

Roles of Good Governance

An economist would tell us there are three - and only three - ways in which one can answer the basic distribution question of “who gets what” in the world.

- The first of these three ways is to institute a political decision whereby one’s share of the “good stuff” is dependent upon political affiliation. Those of the right political party get the best of what's available and those from the wrong political party get what's left over.
- Secondly, we could institute a social system whereby one must be born into the right family in the right social class to have access to the good stuff. Those from another social class get what's left over. (Some would argue that is what was happening in the former Soviet Union with the creation of the book of nomenclature. One could have access to certain stores only if one’s name appeared in the book.)
- Thirdly, we could use a free market system with few or no barriers to entry where, what one gets depends upon what one walks into the market with to trade and one’s abilities at negotiation. One could also argue that what exists in the US and indeed in most of the west is a hybrid of these three basic types where the free market tends to dominate most of the time.

Why is this important? Because, if I can control how much of the “good stuff” you can access, then I have one more way of controlling or influencing you and thereby maintaining myself in power. Furthermore, if I can convince you this is the way it ought to be then, I have a legitimate government! The subtlety is that since we no longer accept the divine right of kings and we do accept the supremacy of individual rights, then if the individual populations being governed think it is legitimate -- it is legitimate. It really doesn't matter what someone else from outside the system thinks about the legitimacy of the actions of the state in question. What matters is the opinion of the people being governed and even then it only becomes an issue if it creates a significant degree of social dissatisfaction.

Prudence would dictate a close look at how the tangible benefits of the government are distributed and this data should then be cross-checked against the population and demographic distribution. In other words, do only the Sunni neighborhoods have street lights? Do only the Pashtu villages have fresh water? etc.

Some very instructional maps can be created overlaying these various distributions for the sake of comparison and contrast as a measure of the equitable distribution by the government of benefits.

To that end one can find ideas inside a relatively large body of information on the art and science of public administration. Take for example electrical power distribution in an environment of crumbling (or war torn) infrastructure – someone is going to be without power or at least will have to deal with brown outs.

A minimum standard of professional competence would dictate awareness of exactly which sectors of the population would be without electrical power and for how long. A slightly higher standard of professional competence would be demonstrated by

knowing what the demographic component looks like (race, ethnicity, religion) as compared to that sector having good stable power. It goes without saying a competent administrator would have mapped out where the hospitals, religious buildings, community centers, etc. are and how they are affected. These things are complex and sometimes complicated but this is not rocket science and a simple overlay of these factors, graphically represented, would be a good thing on which to keep an eye. It would also be a good thing to communicate to the populace before the fact and as progress is made on repairing the electrical production capacity.

An even higher level of professional competence would apply similar processes to other goods and services and aggressively engage with community leaders of the affected areas. Not to put too fine a point on it but if one were sitting in the dark in a hundred degree heat without lights or air-conditioning or fresh food with a disgruntled family, and without a clue as to if anyone were working on the problem, then one might begin to question exactly why the current rulers are in power.

For the military planner then, this offers a potential course of action to create a condition of heightened social dissatisfaction with a ruler we want to coerce or depose. Conversely, this offers a potential course of action to create a condition of heightened acceptance/ legitimacy in a regime that we want to support. The key in both extremes is the perception that defines reality in the minds of the populace. If they think it is legitimate then it is legitimate. If they think it is good governance then it is good governance. If they are dissatisfied then the government is much less likely to be stable.