University, has made progress in understanding atrocities in the conflict.<sup>31</sup> In 2008, she conducted interviews with members of the Congolese Army in their native Lingala as part of an effort to understand the motives behind their violence.

Extensive research from local and foreign sources as well as decades of scholarly research in the country reveal the complexity of the environment and the conflict in the DRC. A careful examination of a wide variety of works uncovers the key sources of conflict, specifically in the Kivu provinces. This is necessary to determine the effectiveness of a VSO construct employed against these problems.

### Summary

This chapter explored literature associated with the CIDG program in Vietnam, the VSO program in Afghanistan, and the current conflict in the Kivu provinces of DRC. Indigenous perspectives from the local level are lacking. This research does not rectify that gap, but it does consult other actors who have had extensive experience and interaction with these populations at the local level. There is also very little discussion on

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<sup>30</sup> Mushi, 15-26.

<sup>31</sup> Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, "Making Sense of Violence: Voices of Soldiers in the Congo (DRC)," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 46, no. 1 (March 2008).

how the U.S. military would approach a village-level engagement strategy to support the overall stability efforts in the DRC. There is a need for innovative solutions, especially in light of current resource constraints.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on the VSO construct in the context of the crisis in North and South Kivu provinces of the DRC. It explored the historical record of the CIDG program in Vietnam and VSO in Afghanistan. It also provided a general context for the crisis in the DRC through the lens of the two key provinces. This chapter identifies and analyzes the problem to find answers relevant to the primary research question.

#### Research Design

The goal of this research is to see how principles from VSO and its predecessor, the CIDG program, may apply to the current instability in the DRC. To make the problem more manageable, the research follows a case study design to provide meaningful focus and depth. The first case study focuses on the Vietnam era CIDG program. It covers the concepts and results to discover how the CIDG program addressed the underlying roots of conflict at the local level. The research then identifies which principles were incorporated into the VSO construct. The second case study covers VSO in Afghanistan. In a similar manner to the CIDG study, it assesses the concept and results to extract the underlying principles. The third case study centers on North and South Kivu provinces because they are a microcosm all of the grievances listed as origins of the conflict throughout the DRC. This case study examines the conflict's key components as they exist in those two provinces. The particulars, and certainly the combination of effects,

will be unique to the specific area; however, the resulting framework will add palpability to the problem and allow further assessment of the potential solutions that will likely apply to much of the country.

These case studies provide the base line for a theoretical experiment designed to apply the CIDG and VSO principles and methodologies to the Kivu problems. A study of how the core principles transferred from Vietnam to Afghanistan may present similar opportunities to pursue a VSO construct in the DRC. Below is a representation of the methodology.

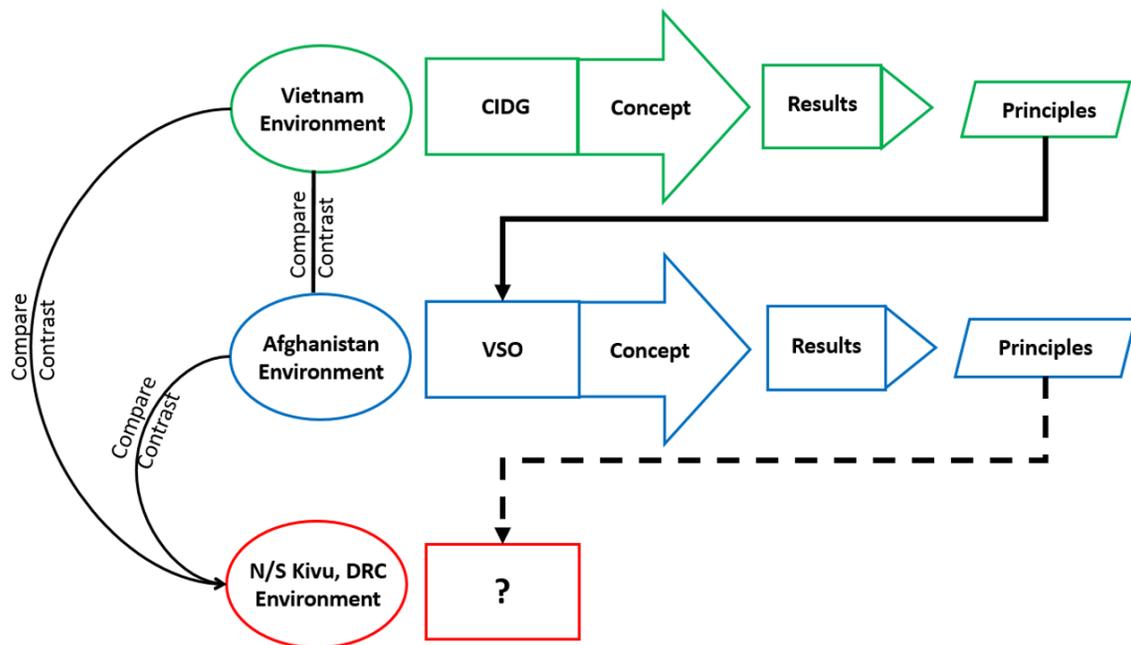


Figure 2. Methodology Flow Chart

Source: Created by author.

To test the VSO construct's validity as a military option in the DRC, it must prove suitable, acceptable, and feasible. It measures the historical principles derived from the CIDG and VSO programs to determine these three criteria. In this study, these criteria apply to a program employed within the two provinces of North and South Kivu as a case study.

A suitable option accomplishes the mission and meets the conditions for the end state.<sup>32</sup> It addresses the core origins of conflict and contributes to sustainable, long-term stability. The study compares similarities and differences of the conflict environments, and then examines each program's effectiveness within its own environment. It then assesses how a VSO model could contribute to current stability efforts in the DRC, based on the significant conflict factors in that environment. It examines how effective the VSO model was historically against these factors to inform how effective such a program would be in the DRC.

An acceptable option balances cost and risk with the advantage gained.<sup>33</sup> Historical examples of significant negative results in both the CIDG and VSO programs inform the risk of employing the program in the DRC. Unique differences in the DRC environment, that have no historical context within the CIDG or VSO framework, also constitute risk. This study identifies specific risks and implications of employing a VSO construct in the DRC and balances them with the potential advantage gained.

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<sup>32</sup> Adopted from the definition for 'Adequate,' Department of Defense, JP 5-0 *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2011), IV-24.

<sup>33</sup> Department of Defense, JP 5-0, IV-24.

A feasible option must be achievable within established time, space, and resource limitations.<sup>34</sup> Based on the successes and failures of the CIDG and VSO programs, this study examines, conceptually, the resources and conditions necessary to achieve success. Extracting the enduring principles from both the CIDG and VSO programs is paramount. This outlines what the program must achieve and informs decision makers of the size and type of force required. It also accounts for the stability efforts already in place that would form the overall framework in which a VSO construct would operate.

### Summary

This qualitative methodology follows the case study design to identify the DRC stability problems in a practicable way. It then applies the VSO construct to the Kivu conflict. The methodology specifically addresses the significant similarities and differences in the environment, conflict, actors, and goals within the different arenas. The results provide an initial assessment of the validity of a VSO construct in the DRC by highlighting key considerations in suitability, acceptability, and feasibility. They also reveal any gaps in current stability efforts that VSO may be able to fill. The intent is to identify if VSO is an avenue worth pursuing and adapting to DRC stability needs, or if some other construct within stability doctrine is required.

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<sup>34</sup> Department of Defense, JP 5-0, IV-24.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The previous chapter described the research methodology used to explore the principles from the CIDG and VSO programs to determine if they are valid for the current environment in the DRC. This chapter will employ that methodology and present the findings. First, it analyzes the CIDG and VSO programs through an examination of their environments, concepts, results, and enduring principles. Second, it analyzes the conflict in the DRC. Third, it compares the significant similarities and differences of the environments in each conflict. Finally, it tests the validity of applying principles from CIDG and VSO to the conflict in the DRC.

# Civilian Irregular Defense Group, Vietnam

## Environment

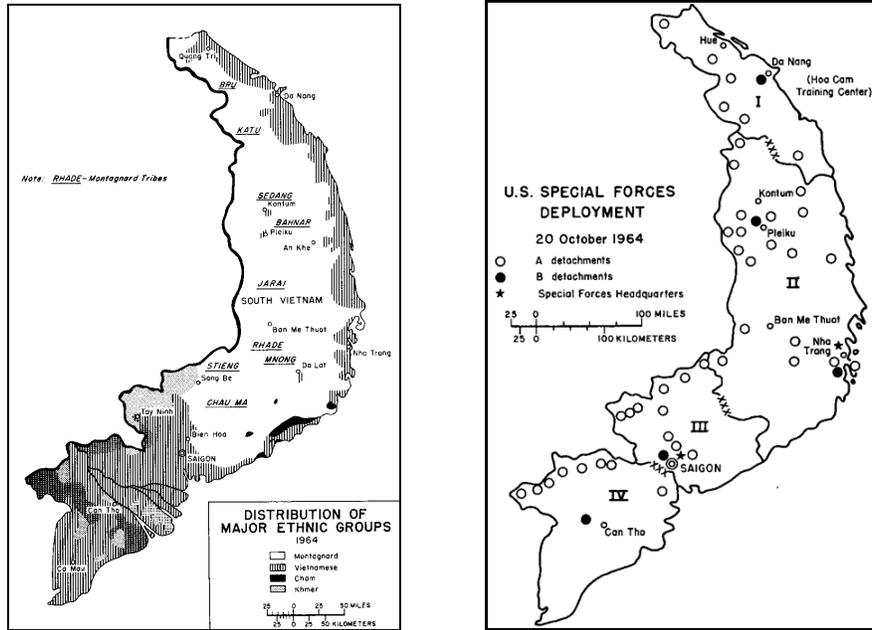


Figure 3. Vietnam Ethnic Groups and Special Forces Locations

Source: Center of Military History, map of Vietnamese ethnic groups, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/90-23/map1.GIF>; map of Special Forces locations, accessed October 1, 2014, <http://www.history.army.mil/books/Vietnam/90-23/map5.GIF>.

The Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) was a U.S. military initiative to support marginalized minorities in South Vietnam who were vulnerable to National Liberation Front for South Vietnam (Viet Cong) influence. The program began in 1961 and the South Vietnamese Army assumed control of the program in 1971. During that time, the political environment in Vietnam changed significantly, influencing the program's effectiveness. From 1959 to 1963, the South Vietnamese government

instituted programs to expand nationalism throughout the country that included assimilating ethnic minorities into the Vietnamese nationalist identity. These assimilation efforts targeted ethnic Chinese, Laotian, and Cambodians living in Vietnam, but the most critical population was the Montagnards of the Central Highlands.<sup>35</sup>

Social tension, ethnic tension, and land disputes characterized the tensions between the ethnic Vietnamese and the Montagnards. Living in the mountainous rural areas of western Vietnam, the Montagnards were separated geographically, as well as culturally, from the rest of the Vietnamese population. The urban-dwelling, ethnic Vietnamese considered the Montagnards backwards people with strange cultural practices. This social tension extended to the government which was not representative of minority populations. While the Vietnamese government promoted nationalism, the Montagnards pursued autonomy. This produced ethnic friction as the Montagnards refused to sacrifice their cultural identity, but still demanded equal rights with ethnic Vietnamese. Finally, the central government did not recognize traditional Montagnard land claims. In an effort to assimilate the cultures, the government promoted Vietnamese settlements on Montagnard land in the highlands without compensation to the previous landowners.<sup>36</sup>

Both the North Vietnamese government and the Viet Cong capitalized on the social and ethnic tensions in South Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh promised Montagnard autonomy under North Vietnamese rule. Whether true or not, this promise appealed to the ethnic minority. The Viet Cong recruited among the marginalized populations to support

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<sup>35</sup> Carr, 24-25.

<sup>36</sup> Ives, 18, 35; Carr, 24.

their insurgency against the South Vietnamese government. They specifically targeted the poor who already held anti-government sentiment.<sup>37</sup>

The South Vietnamese government, under Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, initiated population control measures through two programs. The first was the Agrovillage program from 1959-1961. Under this initiative, the government resettled at-risk populations to self-contained, protected communities. The government then identified these communities as loyal or disloyal. They relied on peasant labor for construction and maintenance, provided insufficient compensation for resettlement, and suffered from poor administration. The plan ultimately failed due to Viet Cong activity that benefited from the plan's unpopularity with the resettled populations.<sup>38</sup>

The South Vietnamese government revised the plan in 1962, renaming it the Strategic Hamlet program. The Diem regime initiated this program as a social revolution to modernize South Vietnam and galvanize local support for the central government against the communist threat.<sup>39</sup> Rather than resettle communities, this plan fortified existing settlements and provided reasonable improvements in security, livelihood, and education. The government provided a six-month supply of weapons and ammunition, requiring the hamlets to replenish their stocks with captured enemy equipment.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup> Carr, 26-27.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>39</sup> Philip E. Catton, "Counterinsurgency and Nation Building: the Strategic Hamlet Programme in South Vietnam, 1961-1963," *International History Review* 21, no. 4 (December 2010): 925, 928, accessed April 14, 2014, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07075332.1999.9640883>.

<sup>40</sup> Carr, 30.

government also no longer designated loyal and disloyal communities. The program's main goal was to limit Viet Cong influence on minority populations by spreading Vietnamese nationalism to the furthest reaches of the country. The program was an improvement, as the government provided goods and services to previously neglected peoples. However, it still garnered dissatisfaction from peasants who suffered from program administrative failures and injustice at the village level.<sup>41</sup>

The political situation shifted considerably in 1963 with a military coup in South Vietnam, the assassination of Prime Minister Diem, and the expansion of Viet Cong activity in support of the North Vietnamese Army. Ousting of the regime brought political instability and a loss of momentum for the Strategic Hamlet program. The new government supported U.S. military initiatives with ethnic minorities, but did not ascribe to the same sweeping nationalistic ideals as Diem and remained wary of empowering groups like the Montagnards who could challenge government authority. At the same time, the Viet Cong shifted from guerrilla warfare to a war of movement in support of the North Vietnamese Army. While they still conducted guerrilla tactics throughout the conflict, the Viet Cong employed company size elements and larger on the battlefield. This shift created a significantly different conflict environment for counterinsurgency initiatives.<sup>42</sup>

From 1965-1971, the character of the war changed. It escalated to a full-scale war of movement, which peaked with the 1968 Tet Offensives. In their subsequent defeat, the

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<sup>41</sup> John C. Donnell and Gerald C. Hickey, Memorandum, RM-3208-ARPA, "The Vietnamese 'Strategic Hamlets': A Preliminary Report" (Research, U.S. Air Force Project RAND, September 1962), 11-14.

<sup>42</sup> Carr, 56.

Viet Cong lost virtually all of their combat power, though some organizational infrastructure remained. Without a significant guerrilla threat, the CIDG program increased effectiveness among the population. By 1971, U.S. policy transferred the CIDG program to Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) authority.

### CIDG Concept

The CIDG program had two main objectives. Each focused on the strategically important Central Highlands of South Vietnam. The first was to prevent Viet Cong access to population centers and critical infrastructure through infiltration routes from Laos and Cambodia.<sup>43</sup> The ARVN was unable to control the rural, rugged highland areas near the western border. The Viet Cong could move freely over the border from their bases to attack urban areas in the south, and then retreat to safety. The second was to prevent Viet Cong influence on the Montagnards, a disgruntled minority population. The Viet Cong targeted groups like the Montagnards to provide support and to recruit soldiers for the insurgency. The South Vietnamese government had little influence over the highland populations and they squandered what little influence they had through unpopular assimilation programs. For both of these reasons, the central highlands, and specifically the Montagnard people, held strategic value for the counterinsurgency effort.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Shackleton, vi.

<sup>44</sup> Carr, 34; Shackleton, vi.



Figure 4. Concept of Civilian Irregular Defense Group

*Source:* Created by author.

The CIDG program progressed through five phases: Preparation, Clear, Secure, Develop, and Civilian Control. In the Preparation Phase, advisors determined the best location based on key terrain and support from key elders in the population. Once a suitable location was determined, and the popular support sufficient, a clearing force would aggressively move through the area in an effort to eliminate the Viet Cong presence. This was the Clear Phase which created space to influence the population. A Special Forces ODA, consisting of twelve members, then began the Secure Phase by working with the villagers to build defensive measures such as walls, trenches, stakes, wire, and mines. Inside this secure area, guarded by the team and villagers together, the team trained select village members as the Civilian Irregular Defense Force for the village. The defense force was expected to patrol an area up to two kilometers from the

base. With the initial force operational, the team moved into the Develop Phase to improve capability and expand to nearby villages. After several bases were formed, Special Forces teams recruited select villagers to form a mobile strike force, eventually termed a Mike force. This element was not tied to a specific village, but could respond as a quick reaction force for a number of villages in an area. The Mike force added flexibility and maneuverability to reinforce against Viet Cong attacks and conduct offensive strikes up to fifteen kilometers from the villages.<sup>45</sup> Once a village defense force was capable of conducting their own operations, at least sufficiently to hold out for external support, the Special Forces team transitioned the village to the Civilian Control Phase and moved to another village or region to continue the process.<sup>46</sup>

The CIDG program contained seven lines of effort that focused all village operations toward the greater operational objective.<sup>47</sup> The first was establishing and operating a base camp at locations of operational and strategic importance. These bases served as strongpoints in a dangerous environment far from government influence. They also reinforced each other and provided a foothold for future operations and expansion. The second line of effort connected the village to the central government. This was mainly achieved through administering civic action programs designed to improve quality of life for the villagers and through logistical support. Eventually, the provincial chief would pay the local village defense force as part of the provincial security force. The goal was to extend government influence from the capital to the village. Third were

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<sup>45</sup> Carr, 45.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 39.

combat operations, which included village and hamlet defense, a mobile strike force, and coordination with conventional forces conducting larger operations in the area. Fourth were psychological operations intended to garner support from the marginalized groups and dissuade Viet Cong activity. Fifth was intelligence gathering for local security and operations as well as for the conventional forces. Sixth were civic action programs to improve the way of life for the supported villagers. This initially included medical and agricultural support, but later expanded to education and other economic opportunities. The seventh line of effort was a border screen. The strategic location of bases allowed village defense forces to report on and interdict Viet Cong lines of communication and logistics from Laos and Cambodia that extended into South Vietnam. Each team conducting CIDG operations dedicated assets and resources toward all seven lines of effort to achieve a more holistic approach to stability in the central highlands as part of the greater COIN effort.

### CIDG Results

Over the ten years that the CIDG program was employed in Vietnam there were positive and negative results with lasting impacts and insights into the efficacy of a civilian defense force. Positive results included effective counterinsurgency operations and central government integration of some previously marginalized groups. The CIDG program effectively reduced the Viet Cong's ability to operate freely by contesting highland movement corridors and turning the will of rural populations away from the insurgency.<sup>48</sup> CIDG units also relieved South Vietnamese Army units of static defensive

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<sup>48</sup> Shackleton, 138.

positions which allowed more combat power for the offensive.<sup>49</sup> Finally, CIDG units supported conventional operations in their areas through intelligence reporting and additional manpower.<sup>50</sup>

The program also integrated some marginalized groups into the central government. It prompted heavy government influence below the provincial level including benefits previously excluded from minorities.<sup>51</sup> For the first time, Montagnards were granted legal certification, medical care, and disability and retirement benefits. When combined with additional security, the result was an improved quality of life that the Viet Cong could not offer them.

The two primary negative results from the CIDG program were obstacles to transitioning the program and the misuse of forces within the greater COIN campaign. Obstacles to transitioning the CIDG from U.S. advisors to the South Vietnamese security forces included ethnic friction, administration and logistics, and Montagnard loyalty. For their support of the central government, the Montagnards developed a false sense of future autonomy. Even while integrating with the security forces, the Montagnards remained set on ethnic autonomy within the government. This culminated with an armed uprising in 1964 by the United Front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races, led by Montagnards demanding that the central government address their grievances. U.S. advisors were caught in the middle until the situation was resolved diplomatically.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> Carr, 41-42; Shackleton, 137.

<sup>50</sup> Carr, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Shackleton, 139.

<sup>52</sup> Carr, 71; Shackleton, 138.

CIDG program actually increased ethnic friction as the central government became wary of the ultimate goals of a now armed and trained minority force within their borders.

A second obstacle to transition of the program was reliance on U.S. administrative and logistical support. This problem stemmed from a lack of resources and will power from the South Vietnamese government.<sup>53</sup> They were unable to sustain the program independently and unwilling to continue supporting minority groups in the same capacity after U.S. advisors departed. The third obstacle to transition was Montagnard loyalty to U.S. advisors rather than the central government. Because it was largely a U.S. program that never gained full support from the South Vietnamese government, the Montagnards never fully integrated.<sup>54</sup> The plan focused more on operational success rather than long term stability.

The CIDG program was also plagued by misuse of forces which limited its effectiveness. CIDG forces were trained and equipped to defend their local villages from Viet Cong insurgent attacks. When the North Vietnamese Army increased their attacks and the Viet Cong shifted from guerrilla warfare to a war of movement, the CIDG forces were often forced to fight conventional forces in a conventional manner. They were ill-suited to the task and ineffective against regular North Vietnamese troops.<sup>55</sup> Their role was also expanded to cover the western border which was beyond their capacity to fulfill.<sup>56</sup> The Mike force was similarly misused as a conventional force for static defense,

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<sup>53</sup> Shackleton, 142.

<sup>54</sup> Ives, 125; Carr, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Shackleton, 139.

<sup>56</sup> Carr, 98.

infantry augmentation, and route security. Even the U.S. Special Forces teams involved in CIDG were often employed beyond their capacity. They conducted security operations with CIDG forces and filled an advise-and-assist role at the District level.<sup>57</sup>

Despite the obstacles to transition and misuse of forces, the CIDG program produced quantifiably positive results against the Viet Cong, ultimately pushing them back across the border to their base camps in Laos and Cambodia. When the Viet Cong transitioned to a war of movement in support of major North Vietnamese offensives, the CIDG forces struggled to effectively counter the threat as they were neither equipped nor trained to face regular forces. Ultimately, the program was promoted through U.S. interests and failed to integrate completely within the South Vietnamese military. Both the central government and Montagnards were suspicious of the other's motives and they could not overcome the obstacles for integration after U.S. advisors departed.

#### Enduring CIDG Principles

A cursory study of the CIDG program in Vietnam highlights key enduring principles that support success for the employment of a similar concept in similar circumstances. First, the plan must be a combined effort of host nation government and U.S. forces working towards the same objective.<sup>58</sup> Long term success can only be ensured if the host nation government fully supports the program. Second, the plan must be holistic in nature to address the underlying grievances that fuel the insurgency. It cannot simply be a security plan; it must address governance at the local level, as well as

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>58</sup> Shackleton, 133.

economic and political factors.<sup>59</sup> Third, the CIDG program was only one critical part of an overarching COIN campaign. CIDG forces cannot replace friendly conventional forces or fight enemy conventional forces. They can be employed successfully against insurgents either unilaterally or in conjunction with conventional forces. Fourth, the program must employ a strike force. Without it, the massing of insurgent forces could overwhelm the individual village defense forces. Finally, there must be a deliberate post-conflict de-mobilization or integration plan. CIDG forces could return to civilian life or transition into the South Vietnam military or law enforcement.

These principles emerged from ten years of success and failure fighting an insurgency in the central highlands of Vietnam. “It is a program which can be modified and adjusted to complement large-scale involvement by U.S. combat forces (such as Vietnam); supplement national programs where there are no U.S. combat forces... [or] employed as a civil affairs program in remote areas of the world.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, U.S. Special Forces teams modified the CIDG program almost forty years later. This modification led to a plan for building local security forces to support COIN efforts in Afghanistan.

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<sup>59</sup> Shackleton, 139.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

## Village Stability Operations, Afghanistan

### Environment

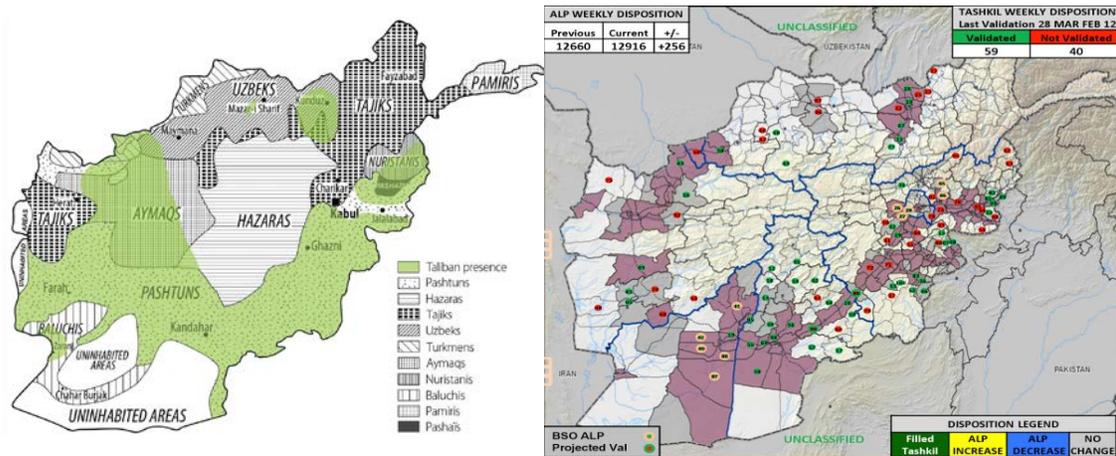


Figure 5. Afghanistan Ethnic Groups and VSO Sites

Source: University of Texas, map of Afghanistan ethnic groups, accessed October 1, 2014, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/afghanistan\\_ethnicities\\_and\\_taliban\\_presence\\_map\\_15Dec2009.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethnicities_and_taliban_presence_map_15Dec2009.jpg); Small Wars Journal, map of VSO sites, accessed October 1, 2014, [http://smallwarsjournal.com/sites/default/files/F1\\_3.png](http://smallwarsjournal.com/sites/default/files/F1_3.png).

Afghanistan has historically been difficult to govern. A combination of mountainous terrain, poor infrastructure and a weak central government with a cultural tradition of decentralized autonomy has created an environment conducive to insurgency. The current insurgency, like those previous, has found safe haven, logistical support, and ideological like-mindedness in the rural areas of the country far from Kabul's reach. COIN efforts within the main cities have been largely successful, but insufficient to ensure lasting stability. Marginalized people in ungoverned spaces present a credible threat to national stability.

The result of a defeated Taliban army in Afghanistan was resurgent Taliban activity from across the border in Pakistan. This activity took shape primarily as a Pashtun insurgency, which increased its intensity in 2006. Unlike the Montagnards who were an isolated minority within Vietnam, the Pashtun are a majority tribe in Afghanistan with roots in Pakistan as well. The insurgency was inherently Pashtun, so it already enjoyed significant cultural influence. Rather than ethnic marginalization – President Karzai himself is Pashtun – it was ideological marginalization. The Taliban fought for sovereignty of Afghanistan and were unwilling to share power with anyone who saw the world differently than they did. This group capitalized on porous international borders and mountainous terrain that was difficult for both the Afghan and Pakistani central governments to control. Southeastern Afghanistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of eastern Pakistan offered cultural havens for Taliban fighters.

Afghan military and law enforcement were insufficient to deal with the threat. Corruption, incompetence, and compliance created significant obstacles to the COIN efforts as the population became disenfranchised with the central government. Two critical factors were a corrupt judicial system and poppy eradication efforts; both were central to local grievances against the government. Where the government was weak, the Taliban proved effective. They provided judges to settle local grievances and disputes with armed muscle to back up their decisions and they eventually promoted poppy growth, albeit with a significant tax. In a fight for legitimacy in the eyes of the local villager, the Taliban held sway in southeastern Afghanistan. This requirement for influence at the village level prompted a shift in the operational focus of the war that has

remained to this day. Beginning in 2006, the U.S. Army pursued an initiative to improve stability and Afghan government influence at the local level.

### VSO History

One of the key challenges for security was that the national military and police did not have the capability, resources, or legitimacy to solve security problems at the local level. The government needed a cheap solution that could reach the farthest corners of the country and carry support of the local populations. The best potential solution was to incorporate what already existed in the local populace, if the government could somehow organize it and maintain control over it.

The inspiration for a local security program stemmed from the 2006 ‘Anbar Awakening’ in Iraq. Of their own accord, villages and towns within Anbar province formed local armed groups to defend their homes against Al-Qaeda intimidation and other foreign fighters in the region. The elders recruited, armed, and stationed their young men at established checkpoints on the main routes through their towns.<sup>61</sup> These groups were so effective that terrorist groups began to target them, drawing enemy resources away from U.S. troops. The U.S. military approach was initially tentative. While these armed groups were fighting against the main threats to American forces and to Iraqi sovereignty, they were still symbolic of national instability. In the end, the U.S. military and the Iraqi government decided to support and empower this movement while bringing the militias under central government control and oversight. The movement spread

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<sup>61</sup> Green, 28.

throughout other provinces and became a significant factor, both physically and psychologically, in the COIN effort.

The creation of the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) in 2006 was an initial attempt to supplement police efforts in Afghanistan. This program, which fell under Ministry of Interior (MOI) control, was focused on manning checkpoints and community policing. The initiative caused friction with the Afghan National Police (ANP) because these new ANAP recruits received only ten days of training before supplementing other police efforts, but they received the same salary as regular police. The program lacked legitimacy at the local level because it was national in nature and heavily infiltrated by the Taliban who exploited it for their own benefit.<sup>62</sup>

The next attempt was the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3) in 2009. The government initiated this plan in districts with operational significance where local ‘guardians’ would protect their villages and key local infrastructure. AP3 called for governance focus and community vetting, but achieved limited results. Although more local in nature, the population still remained skeptical over Taliban influence, either through intimidation or through infiltration.<sup>63</sup>

The Local Defense Initiative (originally the Community Defense Initiative) followed the AP3 in 2009 and was the first plan to include U.S. SOF support. This Afghan MOI program identified communities that were already supportive of the central government and those who resisted the insurgency. The program supported these

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<sup>62</sup> Lisa Saum-Manning, “VSO/ALP: Comparing Past and Current Challenges to Afghan Local Defense” (Working Paper, RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2012), 4; Green, 28.

<sup>63</sup> Green, 29; Saum-Manning, 5.

communities with the local ANP and an ODA that moved into the area. It was the first program that initiated limited development initiatives to address local needs. While the program still suffered from lack of resources and oversight, it proved to be the foundation for success.

In 2010, President Karzai absorbed the Local Defense Initiative into the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program. This was the first serious national effort toward a local solution. Coalition support to ALP arrived in the form of VSO which focused on improving local security, governance, and development. This holistic approach attempted to address the underlying core obstacles to long-term stability. The core element in VSO was a U.S. SOF team partnered with an Afghan SOF element and possibly other coalition partners and enablers.

Building on previous programs, VSO focused on areas that actively resisted the insurgency and requested support. This local buy-in from the elders provided the impetus for development and expansion of the program. The elders and traditional leadership became integrated into the district government and the MOI controlled the local security force through Afghan National Police oversight. This relationship provided the local community with oversight and support from the central government and it provided an avenue for elders to voice their grievances. Development served as a reward for those communities that supported the government as well as a tool that addressed some of the underlying factors of conflict such as local irrigation or medical needs.

The ALP began in 2010 with a force cap of 20,000. Based on the success of the program and quantitative effects across the country, the authorized number increased to 30,000 across 136 districts. Current estimates expect these numbers to be reached by

December 2015.<sup>64</sup> The future of the ALP is unknown, especially once the bulk of U.S. forces withdraw at the end of 2014. It is likely that SOF teams will not have the support required to continue operating at the village level. There has been a push within the Afghan MOI to institutionalize the ALP under the broader Afghan Uniformed Police.<sup>65</sup> There are certainly challenges associated with that, but the program has proven to be an economic means to engage local communities in an effort to counter the insurgency at the ground level.

### VSO Concept

The Village Stability Operations (VSO) program is the primary methodology for employing Special Operations Forces in support of the COIN campaign in Afghanistan. It is a “bottom-up COIN strategy that seeks to establish security and stability bubbles, or ‘white space,’ around rural villages with an eye toward permanently shaping an area to support local governance and development.”<sup>66</sup>

The VSO design pursues three lines of effort across four phases. The lines of effort are security, governance, and development, all of which are mutually supportive and mutually reliant.<sup>67</sup> Every mission in VSO must directly support one of the lines of effort. Security is achieved when the locally established force, with the help of existing government law enforcement, can provide protection for their land and people within

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<sup>64</sup> Saum-Manning, 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

their span of control. Governance involves integrating the existing local leadership into the central government at the district level. Not every village or tribal elder will get a seat at the district table, but good governance assures the voices of all will be heard at the district level through existing hierarchies. Development refers to meeting the true needs of the people in the communities. Development can increase once a security foothold is established and it can provide the means to bolster the legitimacy of local leadership tied into the district government. It seeks to address the core needs that are linked to underlying grievances in the communities and provide a tangible benefit for aligning with the central government.

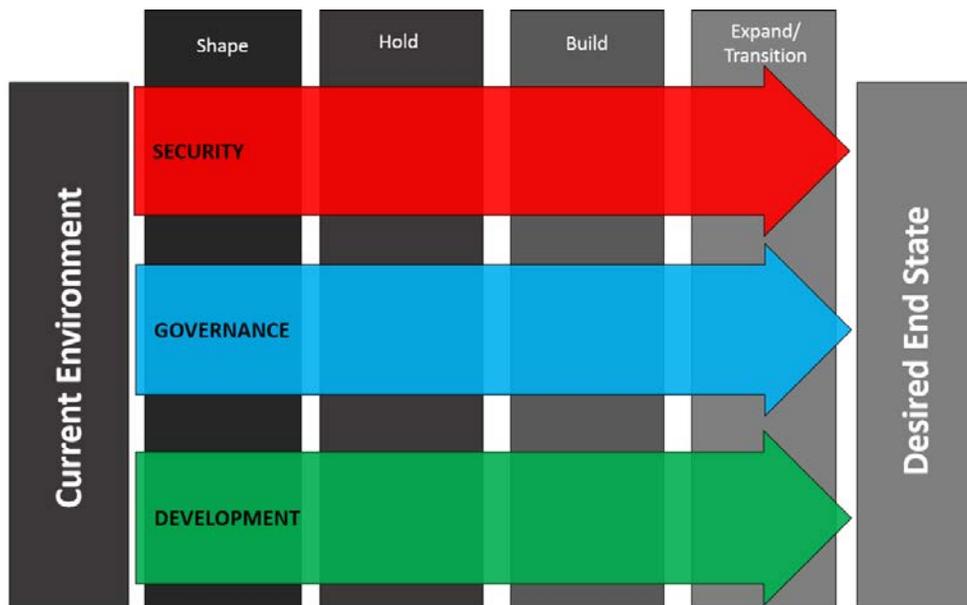


Figure 6. Concept of Village Stability Operations

Source: Created by author.

The four phases of VSO are Shape, Hold, Build, and Expand and Transition.<sup>68</sup> During the Shape Phase, U.S. and Afghan forces assess the village. Assessment includes the village's operational or strategic value, its elders, people, and threats. If the village meets the criteria, the operational force will engage the local elders to gain their consent and then introduce a SOF team into the village to begin VSO. Once consent is achieved, the unit will execute other shaping operations targeting threats in the area that will allow the team to safely infiltrate. When an agreement has been reached and shaping operations begin, the SOF team assumes a moral obligation to protect the village from potential backlash from insurgent forces.<sup>69</sup>

In the Hold Phase, U.S. and Afghan military forces are the primary means employed. They establish a base of operations and lay the framework for progress. At this stage, there is no functioning local law enforcement or connection to the district government. The combined SOF team occupies an area agreed upon by the elders and establishes a Village Stability Platform (VSP), the generic term for the base itself. The team then builds rapport with the villagers, develops their relationships with the elders, and begins to expand "white space;" the intangible span of security and control that decreases with distance from the VSP. The team trains a core cadre of Afghan Local Police (ALP) from volunteers in the village. The village elders, who are accountable for their behavior and performance, approve the volunteers.

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<sup>68</sup> T. Y. Connett and Bob Cassidy, "VSO: More Than Just Village Defence," *Special Warfare* 24, no. 3 (July 2011): 2-7.

<sup>69</sup> Connett, 3.

The Build Phase focuses on improving the established systems to operate independently and without external support. The goal is a functioning security force and local government that is capable of administering the assigned area and is sustained through Afghan channels. During the Build Phase, the SOF team integrates the functioning ALP into the existing ANP system under the Afghan MOI. Through these channels the ALP receive pay and remain accountable within the police hierarchy. The development effort depends on the local needs and resources available. The SOF team can leverage military options such as Army Civil Affairs teams as well as national and international entities and non-government organizations. The team decides which development avenues to pursue based on input from the village elders' assessment of need and long-term sustainability.

In the final phase, Expand and Transition, the SOF team turns over control to the local leadership and determines where to focus follow-on operations. At this point, the established systems are operational and effective enough allow the SOF element to focus resources towards the next objective. This may be the next nearest village or a different district entirely, depending on the overall plan and the operational environment. Success constitutes a capable local security force integrated into the national police and the village elders connected at the district level. Regular Afghan channels sustain the apparatus after the U.S. SOF team departs.

### VSO Results

The VSO program has proved successful enough to remain a key component of the overall COIN plan through 2015. The positive outcomes from VSO include security, legitimacy, and economy of force. In most cases where the government implemented

VSO, security improved noticeably within six months. The security force maintained legitimacy within the village because it was accountable to the elders. The elders supporting the program were connected to and participated in the district government. Improved security allowed the government to initiate development programs that improved the villagers' livelihood. VSO were also an economic option for the U.S. military because they capitalized on existing manpower and motivation.<sup>70</sup>

Continued challenges for VSO beyond 2014 will include sustainability, accountability, insurgent infiltration, and the quality of applicants. VSO are a cost effective option for the U.S. military, but once the U.S. military departs, it will be the responsibility of the Afghan government to sustain the program.<sup>71</sup> The government must provide the funding and logistics through the existing ANP program and maintain the ability to administer the program throughout the country.<sup>72</sup> The ALP at each village must also remain accountable to the ANP and the MOI. If not, the armed group may exert their authority for their own objectives. There is also a continued threat of insurgent infiltration into the program to subvert it from within. Local elders and the MOI must continue their joint vetting process that relies on institutional and local knowledge. Finally, each village is limited in its ability to produce quality individuals for ALP. Despite the vetting process, there are still accounts of drug use and corruption within the ALP as well as general illiteracy and lack of sufficient education.<sup>73</sup> Despite these challenges, the VSO

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<sup>70</sup> Green, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Saum-Manning, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

program is still growing in Afghanistan with plans to continue the program after the bulk of U.S. forces depart.

### Enduring VSO Principles

The first rule of VSO is that every Village Stability Platform, or base, is different. If you have seen one VSP, you have seen only one VSP. Special Forces teams understand that local terrain, dynamics, personalities, and threats can create a significant variety of environmental factors that affect operations. Nevertheless, despite the significant variety, there were several principles that applied to all elements conducting VSO. First, the site must have operational or strategic importance. Resource constraints required prioritization of the most critical locations. Second, the program must have local support. The local elders, supported by the population, must invite the SOF team to their village. If the population was unwilling to host a team, whether from fear of or collusion with the insurgents, that area was left to conventional forces. Third, operations must be holistic, supporting security, governance, and development. The plan sought to turn popular support from insurgents who were often of the same ethnic group. A holistic plan addressed the will, not just the ability, of the people to defend themselves. Finally, the result must be self-sustainable. An ALP force that is integrated with national security forces and sustained through the government infrastructure must secure the improved environment.

These enduring VSO principles evolved from an examination of the principles of CIDG and from four years of experimentation with the initial programs on the ground in Afghanistan. Important to note is that while the two programs were similar in nature, both took years to adapt to their respective environments based on the changing dynamics of

each conflict. Any similar approach in a different environment would also require development and adaptation.

## Kivu Provinces, Democratic Republic of Congo

### Introduction

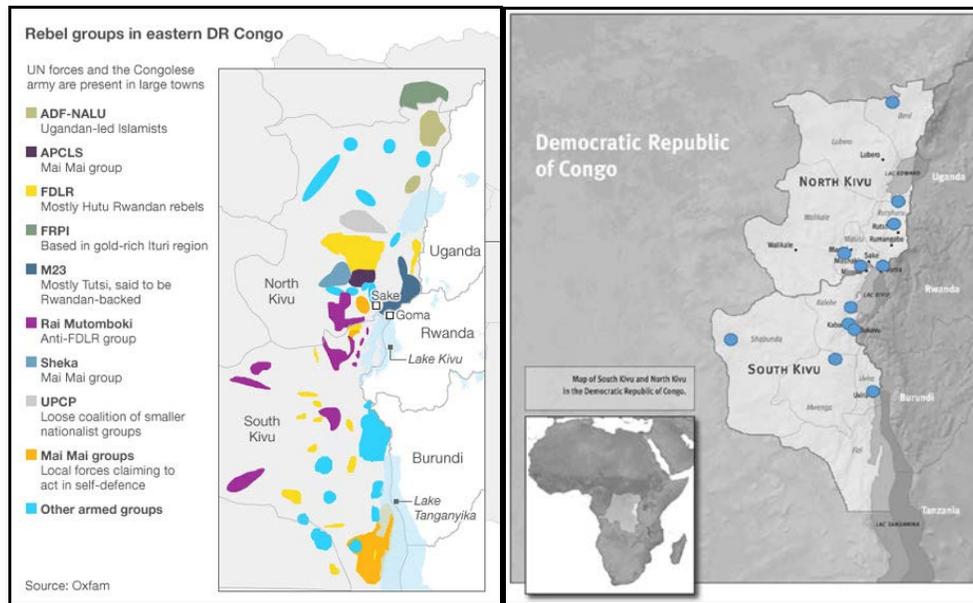


Figure 7. Armed Groups and UN Presence in the Kivu Provinces

*Source:* Oxfam, map of Kivu armed groups, accessed October 1, 2014, [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Images/OGB/What%20we%20do/Emergency%20appeals/Conflict%20in%20DR%20Congo/drc\\_map\\_captioned.ashx](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Images/OGB/What%20we%20do/Emergency%20appeals/Conflict%20in%20DR%20Congo/drc_map_captioned.ashx); Human Rights Watch and MONUSCO, map of UN presence in the Kivus, <http://www.hrw.org/node/84366/section/2> and <http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/dpko/MONUSCO.pdf>.

Why Kivu? These provinces are important as a case study because they are a microcosm the greater conflict. Two Congo wars began in Kivu; one successfully

overthrew the former regime.<sup>74</sup> These provinces are the farthest distance from the capital, Kinshasa, they sit along international borders, and they contain strategically important mineral deposits. Despite their strategic importance, the two provinces have suffered state neglect from the capital that has allowed local armed groups and international actors to hold sway in the area. A potential breakthrough in the Kivu provinces could have significant application for the conflict across the rest of the country.

### Conflict History

A brief history of events leading up to the main conflict in the Kivu provinces provides the context for the current operational environment. The Kivu provinces suffered from significant lack of state authority that ultimately set conditions for instability and foreign exploitation. From 1965 to 1997, former President Joseph Mobutu's kleptocratic government marginalized the problematic provinces that had been susceptible to past insurrection.

Under President Mobutu, the state had gradually retreated from the provinces... [and] cut funding for public services such as health care, education, and infrastructure. The retreat of the state touched the whole country, but it affected the eastern provinces most acutely. Mobutu invested almost nothing in infrastructure or development in these provinces despite continued taxation. As a result, a significant cleavage developed between the Kivus and the capital, which eastern Congolese perceived as predatory, and eventually led to a virtual disconnection of the eastern provinces from the central authorities.<sup>75</sup>

An economic crisis and decrease in foreign aid in the 1990's prompted Mobutu to endow his supporters with mining estates in the eastern provinces that further supplanted central

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<sup>74</sup> Beswick, 334; Mushi, 15; Raymond, 20; Rucogoza, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Séverine Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo: Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 70.

government authority and created semi-autonomous “fiefdoms” centered on illicit trade in natural resources.<sup>76</sup> What little influence the central government maintained was generally negative. Mobutu encouraged his unpaid army to survive off the population, which they did through illegitimate taxation and use of force. Local politicians created additional friction through fiery rhetoric, exploiting ethnic differences to consolidate electoral support. All these factors over three decades of intentional neglect created a volatile environment in the Kivus.

The tipping point arrived in 1994 when the incumbent Hutu government in neighboring Rwanda initiated a genocide of the Tutsi population. The Tutsi Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) capitalized on the ensuing chaos and international outcry to overthrow the Hutu government. This sudden reversal in power caused approximately one million Hutus to flee across the border into the DRC. Many of these Hutus were former Rwandan Army soldiers or militants from the armed group known as the *Interahamwe*. From 1995-1996, the *Interahamwe* continued incursions from their refugee camps into Rwanda intent on toppling the RPF.<sup>77</sup> In 1996, Laurent Kabila led his rebel group, the Alliance de Forces Démocratiques pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire (AFDL), from Rwanda, through the Kivus, and on to Kinshasa. Supported by Rwanda and Uganda, the AFDL ousted the Zairian dictator, Joseph Mobutu. Once he consolidated power, Kabila then attempted to drive out the Rwandan and Ugandan militaries. In 1998, Rwanda backed a second rebellion led by Wamba dia Wamba against the Kabila regime. Though ultimately unsuccessful, remnants of the original party remained in North Kivu

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<sup>76</sup> Autesserre, *The Trouble with the Congo*, 70.

<sup>77</sup> Mushi, 18.

with external support from Rwanda. In 2001, Laurent Kabila was assassinated by one of his guards. The Congolese presidency then passed to his son, Joseph Kabila. As president, Joseph Kabila eventually brokered a series of peace treaties with neighboring rivals that culminated with all foreign forces withdrawing from the DRC in 2003, except for the UN mission to Congo (MONUC). Though 2003 marked the end of the war, internal dissenting armed groups and foreign interference still plague the country. In 2013, Joseph Kabila's agreement with Rwanda brought Rwandan troops back into South Kivu to assist with stability efforts against armed groups. Though promising as a strategic move toward regional alliance, the local Congolese villagers see foreign troops instead of their own, which further distances their perception of national influence.

#### Conflict Factors

Many factors contributed to open conflict. This research has identified four principle factors that seem to have been the most influential: land, minerals, ethnic tension, and international intrusion. All of these factors are interrelated. Current efforts in the Kivu provinces attempt to address the factors, with varying degrees of success.

Land is a critical factor in the origin of the Kivu conflict for simple geography, source of livelihood, historical claims, and political influence. From a purely geographical perspective, the Kivu provinces are over 900 miles from the capital of Kinshasa, separated by dense tropical rain forests and stark infrastructure.<sup>78</sup> This causes distinct administrative challenges. The government simply cannot extend its influence that far, resulting in marginalization and perceived neglect in the Kivu provinces. The

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<sup>78</sup> Beswick, 335.

neighboring capitals of Rwanda and Burundi are closer than Kinshasa and exert more control over the Kivus.

Another factor in the land conflict is the competition between agriculturalists and pastoralists; this competition threatens livelihood and cultural identity. Debate over historical ownership compounds the problem. By law, the central government owns all land in the DRC.<sup>79</sup> In practice, customary chiefs grant people the rights to use the land and retain the responsibility to settle disputes. Massive migrations of both refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) have overpopulated some areas and have evacuated others for years at a time. Refugees have no claim to land, but IDPs lose out when others settle on their land while they are away. National laws are unclear on ownership and the government must compete with local chiefs for authority in mediation. Political influence, the final factor in land conflict, is the most critical. Administrative jurisdiction over land is the main factor in representation within the government. This is especially important for marginalized ethnic groups that want more influence in elections and the political decision-making process.<sup>80</sup>

The second factor in this conflict is minerals. The Kivus sit atop vast amounts of gold, cassiterite (a key ingredient in tin), coltan (a critical component in electronics), and wolfram (a source of tungsten used in machine tools and ammunition).<sup>81</sup> If properly managed, these minerals could boost the national economy. Instead, the mines remain contested and much of the mineral wealth is exploited for local gain by armed groups or

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<sup>79</sup> Raymond, 20.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Mushi, 18.

funneled across the border by neighboring countries.<sup>82</sup> According to Le Billon, minerals in the DRC are a distant and diffuse resource; that is, they naturally occur far from the influence of the capital and they are spread out about the country. They are difficult to defend and easy to loot. DRC minerals have financed the war for all sides involved.<sup>83</sup>

A third root cause of conflict is the ethnic tension and marginalization of certain parties in the Kivus. Ethnic minorities with close cultural ties to Rwanda and Burundi have been settled in the Kivu provinces since the mid-nineteenth century. Ethnicity was a key factor in the Rwandan genocide and in the subsequent rebellions in the DRC. As a result, there is significant tension and suspicion between ethnic groups in the Kivus.<sup>84</sup> Political leaders have exploited this tension in election years to consolidate power.<sup>85</sup> Armed groups often form along ethnic lines, especially if a specific group is targeted. Nearly all the sources consulted in this research described the importance of ethnicity as a factor in the conflict and in potential solutions.

Most prominent in ethnic friction are the Banyamulenge, an umbrella term for mainly pastoral tribes who migrated to the Kivu highlands from Rwanda over the last century and a half. They are Kinyarwanda speaking Tutsi peoples who have migrated by personal choice, colonial force, or ethnic persecution. Policy makers at the national level have debated their right to citizenship and land ownership in DRC and their treatment has improved or declined based on policy decisions and local conflicts. The group was

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<sup>82</sup> Matthysen, 3; Mushi, 18, 21.

<sup>83</sup> Le Billon, 35-39.

<sup>84</sup> Sebudandi, 35-38.

<sup>85</sup> Beswick, 337.

specifically persecuted with an increased threat of Rwandan invasion and eventually ordered *en masse* back across the border to Rwanda in 1995.<sup>86</sup> Some Banyamulenge formed their own armed groups to protect themselves from an increasingly violent local population while others crossed the border and joined the Rwandan Armed Forces.

The Kivu provinces contain multiple ethnic groups, but most prominent in the conflict are Hutu refugees with no claim to autonomy in the DRC and the Banyamulenge whose rights to land and citizenship have been debated despite their historical presence. Both groups have significant ties to Rwanda that add friction to their present disposition in the Kivus.

Finally, the Kivu provinces have been subject to international intrusion from neighboring countries seeking to extend influence, benefit economically, and protect their own interests.<sup>87</sup> External actors support armed groups within the Kivus to extend their influence or exploit mineral wealth. They also engage in illicit international trade with armed groups in the Kivus. These groups operate outside the reach of the DRC central government.<sup>88</sup> The Rwandan narrative is mainly one of security concerns. Hutu armed groups intent on seizing power in Rwanda have found safe haven in the Kivu provinces. The incumbent Tutsi government has employed their military in the DRC to combat this threat, with and without diplomatic arrangements with the Kinshasa government.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Stearns, 58.

<sup>87</sup> Sebudandi, 43-49; Mushi, 18, 23, 25; Beswick, 336.

<sup>88</sup> Beswick, 338; Mushi, 16.

<sup>89</sup> Sebudandi, 60.

Currently, the Rwandan military is occupying parts of the Kivus at President Kabila's request to assist in suppressing the armed groups.

These four factors, land, minerals, ethnic tension, and international intrusion, have contributed most to the conflict in the Kivu provinces. They are all interconnected and must be addressed as such. For example, minerals and ethnic tensions are tied to land and international intrusion is related to minerals, land, and ethnic cross-border ties. They constitute the key points of a complex problem and must be addressed to ensure long-term stability.

#### Conflict Protraction

While some factors had a distinct role in the creation of the Kivu conflict, two factors have played a lead role in its protraction- armed groups and atrocities. Most observable are the numerous armed groups and warlords with various competing objectives and sponsors. Armed groups often arise from necessity or opportunity in the lack of effective security or governance.<sup>90</sup> Some are relatively weak, holding whatever power they can within their social or ethnic structure. Others, with international support, are better equipped and trained than the national military.<sup>91</sup> All contribute to instability, even with the best intentions, because their very existence is a demonstration of government weakness. Some have been integrated into the national security apparatus,

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<sup>90</sup> Mushi, 20-21.

<sup>91</sup> Beswick, 339.

others disarm as security improves, and still others form an ideological base and must be appeased politically or rooted out and destroyed.<sup>92</sup>

Table 1. Armed Groups in the Kivu Provinces		
	Name and Estimated Number of Fighters	Objective
<b>Local</b>	Kivu Mai-Mai Groups	Self-defense, self-enrichment, land ownership and control, local interests, often ethnically aligned, allies for hire...
	Mai-Mai Yakutumba <b>150-250</b>	
	Mai-Mai Cheka <b>50-200</b>	
	Mai-Mai Nyakiriba <b>100-200</b>	
	Mai-Mai Kirikicho <b>50-200</b>	
	Mai-Mai Mongol <b>500-1500</b>	
	Mai-Mai Kapopo <b>200-400</b>	
	Mai-Mai Kyatende <b>50-200</b>	
	Mai-Mai Simba <b>100-200</b>	
	Mai-Mai Zabuloni <b>50-150</b>	
	Mai-Mai Kifuafua <b>300-1000</b>	
	Raia Mutomboki <b>100-1000</b>	
	Jeshi la Uma <b>100-300</b>	
	FRF (Forces Républicaines Fédéralistes) <b>100-300</b>	
	APCLS (Alliance des Patriotes pour un Congo Libre et Souverain) <b>500-2000</b>	
FPLC (Front Patriotique pour la Libération du Congo) <b>200-500</b>		
PARECO (Patriotic Resistance Coalition) <b>300-1000</b>	Integrated 2010	
CNDP (Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple) <b>3000-4000</b>	Agreement 2009	
M23 (Mouvement du 23 Mars)	Defeated 2013	
<b>Foreign</b>	FDLR (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda) <b>3000-4000</b>	Overthrow Rwanda
	ADF/NALU (Allied Democratic Forces/National Army for the Liberation of Uganda) <b>1200-1500</b>	Overthrow Uganda
	FNL (Forces Nationale de Libération) <b>8500</b>	Overthrow Burundi
	LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) <b>200-1000</b>	Unclear

*Source:* Created by author, based on research by Jason Stearns, “A Blog on Congo,” accessed October 9, 2014, <http://congosiasa.blogspot.com/2010/06/list-of-armed-groups-in-kivus.html>.

<sup>92</sup> Mushi, 23; Beswick, 341.

Armed groups include local and foreign organizations. The most powerful local groups have either been integrated or defeated, leaving local militias, called Mai-Mai, with varying degrees of influence and capability. At least thirteen of these groups are currently active in the Kivu provinces. The foreign groups maintain safe haven in the DRC but operate across the border to influence neighboring countries. These groups contribute significantly to international intrusion and they constitute a credible threat that the DRC government has been unable to address. Most prominent are the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda. This armed group, composed of primarily Hutu *Interahamwe* and ex-FAR (*Forces Armées Rwandaises*), formed in the refugee camps in the Kivus after their flight from Rwanda in 1994. Both are often categorized under the general term *génocidaires* for their involvement in the original Tutsi genocide. They originally supported Mobutu against the Rwandan Tutsi force that supported Laurent Kabila's AFDL. However, once Kabila seized power from Mobutu, he enlisted the Hutu armed groups to support his efforts against Rwanda in the Second Congo War two years later. Now Kabila has enlisted the help of the Rwandan Defense Forces to compel the armed group to lay down their arms. Local armed groups may provide an opportunity to support a lasting stability solution in the Kivus. Foreign groups must be defeated, or at least denied safe haven in the DRC.

Another protracting factor in the conflict is the penchant of all sides for mass atrocities including murder, rape, looting, kidnapping, cannibalism, mutilation, and ethnic cleansing.<sup>93</sup> These acts must be further explored to understand the impetus behind them and their lasting effects. Interviews with candid members of the Congolese Army reveal

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<sup>93</sup> Baaz, 57-86; Mushi, 21; Beswick, 339.

that most soldiers commit violence out of poverty, anger, or the “craziness of war.”<sup>94</sup> Interviews suggest that most perpetrators believe the atrocities they commit are wrong. Though unpardonable, their actions often stem from a lack of sustenance to the point of starvation, lack of leadership and a lack of accountability. Unfortunately, the trend continues since the root causes have not been addressed. The results are illegitimate armies of deeply traumatized soldiers and who prey on their own dissatisfied populations.

### Current Environment

The current environment in the Kivu provinces still faces challenges in security, governance, and development. The 2002 “Global and Inclusive Agreement on Transition” integrated five major armed groups and local Mai-Mai militias into the national army.<sup>95</sup> This attempt to satiate powerful warlords and armed groups resulted in delegitimizing the army. The current DRC army lacks capability, professionalism, and education. In some parts of the Kivus, it cannot defeat local armed groups that remain, nor can it defend the national borders from foreign incursion. Because the government either cannot or will not pay its army, soldiers continue to prey on the population. This lack of a capable, professional military force with a monopoly on violence in the DRC is the greatest security shortcoming.<sup>96</sup>

The central government continues to struggle in its efforts to govern the whole nation in large part because of its lack of infrastructure. Decades of neglect under

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<sup>94</sup> Baaz, 75-76.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 64.

Mobutu, compounded by decades of war exacerbated the security situation. There are few paved roads to or through the Kivus. The dirt roads that provide the economic lifeline are subject to bad weather, poor upkeep, and overuse. While the capital cities of Goma and Bukavu both contain airports, air transport within the country is limited. The great distance to the national capital provides administrative challenges with a lack of physical and communications infrastructure.

There also remains a conflict of authority between the central government and the traditional local government. In the absence of central government influence, the local governing structure gains primacy. However, the latest election results in the Kivu provinces reveal general support for the incumbent in Kinshasa.<sup>97</sup> Development programs continue at the provincial level. North Kivu, supported by MONUSCO, has initiated the Priority Action Plan to address macro-economic growth, improve social services, fight HIV/AIDS, and strengthen communities.<sup>98</sup> The UN has extended the mandate for MONUSCO through 2015, maintaining its current numbers with the majority of peacekeeping troops remaining in Kinshasa and the Kivu provinces.<sup>99</sup>

The current environment holds challenges in security, governance, and development. The government, with international help, is addressing them, at least at the provincial level. The UN force in the DRC has dedicated significant resources to the Kivu provinces in recognition of their important role in the overall conflict. A stability

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<sup>97</sup> Mushi, 16.

<sup>98</sup> Rucogoza, 29.

<sup>99</sup> United Nations Security Resolution 2147.

effort at the local level must necessarily engage the root sources of conflict as well as the current UN efforts in the area.

## Validity Analysis

### Introduction

The previous section analyzed the concept, results, and principles of the CIDG program in Vietnam and the VSO program in Afghanistan. It also covered the current environment in the DRC, highlighting the root causes of conflict in the Kivu provinces. This section examines the current environment and critical problems for stability in the Kivu provinces as compared to Vietnam and Afghanistan. This comparison of key similarities and differences will indicate which problems VSO can or cannot address. This is the suitability test to examine how VSO will engage core origins of conflict and contribute to stability efforts if introduced into the environment.

This section then closely examines the key factors of cost and risk associated with implementing a VSO construct. It includes historical evidence from previous programs to avoid potential pitfalls and balance cost and risk with the advantage of potential opportunities. This is the acceptability test to explore the risk involved with a VSO construct in the DRC.

Finally, this section analyzes the progression of principles from the CIDG program to the VSO program, highlighting their necessary application for the DRC. This list of principles will outline what must be achieved and inform the feasibility of the program. It will not list the force necessary to achieve success, but rather list the requirements for such a force.

## Suitability

This test analyzes the environments and problems with stability in the DRC compared with those that the CIDG program addressed in Vietnam and the VSO program addressed in Afghanistan. Any attempt to initiate a similar program in the DRC must be made in light of historical evidence to ensure its suitability in the new environment. A VSO construct is not designed or expected to address all the factors of instability. The results inform the utility of such a program by identifying which factors the program likely can or cannot address based on historical application. This will determine if a VSO construct is suitable to address critical factors of the environment and problem in the DRC in a way that current stability efforts do not. A VSO construct can contribute to greater stability efforts through direct application, direct support at the local level, and indirect support to national efforts.



Figure 8. Sample VSO Contribution to Stability Efforts in the DRC

*Source:* Created by author.

There are some factors in the current environment in the DRC that a VSO construct is well suited to address directly. VSO are ideal for rugged terrain where the central government has limited access and infrastructure. VSO can improve security, governance, and development efforts in these areas in ways that the central government cannot. VSO can also fill a security gap created by a weak military and law enforcement. VSO are well suited to defeat insurgencies and could contribute most significantly to address the problem of armed groups in the Kivus. The security threat posed by these groups prevents significant gains in governance and development. Even recent successes through compromise and integration of armed groups have been tempered by the subsequent de-legitimizing of the military. VSO is suitable specifically to provide security where the government cannot, then de-mobilize or integrate that capability into the security forces as a legitimate, proficient force. Finally, VSO are well suited to directly address marginalized ethnic groups and connect them into central government efforts at the local level. Though the central government must be ultimately responsible for integrating marginalized groups, VSO can initiate these efforts directly and begin integration in a way that regular security forces alone cannot.

A VSO construct can also contribute to the greater stability effort in the DRC by directly addressing national problems at the local level. The central government must provide significant initiative at the national level to resolve some of the critical problems. But VSO can support these efforts locally and connect them nationally. In the DRC, VSO can support governance efforts concerning land disputes, ethnic tension, and reconciliation from atrocities committed on all sides of the conflict. The government, however, must take the lead role in all these areas, as VSO alone cannot address them

fully. VSO can directly support these efforts by integrating government initiatives at the local level. VSO can empower local leadership from the village elders to the district governor, connecting them to the central government. VSO can also directly support efforts to regulate and control alluvial mines. Again, the government must take the lead in reclaiming strategic mineral resources, but VSO can contribute through security and development at the local level for those mines that are located within their areas of operation.

Finally, VSO can contribute to DRC stability through indirect support to central government efforts. VSO provide static security in key locations that allows the military more resources to focus on preventing international intrusion, defending the porous border, and combating any conventional threat or significant armed group with parity of arms or capability to the national military. VSO is neither designed nor capable of addressing these instability factors, but they can contribute by releasing military personnel and resources otherwise engaged in static defense.

These contributions to stability, based on historical evidence from Vietnam and Afghanistan, demonstrate the suitability of a VSO construct for stability efforts in the DRC. VSO can support all current stability efforts in the DRC, but most importantly, they could make significant gains where other efforts have failed with the persistent problem of armed groups.

## Acceptability

An acceptable stability option balances cost and risk with advantage gained.<sup>100</sup> Historically, both in Vietnam and Afghanistan, a VSO construct was a cost effective option, providing significant counterinsurgency gains with limited committed resources. With the current established UN framework in place in the DRC, the U.S. footprint and expenditure for VSO could be smaller than ever before. But while cost can remain potentially very low, there is still significant risk with ethnic tension and armed groups.

A VSO construct employed in the Kivus may exacerbate local and national ethnic tensions. The opportunity for significant advantage is that a VSO construct could provide the framework for improved governance and development in an area previously neglected by the government. Positive gains in these areas may provide the population opportunities to put aside deep-seated ethnic friction for mutual benefit. However, the significant risk is that relative advantage of one ethnic group may isolate another and cause a deeper rift locally or with the central government. This risk is potentially international as some ethnic groups span national borders. If the DRC government does not regulate the program or carry it to completion with demobilization and integration, it could exacerbate local, national, and regional ethnic tensions.

A second significant risk in employing a VSO model in the Kivus is that it may create an imbalance of local power with regional consequences. If not closely integrated into government efforts, it could change the security dynamic by providing local forces relative military superiority over national forces. The great opportunity is to build a representative military and law enforcement capability that is fully integrated with the

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<sup>100</sup> Department of Defense, JP 5-0, IV-24.

national government. A VSO construct could provide this capability in critical areas much quicker than a centralized approach to expanding security forces. The result, if successful, would also be more stable for the long-term since the population was an integral part of the solution. The great risk is creating a capable military force that does not successfully integrate into central government authority. This force could potentially gain significant local power and autonomy, challenging the government's claim and access to the critical areas in the Kivus.

The CIDG program in Vietnam provides an example for both of these key risks. The ethnically marginalized Montagnards used their CIDG capability to pursue autonomy rather than integrate with the government. Lack of government support for the program increased the potential for cleavage rather than unification and ultimately led the collapse of the program. The most effective way to mitigate these risks is through support and participation of the national government. The demonstrated alternative in the DRC was to integrate armed groups without sufficient training, support, or indoctrination. An effective, comprehensive Foreign Internal Defense program would also mitigate risk by promoting stability at the national level. In the current environment, the UN would necessarily fill that role. Both the UN and the central government must be integrated into and supportive of a VSO plan for it to succeed. If the central government is serious about reconciliation and integrating marginalized ethnic groups, these risks can be mitigated. A VSO construct is acceptable because the advantage gained in critical areas outweighs the cost and risk involved, and the critical risks can be effectively mitigated.

## Feasibility

The final test to determine the validity of a VSO approach in the DRC is one of feasibility, which determines if it is achievable within established time, space, and resource limitations.<sup>101</sup> This test will not examine the forces or resources necessary for such an endeavor. Rather, it will outline the principles of the program required for success to inform what must be achieved. Further analysis is necessary to assess the requirements for applying these principles.

The VSO program was a progression from and adaptation of the CIDG program. These changes were necessary to apply the program in a different environment against a different set of stability problems. However, there were six underlying principles that remained just as valid in both environments. This suggests that if a VSO construct is employed in the DRC, it will likely find success along the same principles. These principles offer insight into what sort and size of force will be required to employ a VSO program successfully in the DRC.

The first principle is that the program must have host nation support from the national and the local level. The CIDG program had excellent support from the local level where the Montagnards had much to gain from the training and resources provided. Support of the national government changed over the ten years of the program. During initial stages, the South Vietnamese government tried to adapt the program to fit its nationalistic plans as part of the Strategic Hamlets. Eventually, the government backed the CIDG efforts and the program enjoyed success throughout the country. When government support later waned out of suspicion for the supported minorities and a

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<sup>101</sup> Department of Defense, JP 5-0, IV-24.

drawdown of U.S. troops, the program also diminished. It collapsed altogether when U.S. advisors left because the government did not fully own or support the program and the Montagnards maintained loyalty to their advisors rather than the central government.

The VSO program made several improvements toward this end, but the results are yet to be seen. From the beginning, the program has been integrated from the national level down to the village level. The Afghan government plans to continue the program after the bulk of U.S. forces leave the country, taking with them much of the external support required for the program. This will be a true test of self-sustainment. The government must not only have the will to support the program, but also the resources. Local villages must also continue to support the program, because it is a grass roots initiative that will not function without local support. Any VSO-type program initiated in the DRC must have host nation support at both the national level and the local level. The program must ultimately be self-sustainable for the Congolese government. If it is strictly a U.S. program or a UN program, it will fail.

The second principle is that a VSO construct must be holistic in nature, including efforts toward security, governance, and development. Security efforts alone will not provide lasting stability. The programs in Vietnam and Afghanistan were most successful at separating the insurgents from the target populations when they included efforts toward local government and basic development needs. In Vietnam, it was decisive as the Montagnards, through the CIDG program, were able to improve their quality of life. The Viet Cong could not compete for their loyalty. In Afghanistan, the holistic approach placed emphasis on connecting the village elders to the district leadership and funneling key projects through the local government. Both governance and development projects

leave significant room for corruption with negative impact, but overall, if they are not addressed, security efforts will only achieve minimal results.

The third principle is that a VSO model is only a part of a greater stability effort to improve the host nation capability and capacity. This is significant as both Vietnam and Afghanistan were large theaters of operation with significant numbers of U.S. conventional troops. Even though both CIDG and VSO were applied to the farthest reaches of the country, they still relied heavily on material and military support from conventional forces. There is no historical context for a VSO construct in a permissive or semi-permissive environment without conventional support. The most similar SOF operations have been related to Foreign Internal Defense (FID) and Security Force Assistance (SFA), but both of these models focus on the host nation military rather than the population at the village level. VSO have proven successful in the context of a greater conventional presence and effort. The environment and threat specific to the DRC may not require a large conventional force, but VSO has relied on such a structure. A VSO program in the DRC would necessarily lean on the current UN mission for support.

The fourth principle is the necessity of a mobile strike force. In Vietnam, it was the Mike force; in Afghanistan, it was the Afghan Commandos. These strike forces were instrumental in the village defense framework. They provided significant risk mitigation for villages located far away from conventional support. They served as a dedicated force to provide initial security when new villages were introduced to the program and as a quick reaction force to respond to threats that outmatched the capabilities of village defenders. Such a force has proven necessary for the successful application of VSO. In the DRC environment, a strike force may look different from those previously employed,

but it is reasonable to expect that a local village defense force cannot defeat some of the threat forces facing it in the Kivus today. For that reason, there must be a mobile strike force capable of reinforcing local defense efforts.

The fifth principle is economy of force. Any program must expect limited resources and must therefore focus efforts on locations with operational or strategic importance. This principle guided planning for both CIDG and VSO efforts. The CIDG program focused on areas of Vietnam critical to the Viet Cong insurgency. The VSO program focused geographically along critical roads and infrastructure. Both programs allowed insurgent power bases to exist in some areas to consolidate gains in others. At the national level in DRC, this means focusing efforts in the critical areas such as the Kivu provinces. But even within the provinces, economy of force must dictate where to focus efforts. In the Kivus, this may mean the Banyamulenge areas because of their vulnerability to Rwandan backed insurgency, or the mining areas that remain strategically important and support armed groups.

The sixth enduring principle is a demobilization and reintegration plan. Both the CIDG and VSO programs had plans in place. The CIDG plan failed because of lack of host nation support and ultimate North Vietnamese victory. The VSO plan for Afghanistan includes a reintegration plan that either disbands local security forces or places them under the national police framework for support and accountability. The host nation plays a critical role in this effort, but there must be a plan from the beginning that places correct emphasis on the end game.

These six principles have endured through the CIDG program in Vietnam and the VSO program in Afghanistan. It is reasonable to assume that they will remain valid for

future employment of a VSO construct in the DRC or elsewhere. As a feasibility test, these principles do not lay out the force necessary to conduct VSO in the DRC, but they inform what that force must be able to accomplish to be successful. With current UN efforts in the Kivus and elsewhere in the region, and with support from the central government, a VSO effort in the DRC is a feasible option.

### Summary

This chapter identified the key components of conflict in the Kivus that remain in the current environment. It then studied the historical context of the CIDG program in Vietnam, drawing out key principles that VSO planners adapted in Afghanistan. It detailed the key phases in both programs for promoting enduring stability by addressing security, governance, and development at the local level. These programs were not independent; they directly supported top-down efforts while the overall COIN strategy focused on central government efforts to provide lasting stability.

This chapter also analyzed the successes and failures of the CIDG and VSO programs to determine that a similar approach would be valid in the DRC. According to the methodology previously outlined, a valid option must be suitable, acceptable, and feasible. A study of the CIDG and VSO programs highlighted how a similar program was suitable to address factors of instability in the DRC, especially those critical factors that remain difficult for the central government to address. The study examined the acceptability of the program by exploring relative cost and significant risks involved with implementing VSO in the Kivus. It then recommended ways to mitigate these risks. Finally, this study presented enduring principles from both historical examples that serve as a base line to determine what a VSO force must accomplish if employed in the DRC.

These principles helped determine the feasibility of a VSO construct within the current framework. The next chapter presents conclusions and offers recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

A tribal engagement strategy to promote stability in central Africa must address the DRC. Any stability effort in the DRC must address the Kivu provinces which also directly influence the region and contribute to the overall stability environment in central Africa. The Kivu provinces of the DRC are, therefore, a strategic factor for stability in central Africa. In conclusion, the primary research question must be revisited. Is the VSO model a valid option for the U.S. military to consider as part of a stability effort in the DRC? Yes, the VSO model offers a distinct opportunity to succeed where other efforts have failed. However, in the DRC stability environment, the opportunity also bears significant risks and factors to consider.

A VSO model provides an opportunity to succeed where the 2002 Global and Inclusive Agreement to Transition failed. That agreement recognized that organized armed groups were influential in places the national government was not. It sought to integrate these groups into the security forces as a concession to cease hostilities and as a means to increase government influence in remote areas. In many areas in the Kivus, the unfortunate effect was a de-legitimization of the armed forces. A key missing ingredient was sufficient training and indoctrination of armed group forces to fulfill their role adequately as security forces. The VSO model offers an opportunity for a temporary, well-trained armed group, vetted by local elders, connected to the central government, and committed to protecting the local population.

To mitigate risk of a regional ethnic or security imbalance, any VSO effort must be explicitly temporary and wholly supported by the central government. Kinshasa must regulate the program. Once government military and law enforcement forces are capable of assuming authority, VSO must cease. At that point, the civilian defense forces must either be demobilized completely or integrated, as a trained and capable force, into the existing security force organization. Current SFA and FID efforts focused on the national military are necessary and improving, but they are moving slowly. An incisive application of VSO in support of these existing UN efforts may provide a significant foothold in the ungoverned spaces until the security forces can expand their influence into those areas. It could provide a link for Kinshasa to convince the population that their interests are best realized when supporting a central government that is actively reversing the history of state neglect. This could potentially increase government influence through collaboration with local leaders and provide a secure environment to initiate local and national level development programs.

A key consideration is that a VSO program would integrate into a UN mission rather than a U.S. operation. This is unprecedented, as both CIDG and VSO supported a greater U.S. military COIN effort. Certainly, the principle of unity of effort would apply between the UN, the DRC government, and the VSO effort. A positive factor under this organization is that the overall U.S. contribution and cost would be much smaller. Using the existing UN infrastructure, the U.S. could employ a VSO program that is significantly less resource intensive than previous programs and still contribute significantly to an international solution. As a negative factor, a program under the UN may have a more limited operational reach as it would be reliant on available security, basing, and

resources. It may also complicate legal requirements and chain of command authority. An additional consideration is the African Union's role in the program. The African Union currently supports UN efforts in the DRC and could contribute to a VSO program. U.S. SOF have historic relationships with many of the African Union militaries, but command relationships and integration could potentially be complex.

VSO provide a valid U.S. military option to contribute to holistic stability efforts in the DRC, specifically at the local level where current efforts are lacking. With support from the DRC government and current UN mission, a VSO construct could provide necessary time and space for the DRC security forces to increase their capability and expand their influence in the Kivus.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

This research has provided an initial examination of how U.S. SOF may contribute to stability efforts in the DRC through a VSO model. It has explored the origins of conflict in the Kivu provinces and has identified which factors are important to stability efforts in the DRC. Further research is necessary to determine the second and third order effects of a VSO initiative introduced into the environment, specifically in the areas of significant risk.

First, further study is necessary to examine how a VSO construct could be employed in an ethnically diverse region without causing an imbalance or perceived threat along ethnic lines. It must examine each potential armed group to determine how or if they will support the government and integrate as a legitimate force. It must also analyze international implications of training and arming specific groups in the region.

Second, further study is required to determine how a VSO model could best integrate into current UN operations and government initiatives. There is an opportunity to increase gains in governance and development at the local level through a VSO program, but the efforts must be aligned to be successful. More study is necessary to consider how to implement VSO within the current framework.

Finally, further study is necessary to determine the implications of not employing a VSO program at the local level and continuing with current efforts alone. If there is no other valid option to address adequately the security, governance, and development problems in the Kivus at the local level in a way that connects those populations to their own central government, then a VSO model must be seriously considered.

## GLOSSARY

Counterinsurgency (COIN). Comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.<sup>102</sup>

Foreign Internal Defense (FID). Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.<sup>103</sup>

Guerrilla War. Second phase of an insurgency that employs small-unit tactics to attack security forces while continuing ongoing political efforts. The goal is to undermine government legitimacy and increase insurgent legitimacy.<sup>104</sup>

Security Force Assistance (SFA). Department of Defense activities that contribute to unified action by the U.S. Government to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions.<sup>105</sup>

Stability. Overarching term encompassing various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the U.S. in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction and humanitarian relief.<sup>106</sup>

War of Movement. Third phase of an insurgency that attempts to overthrow a government or force the withdrawal of an occupying power.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-24, 1-2.

<sup>103</sup> Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 3-05, *Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013).

<sup>104</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-24, 4-14.

<sup>105</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-07, 1-92.

<sup>106</sup> Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication No. 3-07, *Stability with Change 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), 2-5.

<sup>107</sup> Department of the Army, FM 3-24, 4-14.

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