REVIEWING THE HISTORY AND PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN: IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS IN A COUNTERINSURGENCY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of The School of Continuing Studies and of The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Omid J. Townsend, B.A.

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, D.C.
MARCH 31, 2011
REVIEWING THE HISTORY AND PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN: IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS IN A COUNTERINSURGENCY

Omid J. Townsend, B.A.

Mentor: John Esposito, Ph.D

ABSTRACT

This thesis reviews the history of Afghanistan and the current counterinsurgency strategy. Military and political leaders ignored cultural and religious affairs inherent to the country in their planning of the invasion after the events of 9-11. This paper goes on to highlight the unique factors of the country that make it a difficult environment for conventional military operations and how specifically to identify and work within the majority Pashtun population to find alternative and grassroots solutions to the insurgency. This thesis argues that identifying and empowering actors in the conflict such as non-governmental organizations and ground level commanders, is the best way to implement a counterinsurgency plan and thereby develop and implement ground-up solutions. In conclusion, the paper outlines why in a successful counterinsurgency environment human security and basic human needs have priority before larger, more abstracts goal such as elections and governmental capacity.
# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1. ANALYZING THE HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN PRE 9-11 ............... 6

CHAPTER 2. THE PASHTUN EFFECT ........................................................................... 38

CHAPTER 3. THE ROLE OF THE NGO IN A COUNTERINSURGENCY ..................... 57

CHAPTER 4. EXAMINING THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY .... 71

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 98

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................................................... 104
INTRODUCTION

The US counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan has lacked a coherent strategy from the very beginning. No serious review of the country’s condition prior to the invasion was taken and as a result, the United States finds itself in one of the most costly military engagements in its history. Military planners relied on conventional war planning methods to oust the Taliban government but had little in mind for what the country should do following that event. The influx of foreign troops and NGO organizations, coupled with their problematic relationship with the new Afghan government, has put the Afghani people through yet another period of violence and conflict. Afghanistan’s recent history of war and conflict with the Soviets and the subsequent civil wars left issues still unresolved. As a result, the United States and its allies have inherited these issues. Fractional and ethnic militias are a serious problem in the country and for decades, Afghanistan has undertaken no serious effort to address the underlying causes of these essential grievances. Major factors such as ethnicity and culture of the different peoples of Afghanistan have been a constant problem for planners and military personnel. Only until recently have they begun to realize that these factors are essential to building the country again and restoring peace. Military strategists and civilian consultants are hard at work trying to decipher the Afghan ethos in an attempt to pacify the serious grassroots resistance to their efforts of security and stability. Not until 2006 was a codified strategy adopted in the form of the Counterinsurgency Field
Manual did the US and its allies realize that conventional warfare would not be the strategy of success.¹

The central argument of this thesis seeks to define Afghanistan and its conflict as in need of a unique strategy that takes into account the many factors such as history, ethnicity, regional identity, religion, and most pressing, current military and political circumstances. Only when a comprehensive and tailored approach is adopted will we see a lasting change in the environment. Moreover, insurgency in Afghanistan is not unlike insurgencies that have occurred in other parts of the World. The nature of conflict and war in most cases destines an end to hostilities at some point. This resolution is by no means final or lasting in some cases, but in order to make it so, a select and specific set of tools is utilized to mitigate a return to violence and instability. This will be addressed at length in the continuing chapters.

Consulting Afghanistan’s vibrant and multiethnic population in search of local solutions has only just begun to show results. If the US had taken steps to analyze and study the country’s history and culture, many solutions would be easier to implement. Coalition forces are now consulting indigenous security groups, Islamic methods of conflict resolution and Pashtun tribal code in an effort to make gains in Afghanistan. However, traditional military thinking is slow to resort to such methods.

Traditional war and force is easy for the US to implement but in order to succeed in Afghanistan, these methods will not work. Afghanistan, known as the graveyard of empires,

---

shares the 21st century era of instant media. War is now a very public and a graphic ordeal. Therefore, public opinion, international cooperation and the utmost effort to mitigate civilian causalities becomes paramount. Success in Afghanistan will use a broad scope of methods and new attitudes in order to convey the stated wishes of the international community and make clear that a war of causalities and destruction is not the objective. Only engagement and popular support will bring democracy, human rights, and the right to certain freedoms.

The first chapter of this thesis will deal with Afghanistan as having the reputation of constantly being at war. Afghanistan is a country suffering from various factions in conflict and the meddling of foreign influence has curbed all attempts at true independent. I will examine how Afghanistan is the unfortunate pawn in rivalries between the British, Russians, the US, Pakistan and Iran. Examining this history could have alleviated the frustration of military planners had in trying to understand why Afghanistan is so notoriously difficult to occupy, and ultimately if it is even possible to do so with transition to a civilian government as the end-state. Addressing and understanding the countries problems is an exercise that needs to take place by anyone who wishes to discuss intelligently a way out for US troops and the establishment of peace in the country. I will also discuss the rise of the Taliban and what conditions, such as ethnicity, imported Deobandism, and the loss of a generation to war had on the movement. The Taliban are central to a solution and their beliefs and ideas are important to a significant portion of the rural population that has bore the brunt of much military attention and fighting. Finding common ground with the different groups of Afghanistan is now a key goal of both the Afghan government and the counterinsurgency effort of the international community.
In the second chapter, I discuss the Pashtun population and why consulting their culture and history is essential to implemented tangible security solutions and long-term political goals. I will first begin by reviewing the Pashtun history and its distinct features in relation to other ethnic groups in Afghanistan and why the Taliban has largely been a Pashtun phenomenon. Understanding the cultural differences between different Afghan groups and learning how to distinguish between them is vital in this conflict. The US and its allies are only beginning to appreciate the intricate systems of Pashtunwali. Pashtunwali addresses issues such as dowry and marriage, to blood money and honor. These are part of everyday life for many Afghans and utilizing their own norms and beliefs is key to cooperation. I will also propose several recommendations utilizing local and traditional methods of conflict resolution and communal security and how they can be utilized throughout the country with popular support.

The role of the non-governmental organizations (NGO) is cited as interference in military operations. The third chapter will deal with rival agencies and groups and how non-governmental organizations and their participation and cooperation is needed to coordinate between them. I will discuss Greg Moretenson and his success in the region and why his model should be emulated in future development and stability work. I also examine instances of NGO failure and success and what common themes can be extrapolated to build lasting solutions.

In the last chapter, I will discuss counterinsurgency theory and why it still has major flaws and why adjustments need to be made if success is to be attained and defined in Afghanistan. Counterinsurgency (COIN) theory and application is a new model adopted by the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), but it has been slow to realize that COIN
theory and practice is not enough. I will analyze key problems with COIN and why it hampers objectives in some regions, and why it has succeeded in others. David Kicullen’s work on COIN will be the primary source for this discussion and a critique of his interpretation is explained and adopted for Afghanistan. Molding COIN to individual cases of counterinsurgency and the dismissal of some of its tenants and the emphasis on other principles will become evident in the analyses.

In the conclusion, I will bring in the work of authors Shannon Beebe and Mary Kaldor. Their book entitled, *The Ultimate Weapon Is No Weapon: Human Security and the New Rules of War and Peace*, will address a macro paradigm that argues modern conflict is no longer in need of conventional warfare methods, but instead cooperative, grassroots solutions to 21st century conflict. The approach adopted thus far by the US and its allies is likely to remain ultimately marginal in its success and therefore, any attempt to provide peace and security to different hotspots around the globe will only be successful if new and unprecedented methods materialize. The military still thinks its aggressive efforts to neutralize an enemy will eventually bring about peace. However, the fallout of such practices ultimately prolongs the conflict. Discussing this idea in depth is central to this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

ANALYZING THE HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN PRE 9-11

September 11th represented a major shift in world order. The response to this event by the United States however, was characteristic of an older world order superpower. The invasion of Afghanistan utilized the modern military of the US and its success appeared to be quick and easy. However, military and political leaders were naïve to think Afghanistan could be easily occupied and secured. Not consulting history was the first mistake made by the Bush administration in its reaction to 9-11 and the lack of understanding that permeated decision makers would come to haunt the US strategy for years to come. More tact and study, however late, reveals that Afghanistan is embroiled in an ethnic struggle and any attempt to reconcile the country with its own internal problems must address this. In this chapter, we will review Afghan history and how its multilayered, complicated population has been in conflict for over 30 years. I suggest that defining a strategy for stability within the country and for the future depends on how well we understand the past failures of different operations and how Afghans themselves need to have peace among themselves first before all else.

The war in Afghanistan may represent a case in point of the 21st century conflict. Insurgencies and low intensity conflicts define themselves as wars with no clearly marked front lines and no substantial uniformed opposing force. The conflict defines itself as many things—an insurgency, a religious conflict, an ethnic struggle, and even a narco-war. Ethnic divisions and tribal feuds have created a conflict ecosystem.\(^1\) David Kilcullen, the world’s foremost authority

---

\(^1\) David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 203.
on counterinsurgency describes this environment in language similar to that of a real ecosystem. Different actors have survived and lived in the environment amid much destruction and devastation. At times creating symbiotic relationships and at other times predatory ones. This has led to a survival strategy among Afghanistan’s vying factions.

Afghanistan is a hostile environment and the reality on the ground requires a multidimensional approach to understand the reality of its problems. Each corner of the country has experienced conflict, often times fueled by outsiders. Major powers and regional actors focus on this country because of many factors. Geography, ethnicity, religion, and politics are central to this landlocked country. The current international effort underway in the country is only beginning to appreciate and respect Afghanistan’s tribal dynamics. However, local politics and tribal affairs are essential to unlocking this country and I will examine if the appropriate measures are being taken and if indeed a respectful reading of history is being consulted.

The current U.S. counterinsurgency approach (COIN) attempts to implement a strategy that incorporates local, regional and ethnic dimensions into conflict resolution approaches. However, these attempts are carried out by the military—a force that is often conflicted with the notion of talking first, before shooting; in other words, a preference for violence before consultation. This approach will fail if not dramatically altered to address Afghanistan and its Islamic character. The country is host to some of the most diehard resistance movements to date and unless COIN strategy brings this into account, no short-term gain will last. The US and its allies once used Afghanistan’s mujahdeen but now we call them by a different name, the Taliban. Focusing on this movement and the narrative behind it will separate a major opposition
movement and its strategy from other issues that are more easily addressed and helpful to the overall effort of stability and peace.

Afghanistan’s fighters are no stranger to invaders. The rise of different Islamic groups and their mujahedeen guerillas to fight off un-Islamic influence could also be described as ethnic warlords battling it out for influence and power, much like many other ideological struggles characterized and animated by grassroots locals, caught up in a larger, more complex struggle for influence and independence. The US invasion of the country is repeating this history.

Afghanistan under the Taliban was simply the latest form of its shifting landscape. In 1996, the Taliban came to power on a wave of popular support from ethnic Pashtuns. Security and stability seemed to have arrived after years of internal strife and bloodshed. The Taliban were famous for their intolerance of corruption and fast, retributive justice. They occupied Kabul in 1996 and immediately began enforcing a puritanical interpretation of Islam under areas of their control. Throughout the 1990s, Afghanistan was divided into regional, ethnic fiefdoms with warlords in charge of different districts and provinces. These warlords were responsible for terrible atrocities and the Taliban answered these groups through merciless pogroms to ‘Islamify’ the country and restore a sense of order. In doing so, they also committed atrocities themselves and alienated their initial supporters. While the Taliban posed no military threat to the United States, their terrible human rights record curtailed their attempts at diplomacy and international politics.2

U.S. self-interest dictated our policy for Afghanistan. During the 1990s, the most brutal years of the Taliban, our goal was still business as usual. The United States never recognized Afghanistan under the Taliban, but it did flirt with the idea of building a huge pipeline.\textsuperscript{3} Unocal, a large multinational energy company based in Texas, viewed the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban as good for stability and they even tendered a bid to build it. Security in the country would increase the chances of a possible natural gas outlet from Tajikistan and several attempts were made to strike a deal with the new Taliban government.\textsuperscript{4} This optimism was misplaced however when the Taliban began their campaign of hostility toward any party that did not accept them and their new form of government. Going back further in the country’s history, Afghanistan has always had trouble in forging lasting alliances with neighbors and perhaps more importantly, major powers. The West is just beginning to remember its involvement in the region and the errors that resulted in its policies.

The landlocked country in Central Asia was of little strategic interest and accounts from the British a hundred years before described the place as lawless and the people savage.\textsuperscript{5} This Orientalist take on a territory sought to be a buffer between British controlled India and Imperial Russia was over simplistic and incomplete.\textsuperscript{6} Nonetheless, Afghanistan succumbed to being a pawn in the ‘Great Game’ of carving out spheres of influence and domain among the world’s


\textsuperscript{5} Victoria Schofield, \textit{Afghan Frontier} (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003), 146.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
superpowers. Geopolitical negotiations, pipelines, their respective routes, and the wars of oil amplified the significance of Afghanistan. The ignorance and indifference to the desires of the people that existed a century ago still dominates regional politics. Such ignorance and careless policy, a series of assignations, royal coups, communist takeovers, and ethnic bloodletting effectively stopped any momentum the country would have built with a continuous government. No less than 35 years of war has ripped the country apart and stopped development significantly in terms of education, healthcare, infrastructure, and economic development.

Afghanistan’s historic rival, Pakistan also appears to ignore the inherent resilience of the Afghans. Pakistan’s interest in Afghanistan was sealed during the 1950s when Muhammad Daoud Khan, first cousin and Prime Minister to Muhammad Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, supported the Pashtun cause of independence near the Durand line. Pakistan viewed this support as a direct threat to its territorial integrity and internal security. Since then, Pakistan has aligned its interests against a strong Afghanistan. Any attempt by succeeding Afghan governments, especially the current one, to build a central government is met with meddling and interference from Pakistan. “If you want peace in Afghanistan, you must go through us” as the saying goes among Pakistani army officials. The effort to pacify Afghan ambition has become a national pastime for Pakistani governments and little appears different today. This mistake still animates Pakistan’s interest in the country.

---

7 Coll, Ghost Wars, 303.

Since Pakistan’s inception in 1947, the support of Muslim groups in Afghanistan became the favored policy of the Pakistani *Deobandi* establishment.\(^9\) Ethnic ties and history were too strong to overcome and the fiercely independent tribes could only be pacified by an appeal to a deeper sense of commonality--Islam. After the British rule over the sub-continent, which included modern day Pakistan, *alims* of the *Deobandi* school sought to appeal to the pan-Islamic sentiments sweeping the Islamic world. Afghanistan’s own mullahs train to this day in *madrassas* established during the early 1900s, many of which are established along the border between the two territories in the Pashtun belt. This was an idealistic approach however. The frontier provinces and the Pashtun tribes continue to frustrate Pakistani administrators, just as they did the British. What truly appeared to be the central aim and aspiration of the people in this region was independence.\(^10\) The Pashtun now, just as they did a hundred years ago are fiercely hostile to outside rule or authority emanating from any form of central government. The Pashtun cause simply desires independence, and to be left alone. Their tribal life and traditional belief system influence by Islam revolves around their rural and agrarian lifestyle. A strong ethno linguistic history and cultural identity simply desires a space for the continuation of its people. The new country of Pakistan however could not imagine ceding yet more territory (Bangladesh was originally a detached province after independence with India) and the Durand line became arguably the most ignored border and continues to be so today.

---


The Cold War found Afghanistan a fertile ground for geopolitical maneuvering. From 1953-55, Afghanistan asked the US for arms in order to balance the competition with Pakistan. However, the US attached conditions and wanted assurances and agreements to align itself against communism.\textsuperscript{11} The United States was inexperienced and rash when it came to dealing with Afghanistan and its reoccurring issues, most notably that of \textit{Pashtunistan}. In 1951 when Afghanistan requested arms, the US demanded a cash payment and a renunciation of the Pashtun cause.\textsuperscript{12} Pashtun nationalists with tribal backing served as Presidents and Prime Ministers during most of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. With technology and the modern world of business and new farming methods spreading throughout the east and west, the desire to progress in these fields was always a talking point for different Afghan rulers. However, geography and the traditional lifestyle kept Afghanistan isolated, despite the efforts of successive governments to modernize. There was never a desire to be a regional power or agent of influence as there was in Iran or Pakistan. Afghanistan simply desired to stand on its own and for itself. If there ever was a Pashtun state, Afghanistan during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century was as close as it got. Not yet besieged by fundamentalists and not yet the battleground it is today, Afghanistan enjoyed relative peace and tolerance among its own people. Nonetheless, the neutrality of Afghanistan during the Cold War fell victim to the broader game of influence and meddling so to force a stance, one which Afghanistan itself was

\textsuperscript{11} Louis Dupree, \textit{Afghanistan} (Princeton University Press, 1980), 477.

\textsuperscript{12} Fitzgerald, \textit{Invisible History}, 91.
unprepared or unwilling to take.\textsuperscript{13} It accepted aid from whoever could provide it. The poor country has never been able to advocate on its own behalf.

The conflict between East and West was taking place in real ways in Central Asia. Where the US was reserved (it did invest in infrastructure like the Helmand Dam), the USSR was glad to ship tanks, artillery and small arms in exchange for political influence. In 1956, Prime Minister Dauod accepted Soviet military aid in the amount of 32.4 million dollars. They also helped train the military and in doing so created a disciplined and educated officer corp.\textsuperscript{14} Soviet influence in Afghanistan grew as help from the West with domestic development and aid never materialized. Eager to make Afghanistan a Soviet sphere of influence, the Soviets also had geographic advantage in that they controlled the territories to the north such as Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Access to the rest of the world through these neighbors allowed Afghanistan to participate in bigger trade. Fuel and other products were often subject to political problems and Pakistan always seemed to interfere with Afghanistan’s need to expand its economy and build its infrastructure.\textsuperscript{15} The Soviets also trained thousands of Afghans in agriculture, medicine, and economics. Full scholarships and thousands of Afghans benefited from studying in the USSR.\textsuperscript{16} In its quest for development, it still could not avoid manipulation.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 93.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 113.
This relationship was tenuous and the US was not eager to see its containment policy be frustrated by the small country of Afghanistan. Soviet interest in the country and its vocal support for the *Pashtunistan* issue further alienated Afghanistan from its Pakistani neighbor and moreover, the US. Allegiances were in place that would influence the course of the countries development for the next 30 years. Pakistan, a staunch US ally, was actively backing Islamic groups that formed coalitions to oppose secular and communist alliances forming in the Afghan political scene. Pakistani security forces used their American arms connections to quell internal revolt among the Pashtuns. Pakistani meddling was aimed at creating instability among the different ethnic groups in Afghanistan and thereby never allowing a strong, central government to control the vast, rural corners of the country where most of the population lived. Pakistani involvement in stoking the religious agenda of pan-Islamism and *Deobandi* influence, thereby suppressing a nationalist cause that would have inevitably angered it was not necessarily a result of increased Soviet involvement however. Religion has always been central to Afghani *modus operandi*. Pakistan simply focused and emphasized this for political purposes. The same policy is still in place.

The spread of *Deobandism* from the *alims* in India in the previous 50 years always found fertile ground in the Afghani *madrassas* and rural communities. The average Afghan relied on the local clerics for much of their education and connections with the larger Islamic *ummah*.¹⁷ *Alims* supported and funded by the Pakistani governments advocated another sort of unity, one which would prevent a nationalist cause, which was perceived as counterintuitive to building a

---

strong Islamic front. Nationalism in Afghanistan was not Islamist in nature; it was Pashtun. A strong Pashtun country would inevitably want to include the northwest frontier provinces and the enormous Pashtun population on the other side of the Durand line. *Deobandism* evolved out of the *Dar’ul Ulum* madrasas in Deoband, India. Similar movements such as the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt and even trends among the Iranian revolutionaries sought to put Islam forward as a socio-political answer. Because it was constructed as an alternative to the 20th century political ideologies it served a purpose to pacify nationalistic sentiments simmering in the region. Barbara Metcalf of UC Davis states, “All these constructed ideological systems and systematically built models for distinctive polities that challenged what they saw as the alternative systems: nationalism, capitalism, and Marxism.”

Pakistan’s interests in Afghanistan, as mentioned before, revolved around the territorial grievances of the Pashtuns who were indeed the majority in Afghanistan. While Afghanistan consisted of several major ethnic groups, none could lay claim to *watan*, or homeland, as the Pashtuns did to what lay on the Pakistani side of the Durand line, thus risking an ethnic secession. Pakistan could not afford to sacrifice any of its integrity to yet another movement to separate. The Pashtun nationalism was largely secular in nature, focusing on ethnic identity and traditional life embodied in cultural values seen as synonymous with Islam. This cause created fissures with the larger and more Punjab populated Pakistan. Therefore, any movement that

---

could speak to a larger, pan-Afghan ideology, like Islam, was enthusiastically supported to draw attention away from the *Pashtunistan* cause. This issue remains at the top of national concerns.

Going back to another outside influence, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet political influence in Afghanistan grew with the likes of sympathetic, communist leaning political parties, eager to develop and modernize the historically illiterate and agricultural society. In 1979, as the political scene in Afghanistan became more polarized, nationalists, communists, Islamists all contributed to an environment of virulent, cutthroat alliances that eventually led to the government of Hafizullah Amin requesting assistance from the Soviets to quell rebellion in northern Afghanistan.\(^{19}\) In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan under the pretense of assistance and more importantly a strategy of countering US aims in the Middle East and the newly formed alliances with Egypt and Iraq.\(^{20}\) The invasion caught many in the West by surprise and it is generally accepted scholars that President Jimmy Carter had underestimated Soviet ambition in the country.\(^{21}\) Opposition to the new front in the Cold War grew quickly and then U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski famously said, “We now have the opportunity of giving to the Soviet Union its Vietnam War.”\(^{22}\) Afghanistan was again used as a staging ground for larger, geopolitical maneuvering. Before it was the British Empire and the

---


Russians, each agreeing on a buffer zone and an area that would leave space for their respective empires to exert control over resources and trade routes, now the landlocked country became an ideological battleground. Whether it was trade or politics, mistakes made a hundred years before were repeated by the US with the Afghan people caught in the middle.

Interference in Afghanistan by other countries widened as the Cold War intensified. Resistance in Afghanistan was financially backed by the US and a coalition of other countries in the gulf, led by Saudi Arabia.\(^23\) Pakistan and its allies trained and armed a group of Islamic fighters that viewed the USSR as a godless aggressor. Interestingly, the Pashtun issue was largely sidelined and the rallying call became religious in tone and thus the fighters themselves, emboldened by the narrative of Muslims versus atheists, became holy warriors. The US was quick to support anti-communist activity and it increased funds and equipment to a level that eventually gave the rag-tag *mujahedeen* a tactical advantage in the form of the coveted stinger missiles. Support went from an initial $30 million under President Carter, to over $500 million a year toward the end of the conflict, which by then, had fallen under the Reagan era doctrine of Intervention.\(^24\) The conflict allowed Afghani regional commanders to rally their ethnic and tribal kinsmen to a common cause. Many influential warlords guarded against and fought the Soviets in their respective regions. Money for their endeavors was usually routed through Pakistan.

---


However, Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan all had supplied logistical and moral support to their respective clients.25

Afghans themselves seem to have forgotten what happens when host superpowers. The mujahedeen were eager to align with the US. Eager to give cash and weapons, the Americans were also an ally of the Pakistanis. In the lens of the mujahedeen, Americans were the natural ally, even if one of convenience, they were not adamant atheists and espoused a God fearing attitude. The perceived Christian character of their new ally was convenient enough to allow and accept assistance. The US overlooked the religious undertones of the conflict. President Regan called them freedom fighters and oppressed people instead.26 Nonetheless, the struggle had a very spiritual dimension to the Muslims fighting in it. Mujahedeen, literally means holy warriors. The call to repel the irreligious aggressor, the Soviets, and the rejection of their client government was a cause echoed and encouraged by ideologues in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world.27 For the mujahedeen it was a holy war, or jihad, pitting believers against non-believers.28 The Soviets were actively waging war against fellow Muslims. The call for jihad went out and many Muslims responded based on a religious sense of duty.29


28 Ibid., 159.

29 Stephen Tanner, Afghanistan: a Military History from Alexander the Great to the War against the Taliban (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2009), 243.
Assistant from the US was instrumental in changing the direction of the conflict. The Soviet military was a conventional force that used brutal campaigns and scorched earth tactics to counter guerilla opposition. Not until the mujahdeen acquired the necessary hardware to shoot down the devastating Hind helicopters the Soviets employed was there any chance of widespread success.30 Temporarily united by the aid and support of larger influences, Afghanistan’s diverse group would not remain aligned together for long. This would remain a reoccurring theme.

Resistance and the nascent Islamic movements growing in Afghanistan that later became the mujahdeen suffered from partisanship, even before the war.31 Several groups were ideological rivals. Hizb-i-Islami, Jamiat-i-Islami and regional, tribe based groups each had their own idea of what Afghanistan would look after the Soviets. The tribal groups fought to keep out invaders from their valleys. However, the two most prominent groups, Hizb-i-Islami and Jamiat, represented the bitterest rivalry. Hizb-i-Islami led by Gullbudeen Hikmatiyan, was willing to sacrifice as many Afghans as it would take to establish a state based on the Deobandi fundamentalism that was pervasive at the time. Jamiat on the other hand, composed of many different ethnicities wanted an Islamic state based on Shari’a, but one that would be independent, democratic, and respectful of human rights. Coordination and ideological glue was needed to hold the mujahdeeen together. With the planning and centralized strategy of the Pakistani Inter-

---

30 Ibid., 266.

Service Intelligence (ISI), the resistance succeeded. The mujahedeen united only because they fought a common enemy, the Soviets.\textsuperscript{32}

*Hezb-i-Islami* and its leader Gulbudeen Hekmatiyar were the most aligned with the ISI and received many stinger missiles, the one key that turned the direction of the conflict. The US was also eager to help Hekmatiyar specifically because his group was not aligned with Iran, like the Hazara, and did not have the independent streak that Jamiat had. This preference was ironic. Gulbudeen had always been an unapologetic anti-Western voice and his ideological fervor permitted little for secular, Western values.\textsuperscript{33} His status as the favorite warlord of the Pakistanis and Americans was perhaps due to his staunch anti-communist views and his strict adherence to a fundamental and ultimately pro-Pakistani version for Afghanistan’s future Islamic state.\textsuperscript{34} Afghanistan after the Soviets was of little concern to the Americans. Heat of the moment allegiances formed and supported by the ISI, led the US into perhaps one of its most strategic blunders of the last 30 years. The fallout of such partnerships remains a problem today.

The US and the Soviets proxy war ended and Afghanistan’s *mujahedeen* split into different groups. As soon as the Soviet troops pulled out of Afghanistan, aid and interest in the country from the United States decreased dramatically.\textsuperscript{35} Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and other regional interests continued to support groups that wanted to install a fundamentalist, Wahabi,


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 232.

\textsuperscript{34} Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 181.

\textsuperscript{35} Tanner, *Afghanistan*, 273.
Islamic government sympathetic to Pakistan and one that would ignore the *Pashtunistan* issue. The ISI was actively supporting Hekmatiyr’s vision because his groups control the logistical supply line was already well established.36 The power vacuum that ensued after the Soviet withdrawal saw virtually no involvement by the US. Rep. Charlie Wilson, made famous in the movie, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, made this clear. Funding stopped and even requests by Wilson to build schools and rebuild the country were denied. The CIA was given money to simply buy back stinger missiles. The ensuing struggle for power by *Jamiat* and *Hezb-i-Islami* soon became the beginning chapters of the civil war that took place between 1992 and 1996.

A brief look into how Islam reached Afghanistan can help put into context the transformation that has taken place from national and ethnic based political struggles, to a battle of vying Islamists and their visions. Islam in the political context was a part of the country long before the most recent ideologues. Islamic culture existed in Afghanistan since the 8th century. The *Saffarid* Dynasty and its founder *Yaqub-i-Lais* marched east from Persian territories and conquered portions of what is today western Afghanistan.37 Before the Islamic conquest, Afghanistan, being located on a major trading route, was subject to influences from a variety of faiths and traditions. Hindu and Buddhist traditions were strong. Sufism, the mystical, esoteric exploration of spiritual reunion with God, is a major influence on the interpretation of Islam by a large portion of Afghans.38 Shi’a Muslims, account for roughly 10-15% of Afghanistan, mostly


among the Hazara minority. The Sunni population, made up of the Pashtun, Tajik and Uzbek account for 80%. The practice of the faith among these groups varies widely. Pashtun tribes have lived in the region for thousands of years and Pashtunwali is seem as synonymous with Islam, although that argument has not stood up to scrutiny. Eastern Pashtun see their tribal code as the main identity and the ideology of being a Pashtun is very strong. Pashtun in the west are seen as people linked with historic institutions of power and Muslim ulemas who exert influence over state affairs.

Geography is a major factor determining different tribes among one another, which has also shaped the way Islam is practiced. Regional identity facilitated different levels of islamization and tribal allegiance. This fact and subject is essential to understanding the slow fermentation of fundamentalists groups like the Taliban. The Taliban movement is a newer phenomenon with theological links outside Afghanistan. Heavily influenced by tribal norms found in Pashtunwali, the Taliban resemble the Wahabi movement of Saudi Arabia in interpretation and implementation of Shari’a. Strict justice, separation between men and women in all avenues of life, a reliance on traditional fiqh, or Islamic law--developed in the few centuries after the Prophet Muhammad, and most importantly, a rejection of bid’ah or innovation. Innovation in this sense refers to matters of religion and spirituality. Islam, the Taliban believe, contains an answer to all things in the world and the next, therefore any foreign concept such as patriotic nationalism, socialism, capitalism and other social structures seen as

39 Ibid., 12.
40 Ibid.
un-Islamic are therefore rejected. The Pashtun tribes of southwestern Afghanistan were the core members of the movement when it began to take shape in 1992. The graduates of the Pakistani madrassas that housed scores of refugees influenced the original cadre of the Taliban. Their religiosity was a relatively new approach to Islam in Afghanistan.\(^{41}\) Ahmed Rashid says as follows:

The Taliban’s anomalous interpretation of Islam emerged from an extreme and perverse interpretation of Deobandism, preached by Pakistani mullahs (clerics) in Afghan refugee camps. Deobandism, a branch of Sunni Islam, arose in British India as a reform movement that aimed to regenerate Muslim society as it struggled to live within the confines of a colonized state.\(^{42}\)

Afghan refugees growing up in Pakistani refugee camps came from neighboring Kandahar and Helmand provinces on the other side of the Durand line. It was the nearest refuge to escape the war and many elders and grown men sent their young families across to Pakistan. The Pashtun culture that was a traditional part of the society began to lose its influence. To fill the void in the refugee camps, Deobandi clerics and their networks of madrassas taught young boys the Quran and provided a place to sleep and eat without the concern of war. After the invasion of the soviets, many now young adult ethnic Pashtuns returned to their ancestral villages and homes to find their fathers, uncles, and kinsmen dead or displaced. Still instilled with some sense of tribal identity, this new generation of Pashtuns was armed with a new agenda, the teachings of their madrassas and in that, the call to spread Islam and the practice of dawa. Dawa literally means to invite people, more specifically to Islam.


\(^{42}\) Ibid., 26.
Since the Pashtun refugees returning to Afghanistan were now emboldened with a mission for justice, society, and honor, the Taliban, largely an ethnic movement concentrated at its core among the Pashtun tribes, spread through the troubled border areas where the historic issues were ethnic and nationalistic in origin. The Durand line issue and the cause of a Pashtun nation transformed into one to ‘Islamify’ all of Afghanistan into the mold that they knew. For these young Pashtun, returning to their country was frustrating. Their vision of Islam meant justice, *Shari’a* and a society based on a Muslim identity. This new identity was directly influenced by the teachings of the madrassas in Pakistan that focused on the proselytizing of Islam, and a rejection of foreign influence—all central to *Deobandi* thought.

The Taliban arose out of frustration with warlords abusing the people and a lack of law and order. In the vacuum of the soviet withdrawal, those who did stay and fight, and survive, found themselves in the possession of large stockpiles of arms, their own militias, and rival groups to compete with. Unfortunately, the Afghan civilians caught in the middle. The Taliban promised *Shari’a* law, security, and an end to highway robbery by predatory militias and their blatant un-Islamic behavior. In the power vacuum that consumed Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviets, many people were at the mercy of factional gangs trying to supplement their sporadic pay with impromptu roadblocks, home invasions, and other predatory ways to survive. The conflict ecosystem discussed by Kilcullen was in full effect. The actual events surrounding the rise of the movement calling itself the Taliban are still uncertain. Nonetheless, a lore of sorts has developed around its figurehead, Mullah Mohammad Omar. His
role and personal history is essential to understanding the Taliban and ergo any resolution we may find with them.

Mullah Omar was born in 1959 around the village of Nodeh in the Kandahar Province.\(^{43}\) He is reported to have organized a *posse* of sorts to punish a group of militiamen. The militiamen, under the orders of a local commander, kidnapped and raped local village girls around 1994. After attacking the encampment, the Taliban hung the commander from a tank barrel. From that point on Mullah Omar and the movement gained prestige and a reputation for coming to the aid of the people.\(^{44}\) His unwillingness to extract payment or reward and his movements growing reputation for implementing order gave the larger Afghan war-weary population hope. The Taliban during this period did not resemble the movement causing so much trouble today. Accepting this is difficult for the US and its agencies, especially because security is so much part of what they are seeking.

A core manifesto of Taliban beliefs and doctrine was never published and they never committed to concrete policy. What guidance the organization drew upon was from their patrons in Pakistan in the form of the *Jamiati-Ulema-Islam*, or JUL.\(^{45}\) This political party was originally the vehicle in which *Deobandism* was brought to the refugee camps. Patronage from rich gulf countries funded the growing number of madrassas that fielded young students, or *talibs*. However, the *Deobandi* creed, the rejection of secular ideologies and an emphasis on the broader

---

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 23.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 26.
Islamic identity, became less of a focus of the mullahs who taught in the schools and subsequently accompanied many of their students back home to establish mosques and continue the *dawa*. These mullahs were not well educated to begin with, Islamic or western. They began to reconnect with tribal elders as they settled down and re-integrate into the tribal life. They began to substitute Pashtunwali as the accepted creed to uphold and live by. Although this was not a conscious substitution, a hybrid of doctrine and culture began to take shape. The lines between tribal custom and religious law began to blur, even at the very beginnings of the Taliban movement. After all, these madrassas were full of ethnic Pashtuns. In short, the cultural identity did not fade or become replaced by a pure, Islamic ethos. On the contrary, Pashtun culture, like any other, absorbed an outside influence and thereby became synonymous and difficult to distinguish from the lending ideology. Considering this history, finding strictly Pashtun solutions or strictly Islamic solutions becomes arguably easy because the people involved, have come to profess both.

Going back to the history of the Taliban proper, As they gained momentum and more people joined them, they became bolder in their style of government. From 1992-1994 a *de facto* cabinet began to emerge and Mullah Omar, who had a reputation of being shy and timid, gradually grew into his leadership position. Despite its regional influence it still was not the only power in Afghanistan, but it was attracting the attention of a powerful, soon to be ally, the Pakistani ISI.46 Their role continues to frustrate ISAF efforts to contain the Taliban. We will discuss this in later chapters.

---

46 Ibid.
The only way to gauge where the Taliban hoped to take their movement was by their actions and methods of governing. Upon capturing Kabul in 1996 and consolidating power in districts under their control, they instituted the most repressive Islamic interpretation to date.\textsuperscript{47} Men were forced to grow beards in order to emulate the disposition of the Prophet. Women were not to leave the home except under male family escort and even then only under the full-body burqa. Schools for girls were shut down. Music and kite flying were deemed un-Islamic. Their justice system manifested itself in the form of black turbaned, Kalashnikov toting, talibs who marauded the streets looking for transgressions and vice as it was now interpreted.\textsuperscript{48} Any religious diversity and mysticism was explicitly vilified under the Taliban. Herat, a city close to the Iranian border and one with a long history of Sufi influence and liberal culture was the target of brutal Taliban campaigns against women and girls. It became dramatically evident that the Taliban were not interested in conforming to an internationally recognized nation-state, but aimed to be a place where Islam was everything. Nothing but the Taliban’s edicts and interpretations of Islam allowed. The Taliban began feeling the international repercussions of their actions when one particular Saudi benefactor returned to Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden will be discussed in later chapters, but for the purposes of understanding Islam under the Taliban there must be a causal relationship drawn between Al Qaeda and the policies of the Taliban, separate from the Taliban’s own initiatives.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 106.
Eventually, goals and military objectives began to take shape in the name of spreading Islam and bringing justice to society and security to the people. The Taliban were seeking to establish an Islamic emirate government in Afghanistan. The territories under their control soon became secure and safe from the marauding bands of militia that terrorized the population. Roads were safe to travel and any criminal caught stealing, rapping, killing or using drugs was dealt with severely. Shari’a was used in the crudest way, or in other words, as best the Taliban could interpret it, to pronounce how the new country would be governed. Stephen Tanner states that, “The Taliban had indeed established order in most of the country, but it was of a fearsome medieval kind. The enforcement activities of their Department for the Propagation of Virtue and Suppression of Vice caused most distress in Afghanistan’s cities.”

Clearly, the hybrid version of ultra-conservative Pashtun culture and puritanical Islam was traumatic for other ethnic groups and religious minorities. One pan-Islamic group with global ambitions and a charismatic leader however, found a kindred spirit in the call to bring Islam to the country.

Al Qaeda and bin Laden found a safe haven and friendly government in Taliban Afghanistan. If the Taliban was a domestic phenomenon specific to Afghanistan and their aims meant for domestic audiences, then the Al Qaeda network provided a framework for foreign policy and aimed at reaching global audiences. Al Qaeda has ideas similar to the Taliban for implementing jihad and Islamic goals upon the enemies of Islam abroad. Osama bin Laden was in Afghanistan during the Soviet war but his role was mainly logistical. He built roads, cave

---

49 Tanner, Afghanistan, 284.

complexes, and facilitated the transfer of fighters from Pakistan to the frontlines. Upon returning to the country in 1996 after being kicked out of the Sudan, his new hosts and old friends welcomed him. Al Qaeda’s message was much more concerned with the occupation of Muslim lands by what it saw as the crusading West. The main grievance was that the US and its allies were killing Muslims and occupying territory holy to Islam, specifically, Saudi Arabia, and supporting a government that partitioned and lorded over fellow Muslims, like Israel.\(^{51}\) The global strategy of Al Qaeda and the domestic implementation of the Taliban agenda created a partnership that both parties would soon realize was unsustainable.

Before his arrival in Afghanistan, bin Laden was known to American intelligence and was established among ultra-fundamentalists like the ‘blind sheikh’ and other Islamic figures on the fringe of the Islamic scholarly community. He was as a fundraiser and preacher.\(^{52}\) His global ambitions had not yet taken shape however and he had a large entourage and family that needed a place to establish a base of operations. The international community saw in 1998 the kind of tactics and plans Al Qaeda had in mind. On August 7 of that year, US embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya were bombed resulting in 258 deaths and over 5,000 injured. The Taliban were now hosting an international terrorist of the first order. This became a central reason for the hasty invasion that the U.S. undertook and still remains the purpose of our ongoing occupation of the country, to deny Al Qaeda a safe haven.

\(^{51}\) Abdel Bari Atwan, The Secret History of Al Qaeda (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 221.

\(^{52}\) Coll, Ghost Wars, 236.
If Taliban Islam, with its Pashtun makeup and leadership, was a result of regional histories based on ethnicity, it lost any hopes of becoming a legitimate movement regardless of how barbaric it was, once it allowed *Al Qaeda* to operate within its borders. The reason of hosting of *Al Qaeda* lay in the Pashtun concept of hospitality and giving safe haven from one who is on the run. This concept is discussed shortly. Many attempts were made by the U.S. to have the Taliban hand over bin Laden after the embassy bombings. The Taliban used a list of excuses over time as to why they would not and could not hand over bin Laden. It is no coincidence that in the Pashtunwali code, a guest is to be protected even if it means dying. Understanding these tribal codes continues to be difficult for the international community.

The Taliban was still without international recognition. The domestic law that the Taliban were enforcing centered on the cultural and regional interpretation of Islam by the Pashtun tribes living in southern Afghanistan, who have historically been the most conservative in the entire country. To implement a tribal code onto an ethnically diverse population under the name of Islam was problematic for a substantial segment of society. Nonetheless, the Taliban offered what many other regimes before it could not, security.

If the Taliban lacked the diplomatic tendencies needed to navigate the realm of international relations, they would find no help in building alliances from *Al Qaeda*. The global

---


55 Rashid, *Taliban*, 110.
outlook that Al Qaeda espoused put little value into realpolitik. Although cunning and clever, their international views were black and white. Traditional nation-state theory, secular institutions and the protocols of diplomacy were dismissed as a Western practice. Islam and only Islam could provide solutions. With each attempt to ask for aid or investment the Taliban were given the cold shoulder. The international community wanted to see substantial changes and implementation of needed reforms in the country, such as allowing girls to go to school and women to work. The Taliban did little to assure the rest of the world that they would become a force for good and progress for all of Afghanistan.

Mullah Omar and his government also eventually rebuffed Saudi Arabia who sought to assist Washington in its capture of bin Laden. After a meeting with Prince Turki al Faisal, Mullah Omar called him an ‘American pimp’ and admonished him for allowing U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia. The small diplomatic recognition the Taliban enjoyed soured after they again failed to reach a compromise or negotiate a deal with one of their most visible supporters. This resulted in no attempt to re-evaluate its position by the Taliban or try to conform to any substantive international norms, instead it angering them and driving them more into the arms of Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden.

UN resolution 1267 passed in 1999 demanding the Taliban handover Osama bin Laden. Disappointed and dejected by a host of other attempts to be recognized by the international community, the Taliban and Mullah Omar viewed international relations as pointless.

56 Gutman, How We Missed the Story, 151.

Afghanistan’s isolation and international rebukes put the Taliban on a confrontational course. Jihad, traditionally understood to represent an inner struggle, became a way of life for the Taliban. Even while in power from 1996 till 2001 they still only controlled 19 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces. General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the ethnic Turkoman warlord, and Ahmad Shah Massoud controlled the north and northeastern provinces where ethnic Turkomen and Tajiks lived. War among these factions against the Taliban was an ongoing struggle throughout the 1990s. The Taliban were quick to view any opposition to their movement as a religious struggle. The Taliban, in their own minds, represented a purified form of governance, above the ethnic warlordism. Indeed, whoever felt compelled to join them often found friends who shared similar histories, upbringing and experiences, mainly from the refugee camps in Pakistan that were filled with families torn by war and removed from the Afghanistan of their ancestors.\footnote{Rashid, \textit{Taliban}, 32.} Religious struggle in the homeland seemed like a noble and fulfilling destiny to a life lived in the wake of war. The Taliban’s religious views and their factional approach to Afghanistan however, did create a highly problematic environment for people unfamiliar with the language they used, literally Pashtun, and the broader message of Islamic society and its implications for women and ethnic minorities. Other strains of Islam found in Afghanistan such as Ismaelism, Shi’aism, Sufism and even other religions such as Judaism and Hinduism were seen as the ‘Other’ and in the black and white world of the zealous Taliban, subject to harsh treatment. Hazaras were dubbed subhuman and surely not Muslims. Tajiks were considered Russian clients and Indian agents. Hardly any group escaped the glaring accusations of the Taliban. Controlling
Afghanistan from other factions was a constant pre-occupation. Northern Alliance commanders had heavy artillery and tanks aimed at Kabul. Different warlords controlled certain areas, mainly along ethnic lines. The emergence of the Taliban at this stage, despite their call to a seemingly larger Islamic vision of justice and law, quickly settled as yet another faction in Afghanistan. Separating the Taliban from other Afghan groups became easier as time passed.

The rise of different groups and their mujahedeen guerillas to fight against other factions for control and power in Afghanistan is one of the only consistent patterns in Afghanistan’s recent history. A country dealt a fortune as this, appears to be, to the outside observer, destined to be in constant conflict. The larger political struggles in the region, subject to the history of colonialism and authoritarian repression, are also similarly affected by a pent up unrest and the newfound mediums of violent struggle and power vacuums that must be filled by someone somehow. Oftentimes the strongest and most willing to use force, much like in the conflict ecosystem discussed at the beginning of this chapter, contribute not to stability or a lasting peace, but simply alienation and continued struggle against yet another repressive and unrepresentative form of authority. Therefore, any attempt to bring stability to Afghanistan must include these factions and their leaders. Peace is not an exclusive arrangement; it must be across all spectrums of the population and include all spectrums of belief and ideology. We will discuss this assertion in more depth in the conclusion.

After the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan and Central Asia as a whole, have been on the losing end in the struggle for independence and stability. The most

59 Schofield, Afghan Frontier, 340.
recent struggles for influence under the banner of justice and an invigorated sense of identity found in Islam, are in reality, ethnic factions battling it out for influence and power, much like many other ideological struggles characterized and animated by grassroots locals, caught up in a larger, more complex struggle for influence and independence.

In order to understand, even remotely, the conflict that has consumed Afghanistan in recent years, even before the U.S. led invasion in 2001, Islam must be consulted in the context of a tribal and ethnic environment. The historic clans and regional identities found in Afghanistan all lay claim to and cite Islam as a motivator and mover of their struggles.\(^{60}\) Any attempt to solve the current conflict and make gains in the counterinsurgency, however haphazardly, must walk the fine line between the tribal, ethnic tension recalling recent history; and the religious narrative for the more fundamentalist groups. This last example must be detached from any spiritual or religious preface but at the same time respect the legitimate wishes of the current subjects and their respective identity. Conflict resolution techniques and peaceful solutions are successful only when basic concepts are tailored to and originate from the communities in which they will impact. Afghans have a rich cultural history and the communities, despite their latest preoccupation with war, are well equipped to tap into a reservoir of communal solutions for issues ranging from security to democracy. As we will see, negotiating with the Taliban and reconciling people with their recent past will not be easy, but it is absolutely essential for Afghanistan’s future.

The central argument of this thesis seeks to define Afghanistan and its conflict as in need of a unique strategy that takes into account the many factors such as history, ethnicity, regional identity, religion, and most pressing, current military and political circumstances. Only when a comprehensive and tailored approach has been adopted will we see a lasting change in the environment. Moreover, insurgency in Afghanistan is not unlike insurgencies that have occurred in other parts of the World. The nature of conflict and war in most cases destines an end to hostilities at some point. This resolution is by no means final or lasting in some cases, but in order to make it so, a select and specific set of tools can be utilized to mitigate a return to violence and instability. This will be addressed at length in the continuing chapters.

Inevitably, a closer examination of the neo-Taliban must be undertaken in order to approach a resolution that is more in context with today instead of the organization that has thus far been discussed. While they share many of the same personalities and narratives, such as visions of an Islamic Emirate for Afghanistan and strict Shari’a adherence, the current actors and their respective tactics and strategies will re-evaluated on their own merit. History needs to consulted to protect against making similar mistakes and repeating the same over-simplifications. Who they are, where they come from, what they actually believe, what vision do they have for Afghanistan are all valid issues that must ferreted out.

Too often, powers that be, in this case the U.S., have rushed in to quell a brewing war or repel a national enemy without identifying the socio-political consequences and more importantly without a strong, well thought out strategy to bring the resolutions needed to fruition.
While Islam is the religion and the *raison d'être* of the Taliban, a complete understanding must take into account the Pashtun ethos and culture. A dominate part of this culture is the “way of the Pashtun” codified in Pashtunwali. As discussed earlier, this code has substituted Islam in ways that continue to reverberate through Afghan society. Discussing this feature of the Afghan conflict is crucial in understanding how to formulate solutions and peaceful alternatives to the tactics currently being used in Afghanistan to kill and maim coalition soldiers and innocent civilians. Connecting with the Pashtuns and understanding their specific conditions and mentalities requires sifting through a micro version of Afghan history.

It is clear that after invasion of Afghanistan the coalition forces were unread and unprepared for the unfolding insurgency, which had roots in problems still festering well before the most recent army to invade its lands. Most of the problems discussed are actually factional, and tribal. Religion plays a role but only a marginal one to some. If Afghanistan was at war among its own people, the Pashtuns, which make up the largest segment of the country, have their own blood feuds and intertribal rivalries. While a study of conflict between Pashtuns would be a subject worthy of a doctoral dissertation, realizing the intricacies and politics at play within that group of Afghans is fundamental to any attempt at nationwide resolution and policy implementation. Furthermore, since they makeup large segments of the country and are spread out in different provinces and districts, this approach would in theory, apply more generally than other ethno-specific solutions. The next chapter will address the Pashtun and how specifically Pashtunwali can help address insurgency concerns. Many of the principles of the tribal code are effective in dealing with issues such as reintegration, conflict resolution, and communal security.
Moreover, using local, time-tested techniques in dealing with problems could be a creative approach to governance in a country that has such a difficult time with the concept.
CHAPTER 2
THE PASHTUN EFFECT

The Pashtun people practice Pashtun. It is more than an ethnicity or language, it is a way of life. If more effort is given to study these ancient customs, many modern military dilemmas can be solved. Afghanistan is not a monolith. Its people are diverse and varied. Solutions to many problems that the international coalition faces can be found in the unique tribal society that operates within the country. In order to engage the history of Afghanistan, we must understand the largest segment of the population, the Pashtun. Pashtun scholars and people that know the language and culture were sparse before 9-11. The lack of attention and the attitude of benign neglect that permeated U.S. policy after the conflict with the Soviets manifested itself strongly. Basic knowledge of the culture and tribal structures could have saved enormous amounts of time and money. If coalition forces in general knew the basics of the ethno-linguistic make up of Afghanistan, the counterinsurgency effort would have began before the insurgency itself was able to take shape and re-arm after the toppling of the Taliban government. The following discussion would have been helpful to any party that seeks to take part in the reconstruction effort.

The word Pashtun also sometimes pronounced Pukhtun is etymologically derived from Pathan which itself comes from the earliest record of a people known as Abgans.⁠¹ Abgans also

---
known as Afghans, have been called such since the 7th century CE. Winston Churchill once commented, "Pashtun tribes are always engaged in private or public war. Every man is a warrior, a politician and a theologian. Every large house is a real feudal fortress.... Every family cultivates its vendetta; every clan, its feud.... Nothing is ever forgotten and very few debts are left unpaid." Afghans are still in a state of conflict and the Pashtuns specifically make this assessment just as valid today. Teasing out answers to security questions in a COIN environment such as Afghanistan will be successful if the U.S. stops and studies a very pertinent set of beliefs that are practiced by the largest population of the country.

Many casual readers fail to realize that Afghanistan is the oldest nation-state in central Asia and it has a heritage that is rich with norms, values and belief systems. The Pashtun people of Afghanistan are central to the history of Afghanistan and will continue to be so well into the future. The Pashtun make up 42% of the population of the country. In 1747, Pashtuns founded the country of Afghanistan under the first of its modern rulers, Ahmad Shah Durrani. The Durrani tribe, also known as Abdali, continues to be the tribe from which many power brokers come, including Hamid Karzai, the current President of Afghanistan.

---


The Pashtun people have a strong and intricate culture that dates back thousands of years.\(^7\) COIN efforts must respect and work within this culture and to-date, only modest gains are apparent under the current strategy.\(^8\) This is perhaps due to the codified behavior that governs tribal life known as Pashtunwali and the slow to adapt culture of a large organization such as ISAF. Respecting the basics of Pashtun culture is only beginning to be understood as key to winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people. The average American soldier would benefit with even just a crash course in ‘Pashtunwali 101’.

Political timetables and international organizations boasting modern treaties and declarations are of little help to a people that have such a strong and pervasive set of norms. Many of the tenets of this tribal code are to reach mutual understandings and respectful solutions to all parties involved. Pashtunwali is not formally studied and cataloged in ways other legal practices are throughout the world. Indeed, if precedent was part of Pashtunwali, perhaps trained analysts could use this knowledge to build better cases for cooperation and security. Nonetheless, the code does operate along several key principles.

These principles have to do with bravery, honor, council, hospitality, community building, blood money, dowry, convening posses, the well being of people under ones protection, balancing power among tribes, property and gender respect.\(^9\) Understanding and utilizing these

---

\(^7\) Sabahuddin, *History of Afghanistan*, 15.


tribal ethics is a difficult task for even the Pashtun, especially among different tribes and their various interpretations and implementation of them. How much more daunting the task to operate in such an environment as a soldier representing an international coalition, chasing an elusive and tribal savvy insurgent who does know the code, so to speak, and furthermore, exploits it by citing an Islam influenced by such practices imported by Deobandism and Wahabi traditions. Lieutenant Colonel John Hawkins of the Australian Defense Force says as follows:

Sharia law also has a strong influence in the village areas and often coexists with Pashtunwali but there is friction between mullahs and village elders in navigating rules for villages. It is equally important not to undermine the mullahs or the elders and an even-handed approach is necessary. Further, the Taliban will unquestionably be among those speaking to the Coalition and any errant message, extending support to either side, will become awkward to manage as it filters through a community and potentially to the Taliban propaganda channels.¹⁰

These same villages are prone to host occasional guerilla forces that have sympathies with the Taliban, yet remain loyal to their village and tribe for many reasons. Pashtunwali and Shari’a often operate synonymously in matters of family, community and property. Coalition forces must enter such locations with open minds and flexibility. COIN efforts and COIN doctrine in general recognize the importance of utilizing local traditional and customs.¹¹ However, COIN training has to-date been only on the periphery and focused on the tactical, military side of the struggle. Brigade combat teams go through extensive pre-deployment training and solider skills are the primary focus at this stage familiarization. Conventional


¹¹ The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, 305.
warfare tasks particular to specific types of units. Engineers, intelligence specialists, and signal
and communications personnel focus on receiving missions and training to complete objectives
within set guidelines and time limits. These standards are drilled into every solider from the time
of basic training. The officer corps are trained to manage and motivate soldiers in order to
complete assignments they receive from higher authorities. This top-down structure ignores the
dynamic and shifting battlefield that is inherent to population based counterinsurgency. Although
special units exist within the military that operate independently around principles of
unconventional warfare and living among the population, like Army Special Forces and Civil
Affairs teams, the vast majority of the forces today are unprepared to deal with a unique and
proud people that have a history of frustrating foreigners.

The Pashtun factor in the Afghanistan conflict is further complicated by the fluid nature
of their historic territory. As mentioned before, the Durand line splits the Pashtun population
between southern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. Pakistan has always struggled to
manage their Pashtun tribes and the indifference of the tribes themselves to an international
border. The influence of so-called foreigners in the Afghan conflict has diluted the reality of the
problem. The reality is they are not foreigners and are part of larger diasporas of kindred people
with a common history. Further complicating matters is that both ISAF, Afghanistan and
Pakistan cite international treaties and regulations that prevent them from taking action and
containing so-called insurgents from ‘cross-border’ activities. In reality, a border is only as
useful as those who recognize it, and the people in question never have.
In order to take measurable steps toward the cessation of violence, full scope efforts that realize the entrenched way of life of the people in question must be taken into account. One aspect of Pashtunwali and arguably the most important is the concept of nang, or honor. Nang encompasses several sub categories of Pashtunwali and in an environment in which property, womenfolk, and tribal dignity are highly regarded; honor becomes the most cited reason for resisting or cooperating with foreigners. At the beginning of the campaign male soldiers would attempt to engage the women. They tried innocently with conversation and aid, but soon realized that not only was it not helpful, as the women retreated into the homes, but it was also highly insulting to look at, talk to or offer anything to a woman in Pashtun culture without going through her male guardian or counterpart. ISAF forces are only beginning to respect and understand this seemingly obvious aspect of Afghan culture. While the reported images of the solider talking to the Afghan elder in a far off province seems like the right idea, it is in reality only a mirage. Most men in a rural village are passive toward coalition troops. They talk only when they have to, mostly out of fear from the Taliban and even then, they give unhelpful information. What compounds the problem further is when a loss of face occurs in front of a translator and an increasingly irritated solider. Detailed accounts of these meetings vary from each encounter. Coalition forces do not speak the language and local translators who speak fluent

---

English and can relay the nuance of the conversation are scarce. One recent instance of a meeting such as this is recorded and put online by the British newspaper, *The Guardian*.13

After receiving incoming rocket fire a U.S. foot patrol was sent to the nearest town from where the rockets had originated. The translator accompanying soldiers from C company 173rd Airborne did not speak the local Pashtu dialect. Upon finding a willing and cooperating village elder, the translator neglects key parts of the message and instead of telling the soldiers that the Taliban are over the ridge and his villagers are willing to organize with the help of the Americans, he says that the elder has not seen the Taliban in over a year. After the frustrating encounter, the translator says he ‘hates these people’ and they give ‘wrong answers’ to his questions. The Americans are baffled and angered by the lack of cooperation on the part of the villagers. More effort is needed to vet translators and prepare them for the work.14

While this example is just but one of thousands of lost opportunities, many more instances exist in which local elders are aligned with the Taliban. Many areas in southern Afghanistan, especially in Helmand and Kandahar province, boast large swaths of territory sympathetic to the Taliban and their fighters. The movement originated in this area and it remains one of the most conservative regions throughout the country. COIN operations here deal primarily with the Pashtun. Combat soldiers are often working against the clock in this region and the traditional way of agreement in Pashtun culture takes what the average Westerner

---


considers too much time. In order maintain a sense of honor, elders are often prone to operate along their own terms and do not really care about superficial deadlines and objectives. Tribal leaders customarily hold a *jirga*, or council, of other elders to resolve disputes. Mediation is handled at the lowest level possible and most issues revolve around family, inheritance, property, and occasionally blood money. Complex issues and accords with other tribes often have conditions and broad rules to interpret such as boundaries, pacts, and marriage arrangements. Obviously, a COIN campaign revolves around catching an enemy. An enemy of the coalition, however, may be a kinsmen of the tribe and therefore makes for an ambiguous situation. In order for the coalition to successfully engage these tribes, a different type of thinking has to be in place and most importantly, an appreciation for the Pashtun history, priorities, and sense of time.

Commanders need to step back from a tactical and operational view to view the situation in terms of influence and credibility. There is undoubtedly a competition for the allegiance of locals and the Taliban take every opportunity to exploit failures and exert their own narratives for influence. As one commander puts it, “The true measure of success in Afghanistan, and one that is not uniformly evaluated, is the amount of ‘influence’ that the government holds over the population.”

Elders in the Helmand and Kandahar region are prone to be sympathetic to the Taliban because of financial and economic reasons, not ideology, or questioning allegiance to the state. These regions are governed by the tribal institutions and moreover, have prospered under

---


the farming of opium and timber.\textsuperscript{17} These lucrative industries benefit local networks and the families that run them, often extended members of one tribe or sub-tribe. Outlawing and regulating from the top-down at the behest of the American and international coalition inevitably has led to friction.\textsuperscript{18} People in this region are unsurprisingly the subject of intense analysis and review by military strategists and political power brokers in Kabul and Washington. The common conception among hostile villagers who have aligned with the Taliban is that the Americans are the ones who will eventually go home, not the Afghans.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, adapting to this alternate sense of time is essential if coalition forces are to make progresses in security and stability. Moreover, demonstrating sincere respect for the local culture and utilizing the traditional methods of consensus will enable ISAF and the Afghan government to implement and develop infrastructure and economic opportunity in the form of legitimate and integrated industries that link these regions with the entire country.

The few gains made in these areas, such as building village security patrols, information-sharing networks and connecting villagers with other communities are good examples of success. Implementation of local solutions keeps honor of the tribe intact. One example of success is the Arbakai system, or communal security. Mohammed Osman Tariq an Afghan at the Crisis States Research Centre states: The Arbakai is a tribal based community

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Andrew Knight, "Influence as a Measure of Success," 71.

policing system grounded in volunteer grassroots initiatives. They differ from those in militia or hired by private security companies. They have greater support and are embedded within the community. In Pashto the derivation of the word ‘Arbakai’ is ‘messenger’.\textsuperscript{20} Having messengers and lookouts who could then notify larger responses, such as the district police or a quick reaction force of coalition forces to Taliban incursions is just one benefit of empowering locals to provide for their own security. Arbakai practices are part of Pashtunwali and they have been a part of Pashtun culture for centuries. Because different tribes of Pashtun have had historic feuds among themselves, the need for an \textit{ad hoc} security system was naturally part of the overall system of life for the Pashtun. As mentioned before, different Pashtun clans and sub-clans generally lived in one area and isolated from others. Naturally, disputes would arise over resources and blood feuds would erupt. The system has elements that invoke specific parts of Pashtunwali such as the men must be honorable, unpaid and volunteers.\textsuperscript{21} Different parts of the Pashtun belt call these organizations by different names, but the idea remains the same, to protect the village. Moreover, the communal security initiative has a history in other parts of non-Pashtun Afghanistan, such as the Hazara and the Tajik areas. These arrangements may not be as codified in Pashtunwali as the Arbakai system but the idea of funding and supporting neighborhood watch style systems is one worth investing in.

As promising as the aforementioned program may sound, until very recently efforts to consult local traditions and customs are viewed with skepticism by war planners and even top

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 6.
Afghan government officials. While exhaustive efforts and scores of analysts have undoubtedly poured through alternative security tactics, recent history is a deterrent to models such as Arbakai across Afghanistan.22 During the recent conflict, warlords often organized around their communal home bases and paid tribesmen to at first protect their villages and then the roads, districts and finally ethnic groups. This exaggerated form of community protection morphed into the factional bloodletting discussed in the previous chapter. It is understandable that authorities would not want to support an initiative that could potentially return the country into ethnic militias fighting one another. However, the Arbakai system proper seems able to transcended this problem. Arbakai, in its traditional form is a product of Pashtunwali. Tribal elders who have dealt with Arbakai successes and failures in the past make a good case for resurrecting the community watch. In an interview with NPR on elder states his case against the top-heavy proposals originating in Kabul.

Among critics of the police is tribal elder Mohammed Rahim. He claims the overwhelmed, underpaid Afghan police officers in his province are prone to corruption. He and others accuse officers of working with criminals and the Taliban, rather than arresting them. Rahim says that's something an arbakai would never do. He says an arbaki's reputation must be spotless because it is up to him to defend his tribe's honor. He says only the best and bravest men in a tribe are asked to serve in the centuries-old, homebred militias that are unique to this part of Afghanistan. "The government in Kabul wants to apply a Western model of law enforcement on us," Rahim says. "They should instead apply our own, Afghan formula — and that way, we'll have peace and security."23


23 Ibid.
The hesitance by ISAF and Kabul to implement local security seems to go against the mandate by the international community of establishing a strong, central government in Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan is not Iraq, which does have a history of central authority. Most of Afghanistan is remote and tribal life still dominates. Arbakai is a Pashtun practice and although its model may be attractive to the counterinsurgency effort, a more nuanced approach is in order.

If Pashtuns are located in certain areas and the rest of Afghanistan is composed of different ethnic groups and tribal practices, why not adopt a local approach in each area? Arbakai and Pashtunwali fall on deaf ears in the Hazara and Tajik regions, but utilizing a familiar model native to those populations would encourage a kind of democratic federalism not yet tried in the security efforts. This form of federalism should not be construed with American federalism or European federalism characterized by strong central governments with powerful enforcement and judicial mechanisms. Federalism in the Afghan sense has taken place for centuries although by a different name.

Local tribes and jirgas have long reigned as power brokers for people and the tribal life. Crimes are dealt with at the tribal level. Murder, theft, arson and a litany of other infractions all have means to rectification within traditional Pashtunwali. Oftentimes blood money is paid or property exchanged in some form to compensate the afflicted. This mediation and form of conflict resolution stands in stark contrast with that of the Taliban. The conflict with the Taliban developed only recently and many tribal Pashtuns realize the Taliban’s ideology is not a homegrown one and consider it a foreign concoction. Military negotiators are beginning to
realize this is an important starting point with local traditions. In an attempt to differentiate the
two systems, Major John Cathell describes the dichotomy. “In the case of wrongdoing, the worst
punishment a jirga hands down is typically a fine, agreed upon by all members of the jirga. The
death penalty is never handed down. This is in stark contrast to the Taliban, who frequently
impose the death penalty for homosexuality, adultery, drug use, and a host of other offenses.”24

The localized feature of justice and independence is a trait of the Pashtun and since Pashtunistan is
still not a reality, the people have navigated between superpowers and regional players such as
Pakistan in order to stake out their claim on self-governance. The most recent foray into Afghanistan
by foreign powers has once again brought this people out of their traditional agrarian lifestyle into
one of international scrutiny and military preoccupation. The notion to let the Pashtun govern
themselves, and for that matter other ethnic tribes running their own affairs, as ideal as that may
sound, is not embraced by the sovereign countries that share the Pashtun people.

The Pashtun are caught in the middle of a new power struggle in Afghanistan. Pakistan in
particular, as mentioned before, has long manipulated the Pashtun and over the years been adamantly
against any real claim to independence. All the while supporting the more radical elements within the
national movement to forget about ethnic and tribal allegiance and focus on the transnational
ideology of puritanical Islam. The reality is that Pashtun men are the backbone of the Taliban
leadership and separating the jihadist from the nangialai, or honorable man, has become a question
of deciding which label to apply by those in power to those being governed. The line between
Pashtun freedom fighter and Taliban is very difficult to distinguish, especially when Taliban

24 John Cathell, “Human Geography in the Afghanistan - Pakistan Region: Undermining the Taliban Using
cells are often provoking historic grievances and tribal identity to take up arms against ISAF and the central government. The ethnic divides are still strong and the insurgency is using linguist and tribal ties to further the divide between the people and the government. Therefore, more focus and effort must be applied to strengthen local, peaceful groups, who if encouraged in the right way, would not only support their own solution, but also reject the influence of the Taliban.

A serious effort is needed in the arena of public opinion and more specifically, to the hearts and minds of the Pashtun people, to remind them of their own history. The neo-Taliban, an organization that is less structured than the group that governed the country during the late 1990s cannot be allowed to equate with the mujahedeen that fought the Soviets during the civil war. This is exactly the image the Taliban want. It must be made clear that Pakistan specifically is supporting these radical elements seeking to drive a wedge between the Afghan people and their own government. Unfortunately, to make matters worse, the influence of foreign powers over an ethnic or religious client is not specific to the Pashtun and Pakistan. Although they represent the most prominent case of influence and double dealings, examining other instances of influence helps shed light on the broader dilemma in Afghanistan. That dilemma is the setback caused by conflicting interests of neighboring countries and their quest for influence. Remember, Afghanistan borders Iran, China, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Pakistan. These competing agendas are further emboldened by the overall lack of coherent national authority on the part of Afghanistan’s central leadership and their blatant corruption, often cited by the resistance

---

Making public these covert relationships would show the Afghan people that they are being subjected to yet another episode of divide and conquer.

Interestingly, Iran has stepped up its support of Taliban fighters and although there was friendly relationship between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban government of the 1990s, this new relationship seeks to simply harass and bleed ISAF forces. Iran, while simultaneously pumping money into regions where it knows strong Taliban influence is lacking and the people are more tied to their own interests, such as the city of Herat, also trains and arms Taliban fighters to carry out attacks elsewhere in the country. The tendency to aid regional and ethnic allies remains a central problem in the conflict. Iran is well aware that the people of Herat are Persian speaking ethnic Tajiks. Pashtuns are the minority in most provinces in the north and this simply plays into the hands of Iran, which despite its rhetoric of wanting a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, supplies them to attack coalition forces.

Ethnic patronage is still a serious dilemma for Afghanistan. The surrounding countries support their ethnic groups and although Pashtun people are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, other ethnic groups combined still outnumber the Pashtun. This reality complicates efforts to consolidate and establish a national identity. Recent reports indicate that ethnic groups still cite the pain of civil war and many corners of Afghanistan still function

---


independently from the central authority in Kabul.29 Pashtun pockets are scattered around the country and evidence shows that these populations also harbor Taliban cells, creating the idea that the Taliban are a nationwide, omnipresent problem.30 However, hastily constructed color-coded maps, put together beautifully by the CIA, misleadingly show violence or terrorism based on province. However, maps ignore the more subtle reality that these incidents are often tied to imported Taliban cells foreign to the local population but sympathetic to brethren Pashtun.31

If any progress in the counterinsurgency is made, it has to be done in a detached, population-centric manner, focusing on each area as if it were an entirely new set of problems. Most problems Afghans have are similar: security, education, development of infrastructure and providing a means to earn a living are the basic needs of people anywhere. What should differentiate is the approach we take to respect and listen to each ethnic group and their ideas for solutions. The military however is not always so quick to let junior officers and commanders in the field dictate negotiation strategy and run programs that are not necessarily coherent with a broader policy outlined in the Pentagon. In other words, coordinated deal making, although ideal, is not the way to face the shifting and fluid nature of the conflict that varies from village to village. The notion of counterinsurgency without a central, over-arching strategy does not mean


that ISAF should be without a plan, on the contrary, the plan is essential. If the U.S. is to make
gains in Afghanistan and restore a sense of security for the people of the country, coalition forces
need to adopt principles that are oriented and tailored to specific groups and their needs.
Approaching elders with patience and respect, sometimes knowing that they harbor the Taliban,
coupled with extensive background information and intelligence, commanders should be able to
create a foundation for good relationships. Sometimes this strategy come to the conclusions that
not all people in Afghanistan need the U.S. or any other country meddling in their day-to-day
life. Some commanders have reported that locals refuse help and aid, and in some cases promise
to stop attacking coalition and Afghan government forces, only if they are left alone.  

Flexibility and consultation are a large part of the solution. However, advocates of this
approach, as noble as it is, do not like to admit that boots on the ground and foot patrols are still
also essential. As mentioned before, the approach should be to decipher the need and the
environment, with input from the locals. Where this approach works, use it. However, places like
Marjah, a collection of Pashtun villages in Helmand province, need a physical presence of
force to show the Taliban that their radical edicts and harsh forms of punishment are not
welcome, even among their ethnic base. In this instance, the people had long been familiar with
the Taliban, even before the insurgency. Since 1994, shepherds and farmers lived under the
shadow of the Taliban. They had experienced the worst of the Taliban in all its forms, from state

32 The Korengal Valley has long been an area where any kind of outside influence is resisted. Upon the US
invasion reports were that some locals in this region mistook the Americans for Russians because it had been so long
since they had seen outsiders.

33 Marjah was a Taliban hotbed of intimidation and opium trafficking until President Obama declared
the surge strategy in 2009, sending in US marines. Marjah was a key objective that was cleared and secured.
sanctioned opium farming and taxation to elusive fighters who literally nailed shab namehs, or night letters to their doors, threatening death if anyone cooperated or talked to ISAF forces. After the fall of the Taliban 2001, many of the group’s core members reintegrated into population centers such as Marjah. When it became apparent that the area was a hotbed of activity and insurgency, military planners focused an incredible amount of resources in the area to quell the violence. Unfortunately, this allocation of resources came in the form of heavy weapons and Marines. In 2009, President Obama announced the new Surge strategy to root out the insurgency, beginning with Marjah. As of February 2011 the area has been transformed and the economy booming.34

Marjah is just one example of success. Many American military units are beginning to understand that the conflict in Afghanistan requires more than just tactical prowess and battlefield superiority. A cornerstone of success relies on networking with the local population and building relationships. Although the military is oftentimes ill suited for public relations work, they at least realize that other parties involved in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan are more than willing to step in and offer a helping hand. Some areas of Afghanistan, like the capital for example, are bearing noteworthy successes with the help of NGOs. Indeed, NGOs have a crucial role to play which we will examine in depth so to better understand the way forward in Afghanistan.

Whether it is in the heart of the Pashtun belt or the far off corner of the Wakhan corridor, non-governmental organizations and charity partnerships are building crucial bridges and providing essential services that may prove to be the most important gesture of the international community and the rebuilding of Afghanistan. It is extremely difficult to look at Afghanistan solely in terms of military and strategic terms and assume one understands the story unfolding. NGOs have poured into Afghanistan and are often the unsung heroes of vital services and projects that often go unnoticed in the mainstream media. Indeed, most of the news that the average American gets coming out of Afghanistan is negative. However, upon closer examination a positive picture begins to emerge that instills a sense of optimism and hope that Afghanistan is lacking. Military strategists often consult NGOs about local sentiments and conditions. The partnership between them is often overlooked or not known. Security is a serious concern in some parts of the country and relationships do not always allow overt communication. However, the reality on the ground is that these two groups, at all levels, are proving to be the most frustrating factor to the Taliban. In the next chapter, I will examine successes and failures of different NGO approaches and how several principles that can assist in the overall strategy can be drawn from their experiences.
CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF THE NGO IN A COUNTERINSURGENCY

Non-governmental organizations and more broadly, the civilian effort in Afghanistan play an essential role as providers, mediators, trainers, and advisors. However, coordination between these groups and the larger counterinsurgency effort must improve in order to bring about a united effort. The military realizes these groups play a key role in linking the Afghan people with their government; however, their views and strategies often conflict with the confrontational nature of military operations. In order assist the stability effort, NGOs and the military must work closer together, learn as much as possible from each other, and then use those lessons to translate ideal ambitions into real world, objective goals. The Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual defines an NGO as follows:

…a private, self-governing, not-for-profit organization dedicated to alleviating human suffering; and/or promoting education, health care, economic development, environmental protection, human rights, and conflict resolution; and/or encouraging the establishment of democratic institutions and civil society
There are several thousand NGOs of many different types. Their activities are governed by their organizing charters and their members’ motivations.1

Within the manual itself, sober assessments also state that some NGOs, despite their close operating proximity to ISAF forces, maintain an attitude of hostility and desire complete independence from parties of forces.2 This reality complicates efforts of coordination and can put coalition forces in the difficult position of being responsible for individuals in their operating

1 The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, 63-64.
2 Ibid., 65.
environment. NGOs and militaries do not work together for obvious reasons, such as enemy propaganda and safety purposes. However, without a general sense of partnership, and basic communication protocols in place, at whatever level, the likelihood of innocent and unarmed aid workers being in harm’s way increases dramatically. A case in point was the failed rescue of Linda Norgrove, a British national rescued not from her own country’s SAS, an elite counter-terrorism and hostage rescue unit, but by an American SEAL team, who was not aware of Norgrove or her organization before the hasty rescue took place.\(^3\) This instance showed how individuals who are in theatre disregard or ignore military warnings about certain areas, from their own governments and the governments of others. Nonetheless, such disregard for protocol is arguably where good work is done. Sadly, little coordination existed between her and the coalition forces in her area. In order for stability and development to take place, all parties in theatre need to know their counterparts and be aware of their mission.

Despite prominent instances of failure between the military and NGOs, many more cases exist in which the two parties, in many forms, cooperate and utilize each other’s resources to solidify gains and sustain projects throughout the country. An important factor that allows for this kind of cooperation is the basic arrangement of security. Security is vital if sustained projects are to take hold and allow their potential to be realized. Without security, aid workers cannot function. If no civilian effort is being made and soldiers in uniform are the only source of alleviating ills and are the only ones responsible for construction efforts, the perceptions begins

---

to self-dilute because soldiers in uniform are also simultaneously conducting combat operations and hunting down insurgents. When military authorities distribute food aid or educational materials use soldiers, this does not convey the best image for peace. Therefore, a balance needs to be place. Projects originate from both camps and COIN theory places great importance on building institutions that the people can take part in such as local councils, education boards, and security training programs. However, the reality is often plagued with problems.

Afghanistan’s unique environment and rural culture does not adapt well to hyper-activists. In other words, the conditions on the ground do not allow for foreign ideas of what the country should like to gain much momentum. Development needs to be supplied and implemented at the pace and scale of those who are the recipients. Each project should be carried out after reviewing local needs and consulting with tribal elders, depending on the area. However, officials and NGO representatives, eager to make a mark oftentimes carry out construction projects and aid efforts only to see them fail or abandoned after several months. Lessons are being learned at each step that underline the need to be patient, even when deciding how to help children and provide even the most basic medical needs. In order to understand what success may look like, where an NGO balances its role in the environment, and provides a service key to resolving fundamental ills in the society, examining the Central Asia Institute and

---


its relationship with the military will help shed light on a problem that seems to repeat itself among different organizations. This organization, an American one, has a proven record of accomplishment of building local consensus, utilizing local people in the effort, and patiently adjusting its goals based on the environment.

In his bestselling book *Three Cups of Tea*, Greg Mortenson, the founder of Central Asia Institute (CAI), describes how he literally fell into his role as one of the most successful advocates of education in Afghanistan and Pakistan by accident. He literally stumbled into his first aid project after a delirious decent from K2. Mortenson, a former Army medic and mountain climber discusses how he built his first school in mountainous Pakistan in a village that nursed him back to health after a mountaineering trip that almost killed him. After stumbling into the village of Korphe, the village elder, Haji Ali, asked after several days of taking care of him, “so what are you doing here?” Mortenson was so moved by the peoples’ generosity and hospitality that he vowed to return and help the village build a school. However, after several long months of difficult fundraising and upon returning with the money, village elders decided that they instead needed a bridge.\(^6\) In this instance, we see where an ideal gesture of providing education and hope to children was substituted for a more practical project. Instead of forcing his project upon the people, Moretson was able to navigate the unfamiliar terrain of tribal hierarchy and village politics, and in the process, build a reputation for himself and secure a trust among the people that is often more valuable than the aid itself.

---

Moretson went on to build schools in Korphe and throughout much of rural Pakistan. In each instance, his ability to navigate local customs and personalities and yield to local sentiments proved to be the single most important behavior and contribution to the overall strategy of development. Where other organizations and military funded projects may have succumbed to the protocol and customary gestures required to cement a project, or worse, bypass the villages and simply build, his organization has a consistent track record of success and minimal instances of failure.

Mortenson’s style of management is often described as terrible. He is late, forgetful, and unorganized. However, these same characteristics that would garner punishment in any military unit, appear to be no problem for the villages he works in because his personality and overall intention is clear. He simply wants to help. By operating on terms acceptable with villagers, Mortenson and CAI have slowly and painstakingly built over 300 schools for mostly girls in Pakistan and Afghanistan, often in places deemed too dangerous by the government and too aligned with the Taliban.\(^7\)

The key to CAI’s success is their attentive approach and patient method of dealing with different interests. Some projects take months of negotiations and alleviating the fears of village elders and religious leaders. Nonetheless, Building up capital and reputation in the small world of village politics and local networks pays dividends in the end in the form of concrete success, literally. In the Balistan province of Pakistan where Mortenson originally started his education

---

work, one instance of this strategy highlights the progress the organization has made. In only 25 days four schools went from planning phase to completion. The Al-Abaid Astana School, the Dhaghoni School, the Ban Basha School, and the Mayourdu School are all now completely operational with fully staffed teachers and local support. This is clear to the potential of empowering local communities to do the work themselves and thereby take ownership of their own future in the form of their children.

While CAI began its work in Pakistan, their Afghan projects are also using the same model for success. Afghanistan though has had a rocky experience with development in the most recent campaign. Oftentimes, military engineers and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) staffed by civilian and military personnel will outline territory on a map, plan projects, secure funding, get approval from their higher command, and go into the villages with security details and then immediately begin building clinics, schools, dams, wells, and roads. The PRTs have also become a flashpoint of contention with the Afghan government. President Hamid Karzai has said they are counterproductive to building trust and authority in Kabul. People should look to the Afghan government instead of other countries for aid. The lack of coordination evident by this instance highlights the attitude from top down initiatives. PRTs are run by different countries

---


and each NATO partner focuses on different regions of the country. However, this form of
decentralized development still needs to consult and secure support from the ground up, not
simply approval from Stockholm, Ottawa, or Washington DC. Organizations left to build on
their own, without local support, and disconnected from an overall strategy, projects will fail.

Comparing the approach of CAI and NATO led approaches illustrates this point. A recent
survey of a Canadian PRT project reveals a large discrepancy in the number of students enrolled
on paper and those actually in the classroom.

Kandahar's Department of Education says more than 52,000 students are enrolled
in the completed Canadian signature schools. About half are boys and half are
girls. But according the numbers provided by principals during visits to the
schools, about 36,000 students are enrolled in classes -- some 16,000 less than the
department has on its books. About two-thirds are boys; the rest are girls. Head
counts revealed fewer students still. The Canadian Press counted some 19,000
students -- most of them boys -- during a week's worth of visits. That's 33,000
fewer than the Afghan government claims.  

PRTs are government organizations by definition. So how do they relate to the work of
NGOs? The fundamental difference and perhaps the most important, is the approach.
Approaching development as a concept that comes from the top for villages at the bottom,
disregards the most important element in the equation, ownership. As the report above points
out, when discrepancies or failures become evident, blame is at the top levels. However, when
the project originates at a local level, with ideas and consensus coming from the village elders
and traditional authorities at the bottom, a sense of ownership takes shape and the people
themselves become responsible for their own investment. Greg Mortenson’s Central Asia

Institute has successfully employed this dynamic for over 20 years. In order for development to be successful in Afghanistan, it has to begin with the village and slowly gravitate upward.

The Central Asia Institute could arguably serve as the model for other NGOs and perhaps even offices of larger government organizations.

The success of CAI in Afghanistan depends on donors from abroad funding school projects and Greg Mortenson travels extensively throughout the U.S. to speak at events and raise money. However, money does not seem to be the obstacle when trying to do development work in Afghanistan. The problem with some NGOs working in Afghanistan is twofold. First, security concerns dramatically reduce enthusiasm of the NGO workers and for Afghans in the most volatile and underdeveloped regions of the country. Moreover, security issues isolate expats in their compounds and often create a void between the aid workers and the people they are trying to help. This is most prevalent in the remote provinces where villages are spread out over several valleys. Aid organizations have to spend large amounts of money on drivers, translators, local guides, and security. The result is oftentimes disheartening. Afghans feel that NGOs do not really care about their well-being and some even reject them as foreigners hiding behind gated compounds, wasting aid money on multiple levels of outsourcing and –sub-sub contracting.  


Secondly, adequate training and accountability frustrates efforts of transparency and oftentimes leaves foreigners doing most of the management and bookkeeping remotely and then delegating dangerous counterintuitive tasks to Afghans, like staffing guard posts, maintenance and cooking.\textsuperscript{15}

Aid efforts must seek to train and integrate as quickly as possible the local population into the development work. Afghans in NGO work must cooperate with the Afghan government, even if the government is weak or ineffective. While President Karzai may push for greater involvement of Afghans in their government, many people are skeptical of the government’s ability to deliver on their promises. Corruption is well documented at the highest levels of the Afghan government and many people know that pay offs and bribes are the best way to do business in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{16} The rift between President Karzai and the international community has highlighted the parallel aid efforts underway. One would think that ‘more hands make light work’, but President Karzai is apparently operating on different terms. Legitimacy in his office suffered after the 2009 election and many people believe that President Karzai and his affiliates stole the election.\textsuperscript{17} It is in this environment that foreign NGOs must train and empower the local people. Mixed signals from the top are frustrating this effort. President Karzai’s own behavior


lends little confidence to his statements. He has lately become confrontational, and made clear that foreign involvement in the development of the country should cease.\textsuperscript{18}

In order to secure success and enable the Afghans to govern their own reconstruction, military leaders are rethinking their strategy toward NGOs. Whatever the problems may be at the top, Afghanistan still has thousands of aid organizations and reconstruction efforts busily at work. The environment still is hazardous and many individuals risk their lives to help people they have never met. Security concerns remain the top reason why concrete gains difficult and why NGOs experience such hesitation among Afghans in rural areas to assist with projects and volunteer for training opportunities. Military planners realize that central to Afghanistan’s success is the sustained ability by the people to secure and govern themselves. This may take another generation, but training programs currently underway are building a strong foundation.

One particular endeavor that NGOs are well suited to assist with is reconciliation between insurgents and the government. Highly experienced individuals with experience in Colombia, the Balkans and parts of Africa are working closely behind the scenes to share lessons of conflict resolution. Luckily, there is precedent for this work. Afghanistan has had a long history of reconciliation and principles of truce and reintegration is part of Pashtunwali.\textsuperscript{19} The tenet is called \textit{itàga} and it translates to ‘laying down of the stone.’\textsuperscript{20} Utilizing this approach

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Michael Semple, \textit{Reconciliation in Afghanistan} (Washington DC: USIP, 2009), 13.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
speaks to the honor values system. Appealing to insurgents to help their tribe and village develop is better than killing and being destructive. Many former Taliban foot soldiers have ‘come in from the cold’, so to speak, under the guidance of different tribal *jirgas* throughout the country. After 30 years of conflict however, the local village hierarchy may no longer exist and individuals feel disconnected from their compatriots. In such instances, there is still hope.

The French NGO, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) has made considerable progress tackling local issues that reverberate upward from the local villages. In an effort to start the local economy in the Khoja Alwan district of the northern Baghlan province, a grant from USAID funded a project to support local tailors. Khoja Alwan was actually a zone created for the return of former refugees. The people are a mix of Afghanistan’s different ethnic groups and it is not a historic community with deep ties to each other as in other parts of the country. The project brought together the local people, who were not members of the same tribe or even the same ethnic group and found a project based on consensus. By focusing on consultation first among the people, ACTED addressed an immediate concern among the inhabitants and moved forward. More interestingly, ACTED has built a space among a community that was fragmented and unfamiliar with each other. Reconciliation can take many forms and this is just one instance of bringing people together to accomplish a practical

---


step toward building a sense of community. ACTED had proposed several other projects but political roadblocks from donor countries and granting institutions like USAID need to coordinate better with local populations and NGOs on the ground to gauge how effective their aid can be. Indeed, the disconnect is blatantly obvious with the following illustration.

The community’s second project, the construction of “peace halls’ where residents could gather to encourage the formation of social bonds was rejected by USAID as the construction plans did not meet the donor’s standards. A third project — the development and maintenance of a transport link from Khowja Alwan to the nearby city of Pul-i-Kumri, was designed to help alleviate some of the economic, physical and social insecurity experienced by all residents. This proposal, however, was rejected because USAID guidelines for this project stipulate no one item may cost over $5,000 USD and all vehicles purchased must come from the USA.23

It appears that the issues revolve around a lack of unity and vision. Large bureaucracies are slow to internalize fluid environmental factors and are unable to adapt to the casual way things are happening on the ground. The key to winning the struggle for progress in Afghanistan is investing in ideas that originate at the lowest level. For example, in the most conservative areas of Afghanistan like Kandahar and Helmand province, girls are not a priority in terms of development goals. Instead, agricultural and economic projects are requested. In the Panshir Valley, with an ethnic Tajik majority and a history of education and empowerment, schools of girls have been requested for a long time. The point is to approach each population on their own terms, in their own way, and support their desires even when it may contradict larger goals of strategy and vision for the country. In doing so, we build trust and partnerships that will eventually result in further cooperation and investment into all of the shared development goals.

---

23 Ibid., 9.
In order to build such trusts, a clear understanding of the various populations must be present.

Classic counterinsurgency revolves around building the trust of the people. Without this understanding, blind ambition and foolhardy idealism can get people killed. A prime example is the case of Korean NGO workers working to promote Christianity in Afghanistan. This particular group may not have been openly proselytizing, but the image of a group of church workers led by a pastor infuriated the Taliban. In order to deny the Taliban such propaganda, developments efforts need to happen on terms familiar and suitable for each group that should be served. Much success is enjoyed by different NGOs, working quietly and in the shadows and undoubtedly, emulating models like Greg Moretenson’s CAI embrace local voices and local solutions is the reason.

This thesis has been reviewing apparent failures and instances of friction between parties involved in the reconstruction and stability effort of the country. Indeed many lessons can be drawn from the handling of the Afghan campaign up until now. ISAF and the U.S. military in particular have had tangible successes, and failures that should be examined in order to appreciate the mature and sober attitude that has been adopted recently by ground level commanders. They are truly the individuals responsible for the full spectrum of tools needed to establish security. The next and final chapters will examine the theory and practice of counterinsurgency in an environment with a hostile and motivated group of irreconcilable enemy.

---


forces that operate in and among populations. Defining failure and success happens at this level. Unfortunately, the complicated matter of fact is, there is an element that must be pacified if the international community is to call the campaign a success.

David Kilcullen’s analogy of the conflict eco-system is referred to in the beginning of this thesis. Kilcullen’s expertise as a COIN guru is widely established. His work is incorporated into international stability and security operations with good reason. The lessons that will be discussed in the ensuing pages will draw upon Kilcullen’s work extensively and the work of his intellectual peers, U.S. Army LTC John Nagl and French Army officer David Galula. Inevitably, military careers and tactical thinking color their approaches and views. Nonetheless, an underlying theme of this presentation is that force must be applied in order to successfully transition from a state of war and insurgency to a state of peace and security. How intensely force must be applied is the question we will examine. Within the conflict zone, aid, development, governance and the establishment of peace overall, rely on the much needed cornerstone of security. Checkpoints, security training, conducting irregular warfare, counterterrorism, and intelligence operations are all part of building the space that allow peace to unfold. Analyzing the so-called enemy is never easy, and in such an environment, the definition of such a term becomes difficult to ascertain. Counterinsurgency by default is highly complicated and multilayered. The following discussion will analyze this fact in depth.
CHAPTER 4

EXAMINING THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan is a complicated affair. The country is ravaged by conflict for a very long time, winning, whatever the definition of that term is, has proven to be an elusive goal. Strategies and objectives have changed and evolved since the U.S. and its allies first set foot in the country in late 2001. The objective was to rid the country of Al Qaeda and the Taliban government that supported it. The goal then was to build up a democratic government that could manage its own affairs. Finally, our focus has shifted to quelling an elusive and patient insurgency with time on its side. If this last effort is not accomplished, all previous objectives risk failure. At each of these junctures, significant steps have been made to improve the situation, yet a successful outcome and sustainable initiative has proven difficult to realize.

The Taliban government no longer administers the country and arguably, Al Qaeda no longer has a safe space to train and plan. The insurgency that has developed over the last five years is facing active engagement by the international community. However, a closer look at history and context shows that it was not until the conflict in Iraq did the international community realize that the conventional approach to a country’s occupation would fail. That reality became the insurgency that still lives on today. This insurgency is expensive, bloody, and on the brink of failure if the correct measures to development are not implemented. When George Bush infamously declared in late May 2003, ‘mission accomplished’ aboard the USS
Abraham Lincoln, little did the American people know that a majority of the casualties, on both sides, would take place after this event.¹

David Kilcullen’s book *The Accidental Guerilla*, makes several insightful points that go against popular beliefs about the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan currently underway. First, he notes the difference between insurgencies and resistance movements.² An insurgency is obviously a resistance, but its methods are less organized and its tactics meant for immediate results, i.e., car bombs, threats and assassinations. A resistance however, works more from the strategic starting point and its methods are to compete with the established order to offer its model in the place of the existing system. To further complicate matters the Taliban attempt to offer an alternative to the Afghan government in the form of their own courts, governors and plans for the country. What makes clear the difference so to ascertain if the Taliban is an insurgency or a resistance movement is the fact that the Taliban have no serious resources to run a country and no one in the international community would recognize them. In short, the Taliban’s tactics put it into the category of a classic insurgency, but they attempt to portray themselves as a viable alternative and ergo, resistance model. This contrast complicates strategic and tactical tools to address the situation because the overlap between the two camps is difficult to distinguish. An insurgent, guerilla, terrorist, rebel, or violent protestor, has specific modes of

---


operation and motivations. It is impossible to distinguish between them most of the time and many of their tactics are ironically the same.

Kilcullen offers advice on how to decipher the environmental actors. The first step is to realize that counterinsurgency theory, developed in the 20th century by colonial military officers in Britain and France is not suitable to be used as a template for the current conflict. The second realization must be that practicing modern counterinsurgency is far more difficult and time consuming than executing a conventional war with a conventional enemy. This last point is difficult for decision makers and politicians. Success in a counterinsurgency often does not become apparent until a generation or two has passed, which tends not be a viable answer with those deciding to fund such campaigns, like Congress.

Despite such contradictory and gloomy assessments, Kilcullen has put together in his book Counterinsurgency, twenty-eight paragraph size articles that need are applied to the current environment.3 In his sobering introduction, Kilcullen describes an insurgency as, “a competition with the insurgent for the right and the ability to win the hearts, minds, and acquiescence of the population.”4 The competition often requires restraint, discipline, and patience. It is a small conflict carried out at the company level. A company refers to a military unit of organization with roughly 130 personnel who are armed and trained to control territory or seize an objective. In Afghanistan however, they become local ambassadors of the invading country and any action

---


4 Ibid., 1.
by the lowliest of foot soldiers, or privates in military jargon, can and will have the broadest strategic impact.

Kilcullen first article among the twenty-eight is titled, ‘Know your turf.’ In order to prepare at the company level, which Kilcullen describes as the frontline unit responsible for the successful outcome of a COIN campaign, the individual task and collective training must revolve around knowing the terrain of the COIN environment. Studying Afghanistan before arriving and actually gaining any insight into the culture and people is extremely important. The country is vast and rural with a population as diverse as varied as they come. A few books may provide anecdotal insight into tribes and regional cultures, but perhaps the best training would be language training.

The military has created numerous websites geared toward teach soldiers basic Pashto and Dari, the predominate languages in the country. However, requiring passing scores on standardized tests is difficult. Soldiers are still required to maintain proficiency in other areas first. Weapons qualification, occupational specialties such as rifleman, heavy gunner, scout and sniper each have standards that are met before a soldier is deemed fit for deployment. One recommendation that has not yet implemented is to make language courses and counterinsurgency doctrine, part of these warrior tasks. In Afghanistan, actual combat and firefights are sporadic and conducted in mountainous terrain where insurgents usually lie in wait to spring ambushes from mountaintops and from rocky cliffs. Before enemy positions can be determined and elements mobilized to return fire, the fight is over and the insurgents vanish. It

\[5 \text{ Ibid., 2.}\]
would be more productive and less dangerous to engage the local population on their terms and in their own language before entering into their domain. Any person who has travel abroad can testify that speaking the local language is a sign of respect and an indication one has prepared and sincerely wants to connect with the people. Soldiers need ever opportunity they can get to project a positive image to the people. Although it is unrealistic to expect every solider to be fluent in the language, it is reasonable that everyone pick up a few key phrases. Translators can be the bridge in this environment. Language training speaks to a sense of brotherhood and reflects the energy we are willing to put forward to connect with the local population. This connection, whether it takes the form of chatting on a patrol, or sitting for tea is the same connection that is needed to take objectives to the next level of involving the locals with their own future.

Kilcullen’s second article would be easier to implement if language training is utilized. ‘Diagnosing the problem’ as he calls it, entails consultation, observation, and respect. Kilcullen says, “You need to know why and how the insurgents are getting followers. This means you need to know your real enemy, not a cardboard cut-out…The locals have known him since he was a boy. How long have they known you?” Being able to understand the difference between an insurgent and someone who is defending ones honor is key to reaching out to reconcilable elements who are receptive to aid. If locals are consulted and proper avenues of authority are utilized, solutions and projects can begin with everyone on board. Many localities suffer from a host of ills such as poverty, farming droughts, transportation, and corruption from local

6 Ibid., 2.
authorities. Later in this study we will examine such examples in more depth. Nonetheless it would be helpful to examine a case in which everything went wrong when this particular article was ignored.

The documentary Restrepo\(^7\) outlines how COIN can go wrong. Sebastian Junger and his cameraman, Tim Hetherington, were on assignment from Vanity Fair magazine in collaboration with National Geographic. They were embedded with a platoon from the 173\(^{rd}\) Brigade Combat Team in the Korengal Valley in Kunar province in northeastern Afghanistan, right along the Pakistani border. The documentary took place over a 15-month period and recounts the day-to-day activities of the soldiers involved, particular the company commander, CPT Kearny. A New York Times article written by Elizabeth Rubin about the same time the film crew was there provides even more insight into the environment.\(^8\)

CPT Kearny and his men were tasked with making contact with the local Korengalis in an attempt identify the cross-border insurgents and build a road through the valley. The local population had historically been involved in the timber trade and was mainly part of an extended, single tribe. Upon assuming command of the outpost, CPT Kearny was not informed as to how terrible the local dynamics and engagements with the population had been. The Marines and elements of the 10\(^{th}\) Mountain Division had all been there before and were severely tested throughout their deployment. Their operations were reactive in nature and mainly dealt with

\(^7\) Restrepo, Directed by Sebastian Junger, National Geographic, 2010, Film.

figuring out who was shooting at them. They became angry with the locals and conducting their missions without much regard to civilian causalities. Minimal consultation and orientation was given to CPT Kearny and his men before they arrived and they received no guidance on how to relate to and approach the local population. CPT Kearny realized that his mission was to take over a locality whose occupation had resulted in numerous coalition deaths and a sustained psychological toll for those who served there. His unit was unprepared for the environment and unwilling to acclimate to the local way of life.

If CPT Kearney had studied the location he would have learned that this area has had a historic tendency to fight off any and all people, Afghan or foreign, who were not invited. The Korengalis personify the accidental guerilla syndrome. They had long been an independent group and were isolated from even the closest population center that was just five miles away. Historic grievances have made them rivals with the nearest tribes and blood feuds have complicated development work ever since. Upon the insertion of American forces under the pretext of monitoring human traffic between Pakistan, the Korengalis found themselves on the receiving end of American engagement and intelligence gathering efforts. At a time when food aid and medical resources were scarce, Americans were offering security and road projects instead of what the people truly wanted-to be left alone. American officers were pushing for intelligence and attempting to map out the human terrain of the population. Naming extended family and tribal connections inadvertently created a list of insurgents.

The people of Korengal themselves may not have been quick to fight the Americans at first, but it only took a few embedded insurgents among them from Pakistan and one Arab linked
to the region dating back to the Soviet invasion, begin the resistance. While on patrol, villagers would take random shots at the soldiers and then disappear into the forest, frustrating American engagement efforts that inevitably became interrogations of local families. The high testosterone environment of an infantry platoon fueled the hostile divide between the two parties, Korengali versus American soldiers. If the villagers were not helping the Americans, then they were surely helping the insurgents, or so the common knowledge of the Americans held. These insurgents were 90 percent of the time, angry men put out of work when the Americans shut down their timber smuggling operations.⁹

Restrepo shows how CPT Kearny decided to build a Combat Outpost (COP) right in the middle of the valley within open view of most of the population. They named this COP Restrepo after a soldier who was killed in a firefight. In order to build it, the soldiers moved on to a small spur, a subsidiary summit of a mountain, in the middle of the night and dug out enough space to fill the makeshift barriers with dirt and rock. They had enough room to have several plywood shacks built to sleep in. After several nights of intense labor, one platoon consisting of about 25 men moved in and set up weapons with fields of fire, a view of the entire valley, in a 360 degree view. The COP immediately became a target for the local insurgents because it was so prominently located. Although only 500 meters away from the larger outpost, Firebase Phoenix, they were virtually alone with help out of reach, even if called upon. The terrain was so steep and treacherous; it provided a perfect view right into the COP if the insurgents wanted to harass them, which they did daily. The idea behind COP Restrepo was that if the Americans could gain

⁹ Ibid.

78
a foothold and establish a presence right in the middle of the valley, they could extend influence and build security radiating out from this point. Unfortunately, things only got worse. Now living in an exposed space, not at the highest point in the valley moreover, they became target practice for the insurgents and ultimately ineffective in their outreach efforts. They created a huge divide between themselves and the villages with whom they were trying to connect, both figuratively and literally.

In one instance, a village cow got caught up in the barbed wire. By the time the soldiers noticed the cow it had been badly cut numerous times and had lost a lot of blood. They subsequently killed the cow and slaughtered it for their own consumption. After village elders approached the soldiers with a demand of compensation, the soldiers only were able to promise the weight of the cow in grain and some fruit. Unwilling to cede to the villagers request of monetary compensation, the incident was left unresolved. The physical presence of the soldiers right in the backyard of the locals put everyone on edge. Locals could not move about freely and they had to cross a large dead space right in the soldier’s field of fire even if they wanted to talk. Communication with the local population is key and COP Restrepo was simply counterproductive. At one tribal jirga CPT Kearny attempted to distance himself from the policies of his predecessors, who were even worse at practicing COIN. After being asked repeatedly about issues still unresolved, he blurs out in frustration, “I wasn’t here, I don’t give a fuck!” Such sentiments, needless to say, are unhelpful in trying to get to the root of the problem.

In CPT Kearny’s defense, in 2008 COIN doctrine and resources had just become a focus of military leaders and no major push for institutional training had taken place. Critics of CPT
Kearny point to his cavalier attitude toward villagers and the hostility that developed within his own unit toward the people of Korengal. He made honest attempts to try and figure out the problems he could change within the village, and his unit was responsible for numerous aid drops, when they were available. However, realizing that the only problem in the valley may have been the presence of American forces is not a truth the military can work with. Therefore, the preface of helping the people and connecting with them to solve their issues becomes moot. Identifying the problems within a community whose only grievance is meddling from outsiders, becomes an exercise in futility and frustration. If soldiers are on a foot patrol and they happen to damage property or accidentally shoot up someone’s house, villagers come and say, “You want to solve problems? How about not shooting at us and damaging our stuff.”

In 2009, the former commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, said: “The question in the Korengal is: how many of those fighters, if left alone, would ever come out of there to fight?...I can’t answer that. But I do sense that you create a lot of opposition through operations.” In early 2010, despite dozens killed and many more wounded, the U.S. pulled out of the Korengal all together and has not been back since. Such instances of withdrawal leave room for different kinds of influence and operations—operations that are essential to gauging how the campaign could better be served. Indeed, the mere presence of troops can derail any hope of success. In such cases, local national aid and outreach may be the only way to incorporate remote, independent populations. Utilizing this method and having this

10 Ibid.

understanding helps shape where to focus resources and forecast where serious threats are, and are not. The sorts of soft operations, or operations that do not involve military force, bring us to Kilcullen’s next article, intelligence.

Had the Americans monitored the situation and sent forward emissaries to gauge the will and mood of the population, perhaps the Korengal campaign would not have resulted in the way it did. Intelligence is arguably the most important factor in understanding any active insurgency. While a military unit sits on the periphery waiting to raid or storm a target, such operations would usually prove excessive if accurate and timely information was available. Who is influencing the locals, who is planting roadside bombs, who is illegally taxing the population, and how insurgent organization is structured in a given area are all questions that intelligence resources and information networks can answer. Kilcullen points out that traditional military organizations, from the squad, the lowest element, to the company, need to organize around for tactical intelligence. Bluntly put, “In counterinsurgency, killing the enemy is easy. Finding him is often nearly impossible. Intelligence and operations are complementary. Your operations will be intelligence driven, but intelligence will come mostly from your own operations, not as a product prepared and served up by higher headquarters.” The reference to higher headquarters reflects how intelligence dissemination has worked until recently. Information would be gathered and sent up in its raw form. Analysts would look for trends and patterns and then send back down a general warning about possible threats in the area. The officers would then plan accordingly and brief with these threats in mind. When a patrol happens, individual soldiers are briefed the route, alternative route, what resources they have on standby, rally points, proper
protocol in the case of contact, and the enemy threat level. Unfortunately, with this system, intelligence suffers from the delay it takes from collection to analysis to final product. Often it is irrelevant and those who knew what was actually likely to happen on a patrol, are the soldiers in the other platoon who just got back from patrol.  

Kilcullen’s emphasis on COIN being a company level, frontline unit, task is very real. Elsewhere in this study, we have discussed the effects of top-down strategy that often gets too involved on the ground and among those who are actually making connections and talking to the locals. These soldiers on the frontlines have the routine of dealing with people every day and they often see the same families and children going about their daily lives. These soldiers are the best resource for information on insurgent activity simply because they are embedded with the civilians. It is very difficult for high-ranking members of the military or VIPs from any government to visit the streets and often times their presence is actually counter-productive. Therefore, the day-to-day efforts of COIN must be done at the basic level, detached and empowered from higher headquarters. Company level commanders should be given more resources, better training, and ultimately more time to connect with the local people. Consulting with higher authorities currently entails receive directives and the lower units being talk at not with. Coordination is unavoidable and it needs to happen, but these frontline units need the resources of higher commanders and civilian organizations to ease the passage of resources to the people who need it most. Moreover, discretion of the local commander is based on his own

---


13 Personal interview from an Army lieutenant who had to escort General Petraeus on patrol in southern Iraq, March 6, 2011.
real-time experience and is further informed by the experiences of the men under him. In order to make gains, higher authorities and larger organizations must work among themselves to empower the soldiers and civilians on the ground.

Interagency cooperation is Kilcullen’s fourth article and by far the most troublesome when it is not followed. As mentioned elsewhere, Afghanistan is an environment flooded with a number of different organizations and sections of various governments. Kilcullen’s full advice is useful when read in its entirety and context.

Almost everything in counterinsurgency is interagency. And everything important from policing to intelligence to civil-military operations to trash collection will involve your company working with civilian actors and local indigenous partners you cannot control, but whose success is essential for yours. Train the company in inter-agency operations get a briefing from the State Department, aid agencies and the local Police or Fire Brigade. Train point-men in each squad to deal with the inter-agency. Realize that civilians find rifles, helmets and body armor intimidating. Learn how not to scare them. Ask others who come from that country or culture about your ideas. See it through the eyes of a civilian who knows nothing about the military. How would you react if foreigners came to your neighborhood and conducted the operations you planned? What if somebody came to your mother’s house and did that? Most importantly, know that your operations will create temporary breathing space, but long-term development and stabilization by civilian agencies will ultimately win the war.14

What Kilcullen implies is that the company level soldiers must take the initiative to bridge the gap between the higher authorities and different organizations with the people whom the outcome of the conflict ultimately relies. In other words, soldiers must make every effort to play the role of police, ambassador, aid worker and trusted advisor to the local population.

The effort would be much easier indeed, if it was a single effort and a single organization doing everything. However, the reality is much more complex and unfortunately, what often

14 Kilcullen, Twenty-Eight Articles, 3.
happens is a competition of sorts between different groups. These groups can be military units, different NGOs, different government agencies, and even different Taliban groups. In order to better understand the situation through the eyes of the most important group, the people and soldiers on the ground, we will examine two situations that illustrate this point.

In 2008, an Army infantry lieutenant interviewed by the author recounts what happened after weeks of relationship building was destroyed when another Army unit conducted a raid in his sector. The now captain declined to be named. This lieutenant (LT) was responsible for the security of several villages in Afghanistan where insurgent activity was recently beginning to taper off after his unit began stability operations. Food aid, well digging, and local security forces training projects had returned a sense of security to the area after several months of insurgent activity and roadside bombs. The LT was even beginning to pick up the local Pashto dialect and would provide additional security on Friday’s after prayer. He began to know the children by name and his men would often play impromptu soccer with them in the streets. The LT had built up a budding relationship with several local elders and trust was beginning to pay dividends in the form of actionable information. The elders trusted the American officer and simply wanted peace in their villages, even if it meant informing on the insurgents. Their help led to the arrest of several individuals taking refuge in the area and the seizure of several weapons caches. One evening a message was received on one of the Army’s secure networks notifying units in the area of an impending operation to be conducted within a matter of minutes. It is the Army’s form of instant messaging between units. Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), had tasked a company of Rangers from the 75th Ranger Regiment with a raid on a
compound within his sector in the dead of night. Chinook helicopters flew into the area and offloaded 120 heavily armed, Rangers. Rangers have a reputation among the Army as being the most lethal fighting force. Their tactics and training revolve around quick, explosive combat. They encircled the compound, blew the gate off its hinges, and after several minutes of intense gunfire, escorted several individuals and corpses back into the Chinook and flew away. They came, they killed, and then they left.15

The next day, the LT went to see what had happened and survey the damage. Any request for additional information from JSOC would be rebuffed and moreover, classified. The LT came upon burial preparations and saw that a number of women and children were killed. After seeing three young girls with bullet holes in the heads, he began to cry. One of the village elders came up to him and said, “You did this.” The LT recounted to the author, “What could I say? We did do this and now I have to deal with it.” His relationship with the village was destroyed and an immediate increase in roadside bombs ensued.

The relationship between different units in the military is checkered. Special Operations forces like Navy SEALs or counter-terrorism units like Delta Force operate in an environment of clandestine activity and highly compartmentalized intelligence driven by their own networks of informants and signals intelligence. JSOC operates independently from other military commands and has its own prerogatives within its own sectors, often overlapping those of traditional units. Mainly tasked with direct action, in other words, operations just like the one mentioned above, their methods are heavy handed and revolve around the old adage, ‘shoot first

15 Personal interview from an Army lieutenant who served in Kunar province Afghanistan 2008, March 6, 2011.
and ask questions later.’ While JSOC comprises some of the most elite and well-trained personnel in the military, their focus is not COIN oriented with a few exceptions.\textsuperscript{16} JSOC focuses on going after high value targets and its planning is done in house, without consultation with local ground commanders. Such strategy is often counterproductive to say the least, to the overall effort in Afghanistan.

Another example that puts into context the disconnect that exists between different organizations and thinking methods, is the work of the Asymmetric Warfare Group (AWG). In theory, AWG provides information and research into countering enemy tactics, using their own methods and strategies. They devise traps, cameras, dysfunctional equipment and other techniques used by the insurgents themselves to confuse and frustrate the Taliban. These tactics were successful in the past and much of their results remain classified. However, one instance recounted by the aforementioned LT provides some perspective.

In the middle of night, the LT gets word that a team from the AWG will be coming shortly in from Kabul to share a new technique with his platoon to help deter against the increased occurrences of roadside bombs. Upon landing, several men get off the chopper and the LT’s first impression was that these men are fully equipped with the latest weapons and protective gear. This is strange because they are only scheduled to visit the outpost for a few hours and then go right back to Kabul, not go out on patrol. Upon waking his entire platoon up after a grueling three-day patrol, the men begin their brief on how to stop insurgent bombs. The

\textsuperscript{16} Army Green Berets, also known as Special Forces, are trained to embed and train local forces. They receive language training and cultural awareness courses before a deployment and often have great success in building lasting ties with local populations.
men begin by stating they know that this unit has come under heavy fire from insurgents and was targeted by a number of roadside bombs. They suggest, based off extensive research and survey, the next time they go out on patrol, to take several boxes of Meal Ready to Eat (MRE) rations, barbed wire, and a field camera that will provide a live feed back to the base. They recommend putting the MRE boxes out in the road, surround it with barbwire, and then position the camera in a nearby tree so to capture the insurgents in the act of trying to steal the MREs. The half-awake soldiers begin to giggle and laugh. Finally, one of the senior non-commission officers (NCOs), raises his hand and asks if this is some kind of practical joke. Upon realizing it was not, the NCO tells the people from AWG what will actually happen if they did that. “First they will steal the camera, then they will steal our barb wire and then they will steal our MREs, which we need! Then they will take it back to their village and give out the MREs to whoever they can and when we try to figure out what happened, we won’t have a clue because now everyone has MREs.” After this comment, the soldiers went back to bed angrily knowing that only the guy next to them knew what was actually happening in their sector and that any help from higher headquarters, however good intentioned, was useless. The men from AWG asked the lieutenant what was it that they said or did that made the soldiers angry. The LT replied that it was a disconnect that existed, not just with them, but with almost everyone else that was so frustrating. Only the men who were out each day understood, as well as anyone could, what really needed to happen in order to bring about change to their sector. These illustrations point to the lack of coordination from the ground up and *vis versa.*
Kilcullen’s theories are, as he himself recognizes, only textbook.\textsuperscript{17} They are rough guidelines to remember and oftentimes, the most insightful critique comes after a unit has experienced the reality of COIN on the ground. An important difference in COIN doctrine and that of conventional military thinking is the shift from attacking the enemy, to protecting the people. An example of where American leaders and strategists began in their thinking was captured when Condoleezza Rice stated, “Carrying out civil administration and police functions is simply going to degrade the American capability to do the things America has to do. We don't need to have the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten.”\textsuperscript{18} Although this statement was made referring to the Balkans pre-9-11, Kilcullen’s ideas and the analysis given above, infers that the 82\textsuperscript{nd} Airborne is actually perfectly suited to escort kids to school in a COIN environment. The new kind of conflict that is characterized by civilians and armed insurgents, who are also people linked to civilians, needs an approach that can be characterized as ‘armed civil affairs.’\textsuperscript{19} Having a secure environment in which the people are put first in order of priorities may seem counterintuitive to combat units, however, the world has changed and if the U.S. is to remain a dominate force for good, realizing this fact is essential.

Kilcullen’s assessments concur with this outlook and although much work needs to be done in terms of changing the way people think in the military, there are promising signs

\textsuperscript{17} David Kilcullen, \textit{Counterinsurgency}, 30.


\textsuperscript{19} David Kilcullen, \textit{Counterinsurgency}, 43.
that people at the very top understand this need for a paradigm shift. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said recently:

> There has been an overwhelming tendency of our defense bureaucracy to focus on preparing for future high-end conflicts — priorities often based, ironically, on what transpired in the last century — as opposed to the messy fights in Iraq and Afghanistan,… We can’t know with absolute certainty what the future of warfare will hold, but we do know it will be exceedingly complex, unpredictable, and — as they say in the staff colleges — ‘unstructured.’

Secretary Gate’s comments speak to the fundamental change that characterizes how struggle and conflict will be defined in the future. If we wish to remain a dominant force in the world, it is our responsibility to not simply exercise our will and exert power in pursuit of our influence. We must work together with people to develop the universal rights and freedoms our military seeks to uphold. Whether people accept them or not does not matter, our beliefs need to respect the freedom and rights that people everywhere should have. The approach to war fighting must incorporate this reality.

This realization is best suited for soldiers on the ground and in the streets. Because the Army is such a large organization and policy changes tend to take years, those who can immediately see the difference in the actions need to unlearn much of what they have been taught. While this survey of theory and practice is not an exhaustive study of Kilcullen’s articles, we will examine a few more key recommendations that make sense in the context of Afghanistan.

---

Articles 8 & 9, ‘Rank is nothing: talent is everything’ and ‘Have a game plan’ speak to very important characteristics that oftentimes become issues of contention within the military. While rank in the military is a historic structure with rigid traditions associated with it, it can often be an obstacle in a COIN environment. When the Afghan campaign began in late 2001, general officers whose only experience were in garrison, or on the base, and maybe combat experience in the first Gulf War, were tasked to draft a plan that would free Afghanistan from the Taliban. What ensued was an aerial bombardment quickly followed by airborne troops occupying key locations and special operations chasing the Taliban and Al Qaeda. While the initial occupation of the country was simple, the last decade has been anything but. As Kilcullen states, “Entering Afghanistan and capturing its cities is relatively easy; holding the country and securing the population is much, much harder.”21 What unfolded was a struggle, not a battle, between insurgents and NATO forces, a military coalition comprised of dozens of nations with varying levels of competency and commitment, and overwhelmingly underprepared for the insurgency that would ensue. Rank in the modern military means at what level you take orders, and how much say one has in executing them. The lower the rank and whether an officer or enlisted can mean the difference between consulting and shaping the way an operation should be executed, or if one does not do exactly has he is told, punishment is in order. A vast majority of the individuals involved in Afghanistan fall under the latter category because they are lower enlisted foot soldiers, sergeants all the way down to privates.

21 Kilcullen, Accidental Guerilla, 44.
Since COIN is a peoples war, those who have the most dangerous job of walking along IED laced roads and among crowds of people, are also the ones with the most important function. Getting out and mingling with people, shaking hands, saying hello, buying fruits from the local stalls, and slowly getting a feel for the environment comes down to the instincts and training of the junior enlisted people. These same individuals are also statistically more likely to be killed, maimed or suffer from PTSD in country because of their frontline experiences. They are where counterinsurgency meets insurgency. All other secondary operations such as counter-narcotics, counter-terrorism or training indigenous forces take place in somewhat controlled environments where planning can mitigate risk and predict the outcome. But on the streets of Marjah or in the poppy fields of Helmand province where the private is on patrol, decisions and judgment need to be honed and sharpened to the greatest extent possible.

The best way to prepare a young solider for a COIN environment is not by spending time on the range or learning close quarter battle drills, but by reading history, learning religion, language and psychology.\textsuperscript{22} In short, the real battle is for, as the cliché states, ‘the hearts and minds’ of the people and knowing how you can influence them to inevitable change the environment to one of peace is essential.

David Galula, the French Army officer who lived counterinsurgency in Algeria, explains the human environment in which the struggle is taking place and how the population is divided. “In any situation, whatever the cause, there will be an active minority for the cause, a neutral

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 31.
majority, and an active minority against the cause.”

The soldiers in Afghanistan are interacting with all segments of the population and their direct conduct will ultimately decide the outcome of the struggle. The behavior drilled into a soldier going into a COIN environment needs to shift from teaching how to conduct a pat down and properly ziptie someone, to focusing more on active observation, and Muslim greetings and cultural respect behaviors. In those situations where the day can turn sour, or a firefight erupts in the middle of a village, unfortunately, soldiers are still trained to call in artillery and airstrikes better than the local language phrases of, “who is shooting at us?” or “hurry, protect your children.” These key moments are when people feel the presence of the Americans the most. It is also at these key moments that the most good can be done to successfully show the people that harming them is not our objective. Providing security and stability is.

In order to influence what Galula calls the neutral majority, it takes time and practice of a daily routine of showing respect and being observant of local wishes. Afghanistan’s environment and cultures can shift from valley to valley and it becomes the responsibility of the soldiers on the ground to actively seek out and learn about the subtle differences. Translating this directive into action becomes a task that involves reshuffling ordinary rank structure and unit protocol. As Kilcullen points out, teaching and practicing counterinsurgency becomes a basic task of the basic soldier.

Not everyone is good at counterinsurgency. Many people don’t understand the concept, and some who do can’t execute it. It is difficult, and in a conventional force only a few people will master it. Anyone can learn the basics, but a few naturals do exist. Learn how to spot these people and put them into positions

---


92
where they can make a difference. Rank matters far less than talent a few good men under a smart junior non-commissioned officer can succeed in counterinsurgency, where hundreds of well-armed soldiers under a mediocre senior officer will fail.24

Operating along such terms requires flexibility and resilience. Afghanistan is not known for its easy conquest and this fact has frustrated every major military that has occupied its territories. Planning for Afghanistan is like trying to predict the path of a storm, past experience and traditional models of theory can be helpful but in the end, one can only adapt and adjust while events are unfolding.

‘Having a plan’ refers to Kilcullen’s principle that will be discussed last in this thesis. Although it seems elementary, the concept of planning in a COIN environment, especially planning for success, relies heavily on actions that cannot be predicted or controlled from a distance or a reasonable window of opportunity beforehand. It is first noteworthy to realize that American military planners did not anticipate an insurgency in 2001 after 9-11. The Taliban government was notoriously brutal and international outrage at their behavior was well established. Entering the country and eliminating their leadership was relatively swiftly. The naivety that overtook angry political leaders in the wake of 9-11 is often confused with resolve and determination. President Bush undoubtedly was under extreme pressure to react to 9-11 and frankly, the nation as a whole was seeking a response. Unfortunately, the response to 9-11 was anticipated by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. They anticipated the reaction of a powerful nation under attack. Much like the Japanese knew that bombing Pearl Harbor would start a war. No academic analysis was done beforehand and a fallout assessment was left to a handful of

24 Kilcullen, Twenty-Eight Articles, 4.
Afghan experts who were tapped from various universities. Much like the later prediction of invading Iraq, the idea that American troops would be ‘greeted with open arms’ and treated as ‘liberators’ felt sufficient enough for the public opinion to warrant the invasion.

Almost a decade later, the most recent assessment of the conflict is troublesome. A central theme of this review has been that American forces were unprepared and unwilling to invest time in understanding the environment before entering Afghanistan. Therefore, several key lessons should be taken into account and integrated into the overall objective of securing the people and establishing a functioning government. Little evidence suggests that military planners consulted recent Afghan history and moreover, the Pashtun dilemma that still remains central to any solution or hope of sectarian peace. However, the foresight of several key individuals such a General David Petraeus and Lt. Colonel John Nagl provided the effort with a reference. The Army-Marine Corp Counterinsurgency Field Manual was complied, revised, edited and published in a record time. Army manuals are notoriously late and oftentimes irrelevant and although FM 3-24 as it has come to be known, is not a plan per se, it does provide exactly what a COIN environment requires, flexibility. As mentioned before, COIN is a company level effort and junior officers are responsible for a great amount. Their actions and efforts will ultimately determine success or failure. In order to plan and create measurable benchmarks of success that incorporate people and their security-the main goal in COIN-junior officers must be granted an unprecedented level of discretion and they themselves exercise sage-like wisdom. Training still revolves around solider tasks and only a select few receive the time intensive language and culture training to operate in a COIN environment. In order to bring all parties to the same level
of understanding what the outcome should be and the tools and strategies used to get there, there must be a doctrinal change in how training, deployment, and ultimately battles are fought. Rules of engagement, those guidelines that dictate when force can be used, must inevitably be tightened and extreme caution displayed under enemy action. The risk of civilian casualties and damage to religious or cultural property can devastate the fragile progress that is cultivated over time, and over tea. The passive majority that Galula mentions must be prioritized, protected, and consulted at all stages of any operation. Junior level officers and the men directly under them are where this interaction takes place and any higher scheme should request input and be open to critique from this level. Otherwise, tragedy becomes only a matter of time, much like the incident involving the killed young girls and the Ranger regiment.

A key recommendation is that planning for counterinsurgency operations should not begin with the military, but from the people it involves. As mentioned before, holding jirgas, taking surveys, observing patterns among the population and requesting advice from the population must happen in every location where a military presence is established. Where this is happening, the process needs to be protected, reinforced and encouraged to grow and multiply. Junior officers should take the first step when they first enter an environment and establish their presence. They should do their homework, literally, and talk to everyone they can before they hit the ground. Ultimately, they will realize very soon how difficult there tour will be depending on the actions they take as soon as they arrive. Unlearning a lot of their combat training may be extreme, but certainly learning how to tame it is key. Oftentimes going in with a plan entails the attitude that whatever it takes to accomplish the plan is necessary. In other words, ‘make it
happen.’ However, holding strongly to such a mentality is essentially counterproductive because COIN requires constant readjusting and revisiting stated goals.

Conversely, entering the environment and simply hoping for the best is not possible either. Kilcullen says, “One approach is to identify basic stages in your operation: e.g., establish dominance, build local networks, marginalize the enemy. Make sure you can easily transition between phases, both forward and backward in case of setbacks. Just as the insurgent can adapt his activity to yours, you must have a simple enough plan to survive setbacks without collapsing.”25 Flexibility and the realization that decisions and policy are best made and adjusted at the bottom levels is now more of a reality than it once was. Administrators and bureaucrats far removed from the ground are often too slow to realize that one policy is no longer applicable, and too slow to study and implement an effective new policy before its utility runs its course. In Afghanistan, these guidelines translate into practices that are quickly determining the outcome of the conflict. Instead of “establish dominance, build local networks, marginalize the enemy”, establish rapport, build friendships, secure the population would do much better in terms of tactical difficulty. This shift in approach is what this review, has recommended in the form of ground level initiative and empowerment on both the part of the coalition and local population.

This thesis has attempted to shed light on the complicated history of Afghanistan, how those unique circumstances created a perfect storm for the current campaign. Objective review of the history and culture of a people before invasion has not been an accepted practice of modern militaries. While intelligence agencies and academics are consulted in the process, their

25 Kilcullen, Twenty-Eight Articles, 4.
assessments and judgments are often only a footnote to politicians eager to act. A major factor in Afghanistan is the political and tribal condition of its fractured and troubled Pashtun majority. Had adequate review of their narrative and history been implemented into a political strategy, more than what has taken place thus far, Afghanistan would arguably enjoy a tribal federalism that would make governing and security a local concern, as it has historically been, despite superpower and regional ambitions. Since the way forward will inevitably be more complicated than any one player may plan for or anticipate, an attitude of partnership and respect is in order.

NGOs are ideal for fostering this kind of work and although some organizations may display reservations about collaborating with military units, at least having in place protocols and understandings would alleviate concerns in times of emergency or disaster. Each of these recommendations and assessments deserve doctoral level work and although the scope of this review has been limited to the requirements of a master’s thesis, it would be appropriate to offer a few key recommendations in the hopes that they may at least be a part of the literature, however tertiary.
CONCLUSION

The Afghanistan conflict represents several dilemmas but most concerning is the issue of human security. Human security is key to bringing peace to the country, even in the face of terrorism and sometime indiscriminate military bombing and raids. The people of Afghanistan are surviving through a period intense international scrutiny and destabilizing influences of corruption, an insurgency with no sight in end, and the growing pains of reaching member status in the community of nations. The last 30 years for the country have left Afghanistan a country in name only. No stable government, no national identity, and a serious lack of economic and security assurance has traumatized the people to the point of near hopelessness. Despite such a bleak history and such a troublesome state that the country still finds itself in, the strategy is reasonably easy to conceptualize and moreover, straightforward in its theoretical application. The following recommendations address a few fundamental issues that could potentially ease the transition of authority and responsibility if implemented and reinforced through sustained efforts by internal and external partners.

Respect for basic human rights in a conflict environment is difficult because warfare is a bloody, chaotic ordeal and no reasonable expectation to respect human rights is possible in the fog of war. However, Afghanistan is not in a state of war that the world was so familiar with during the last century. Conventional conflict and large armies could distinguish between civilians and innocent people. Uniformed soldiers fought uniformed soldiers. However, in a counterinsurgency, the human rights issue is paramount not only from a moral and legal standpoint, but also from a tactical and strategic point of view. In the very insightful book, The
**Ultimate Weapon is No Weapon**, this issue is framed in terms of providing basic human needs first. “In human security operations, the goal is protecting civilians, not defeating an enemy. This means that human rights, including the rights to life, education, clean water and housing must be respected even in the midst of conflict. If they are not, outside interventions can fuel insurgencies.”¹ The right to life, education, clean water and housing, are actually very reasonable starting points that need to be put into perspective with other rights that tend to be ahead of such needs. Implementing democracy, religious freedom, free speech and other “higher freedoms’ could be better conceptualized in terms of priority by placing them on the hierarchy of needs outline by Professor Abraham Maslow.² Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and the model that counterinsurgency advocates can be absorbed in application by continuously provided that which the competing insurgency cannot. Creating safe spaces, wells, schools, roads, economic projects and the ability of the local jirga to feel empowered is essential. The abstract freedoms that frankly, are of little immediate concern to rural farmers is a topic best discussed in context and a set of priorities that can eventually be approached once the lower needs are met on a case by case basis. Urban, educated, and wealthy Afghans are more inclined to take part in higher freedoms because many of their basic needs are already met. Security, jobs, personal relationships, and shelter are more problematic where insurgent activity is higher, therefore, local efforts by local coalition commanders need the tools to address the basic needs first in terms of human development. Too often the reason and story soldiers are told to convey to the Afghan villages is


that they are trying to build a relationship and presence of the Afghan government and that is why they should cooperate, because it’s the legal and patriotic thing to do.

Addressing people’s needs in the order of their importance can quickly become a powerful tool in the arena of public opinion. Although in Afghanistan we have a full spectrum of initiatives at all levels of needs being developed, such as schools and clinics from a counterinsurgency perspective, there needs to be a better job of reporting and making known the progress the international community can offer at the basic levels to the Afghans. The Taliban are unable to build infrastructure, they do not place great emphasis on any education other than religious indoctrination,\(^3\) and their economic policies are in most cases illegal.\(^4\) Afghans, like people everywhere, just want to live in peace and carry on in a respectable way.

In a war-ravaged country like Afghanistan, most people do not ask for much. Although Afghanistan is not suffering from widespread starvation, clean drinking water and shelter remains a problem. Each winter a crises looms as temperatures drop and food aid slows down. Many people huddle together amid bombed out ruins the checker the capital. What more pressing concern is there than providing basic needs to the innocent people? More importantly, what greater aid could be provided than the ability to help the Afghan people take care of themselves and feel confident in their own security, thus allowing for grassroots development to advance. The lack of coordination between different organizations was mentioned elsewhere in this study, but it should be emphasized if any sustained development is to take shape, there must

---


be networks of organizations, whether military civilian or government, who can work together to provide shelter, food and water in any circumstance, at any time. This concern simply speaks to the basic level of need and the prerequisite before any other form of aid can or should be offered. Furthermore, when attempts to address higher needs happen first, without addressing fundamental ones, like education or providing the option to participate in elections, the results can be mixed and often are simply not sustainable. Evidence of this was evident in the disproportionate and highly contested 2009 Presidential election. Hamid Karzai’s victory was overshadowed by the scandal of ballot box rigging, intimidation, and the overall outcome of a unbalanced ethnic representation in the Parliament. The people were not guaranteed security and freedom to move about on election day, an event that was coordinated and assisted by ISAF. Instead of providing security in general throughout the rest of the year, the coalition forces focused on a political objective that portrayed a healthy Afghan democracy in action. The reality was true security was ultimately non-existent in the remote regions where it is needed most and the result was non-participation of a key segment of Afghan society—the rural poor.

The lackluster participation in elections, the vacant schools, and increased participation in the insurgency are all a result of this neglect on the part of the central government. The last point is especially poignant because in most cases, young men, the breadwinners of most Afghan families, are paid a basic salary by the Taliban to carry out attacks and work with insurgents. If
$150 dollars a month can provide food and shelter to a family, there is a strong incentive to do whatever it takes to earn a living by whatever means necessary.\textsuperscript{5}

Human security, the essential prerequisite to empowering locals, is essentially an emphasis on the population more than the effort to go after insurgents. As Beebe and Kaldor note:

\begin{quote}
Human security is both an ends and a means. If a human security approach were to be adopted in Afghanistan, the goal would be the security of the ordinary Afghans. At present, the goal of Western operations in Afghanistan is the defeat of what are seen as foreign enemies. As President Obama put it in his announcing the surge at West point on December 1, 2009: “Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacities to threaten America and our allies in the future.”\textsuperscript{6}

The military only adopted COIN as its strategy within the last few years and despite the shift in thinking it represents, a realization that the framework is incomplete is a slow process. Were the military to again shift its focus from chasing the enemy while securing the population, to simply securing the population and assisting in providing basic needs, the outcome would be much more in line with providing basic human security and ultimately bringing Afghanistan to a state of self sufficiency. Resistance to such a prerogative or mission is expected. However, as events and time carry on, the realization that this same combat effective organization could be a serious force for good and peace will increase and hopefully be accepted as a permanent function for Afghanistan and other places in need of assistance.
\end{quote}


No one disagrees that Afghanistan should have been handled differently. This thesis has argued that counterinsurgency work is a case by case affair and the 21st century era may well be an environment in which insurgencies and civil wars are a dominant form of conflict. If the U.S. seeks to maintain its interests, and more importantly uphold the ideals that it stands by, military engagements must acknowledge that conventional force no longer accomplishes the mission.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


http://www.namsa.nato.int/Demil/back_e.htm.


