



## The Maneuver Company in Afghanistan Establishing Counterinsurgency Priorities at the District Level

Colonel Michael R. Fenzel, U.S. Army

*The basic unit of counterinsurgency warfare is the largest unit whose leader is in direct and continuous contact with the population. This is the most important unit in counterinsurgency operations, the level where most of the practical problems arise, where the war is won or lost.*

—David Galula in *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*

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PHOTO: Observation Point 1 near Forward Operating Base Tillman in Gayan District of Eastern Paktika Province, manned by Attack Company of Task Force Eagle (1-503d Airborne), May 2008. (U.S. Army, Chaplain (Major) Kevin Guthrie)

**T**HE RECENT SHIFT in national concern from Iraq to Afghanistan and the increase in forces committed by the Obama administration have directed greater attention to the current problems in Afghanistan. United States forces and coalition partners are working on many fronts to secure a stable future for the country, but they face more than a few obstacles. At the macro level, the Afghan central government is weak and plagued by corruption and indifference to the plight of its rural constituency, yet without tribal accord, the government has no real chance of extending its reach to the rest of the country. The Afghan National Army, Police, and Border Police are increasing their numbers and improving their skills but, with the exception of a few exceptional Afghan National Army battalions, they are not yet capable of operating on their own. The poppy fields and drug trade in southern and eastern Afghanistan continue to flourish. The border with Pakistan remains porous enough for a resurgent Taliban to use it as its primary and most unfettered means of infiltration into remote rural sections of the country. These are just a few of the many problems for the government of Afghanistan and the U.S.-led coalition.

Many authors, strategists, and politicians have offered measured opinions and recommendations on how to improve the situation, but most agree that to fix these problems and allow Afghanistan to develop without the constant pressure of an insurgency, we must establish and maintain security and develop governance in the rural districts.

Completing these tasks may appear impossible to a casual observer of the conflict. Indeed, while fighting a growing insurgency, coalition casualties mount.

Historically, the rural population in modern Afghanistan has rejected all large-scale reforms attempted by a central government. Unfortunately, change acceptable to the tribes will simply not come from the center. Establishing security in this war-torn land is achievable only if we focus our efforts and resources at the district level, where the sub-tribes are culturally dominant.

Nowhere in Afghanistan is this more pressing than along the border of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). It is commonly accepted that the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and other foreign fighters use the FATA as a safe haven from which to plan, resource, stage, and launch attacks in the border districts and deeper into Afghanistan's interior. Since 2006, the number of foreign insurgents involved in the border fight has substantially increased, which strengthens the insurgency and decreases security. The struggle to secure this area has become the front line in the counterinsurgency fight and the coalition's most important strategic task.

If we can establish security and stabilize the border provinces and districts in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the accompanying momentum may guide the rest of the country to a sustainable peace. The problem is that the insurgents are most effective in these rural areas, and limited troop levels make challenging them on a wider scale a confounding proposition.

I propose a fundamental shift in the way we think about fighting the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. To set the conditions for success, we need to engage tribal leaders and establish a district-level security architecture in which the district governor is the key leader elected by the *shura*. In conjunction, we need a bottom-up focus that places the coalition maneuver company commander where he can work closely with the district governor. Next, we need to redistribute critical assets now located at the provincial level down to the district level. Afghan security forces should be redistributed to districts and rural areas, and we should dismantle entities like the provincial reconstruction teams and reassign those assets to the maneuver battalions for use in the maneuver companies at the district level. Finally, we need to integrate native Afghan intellectual capital into our maneuver company operations to improve cultural engagement and provide expertise in critical development skills.

## Tribal Influence

To create the environment for such advances, we begin by reinforcing the role of the tribes. We've taken the first steps toward establishing security when we recognize and embrace the prestige and broad power base of tribal elders and accept the influence of the mullahs. Invading armies throughout history have failed to understand the tribal structure that has always defined this nation. Breaking this troubling paradigm is the first challenge for a refocused U.S.-led coalition. We cannot engage just a handful of tribes for this mission. There is no one ruler in Kabul that can consolidate the loyalty of all tribes in Afghanistan. Rather, we must reach out to every sub-tribe in each of the 398 districts across the country. The real power and potential in Afghanistan exists among the local tribes in the rural areas.

Developing governance capacity at the district level is a low-level affair, but hugely important. Currently, provincial governors appoint district governors, often favored friends and acquaintances, not men of the people or even of the local tribes. The vast majority of provincial council members do not live in the provinces they represent. For this reason,



U.S. Army, Chaplain Major Kevin Guthrie

Akram Khapalwak, then provincial governor of Paktika Province, addresses a grand shura of elders and villagers in Naka district, Paktika Province, August 2007.

provincial councilmen are almost entirely irrelevant to their constituencies. The current flawed process of selection, rather than election, almost guarantees that the appointed district governor will be irrelevant as well. This method rarely yields a close connection with the elders—it must be changed to meet the cultural threshold of what is acceptable and suitable.

Everything of intrinsic value to Afghans is rooted in honor, reputation, and familial pride. The current method of selecting district governors is arbitrary and antithetical to the tribal culture and Pashtun traditions of selecting leaders. There should be no quibbling with a method that meets the demands of democratic traditions, eschews the non-inclusive self-selection modes of warlordism, and reinforces the real power and influence of Afghan communities—the shura of elders.

**Setting conditions for success.** Counterinsurgency forces routinely engage the leaders of the district sub-tribes, or shura elders, throughout Afghanistan. Once legitimate governors take office, the coalition must integrate them into the counterinsurgency effort. The key component for successful counterinsurgency efforts is the coalition maneuver company and its commander. A company commander is, in effect, the counterpart to the Afghan district governor. The tribal elders are not his counterparts; indeed, it is the responsibility of the company commander to ensure that the district governor maintains a close relationship with the elders and acts as the immediate interlocutor between them and the provincial government.

When these young commanders have proper direction and focus, they can identify where to channel resources and effort in a way no other counterinsurgent leader can replicate. Much of their insight comes from the weekly shuras in the district centers where they are often guests. District centers are the focal point for all government and economic activity and clearly places where counterinsurgent forces must have a significant presence. Coalition forces that have spent considerable time among the people understand that these district centers are the places that must become well-defended Afghan National Security Force bastions and political centers from which the district governors function. A district governor should conduct business with the full backing and strength of a sizeable Afghan police and security force operating from the district

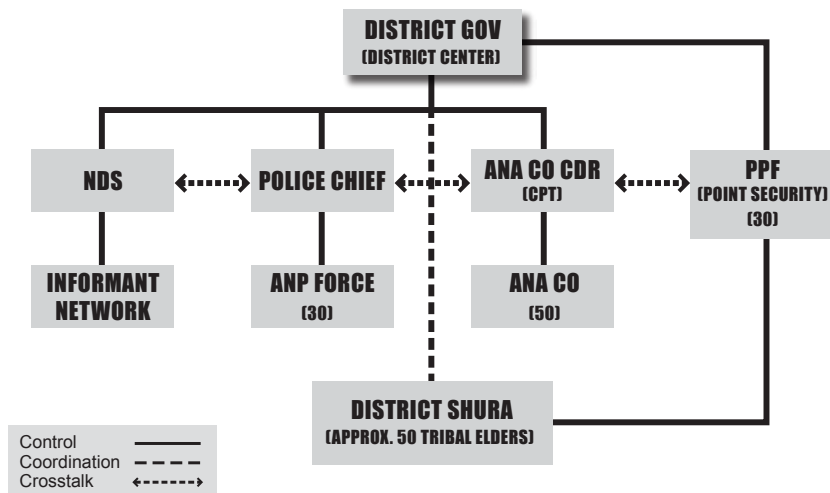
center. Where better to position Afghan forces in a rural Afghan counterinsurgency than among rural Afghans?

The vision for effective local government administration in Afghanistan includes the district center as the point of initiation for all Afghan-led political, development, and security operations. The district center is already a local nerve center—it must also become the security epicenter. This is the first fundamental change to effect across the country. There are six important steps to take in every district in every province:

- Tribal elders within a district shura must elect a district governor they trust.
- A well-trained police chief must be appointed and he should have no less than 30 police officers to maintain order.
- District centers must be reinforced with coalition support and funds for governance and economic activity (with a designated development stipend to facilitate reconstruction programming).
- Each Afghan district must have no less than one company of the Afghan National Army garrisoned at the district center; their mission must be to conduct counterinsurgency operations and their primary task must be to engage daily with the population.
- A point security force must be emplaced (Afghan public protection force of 30 guards) in each district that reports directly to the district governor and guards the district center and other sites at risk of Taliban attack (i.e., girls' schools, bazaars, etc.).
- A district-level and native Afghan National Directorate of Security chief must be assigned and, through appropriate coalition oversight, a robust informant network developed to counter Taliban human intelligence efforts and provide early warning.

These six critical steps would set the stage for an immediate counterinsurgency advance because they focus exclusively on the protection of the Afghan people, the center of gravity in this war. The adoption of this district-centric approach places the execution of the war at the appropriate level.

**Blended security architecture.** Putting this strategic approach into operation demands a security architecture with an appropriate blend of command, control, coordination, and crosstalk among the key players. Figure 1 illustrates how the district-level structure might look. Establishing these baseline capabilities would empower district governors to



**Figure 1. Optimal Afghan district security structure.**

move beyond their understandable preoccupation with self-preservation and begin working for the people in the villages that comprise each district. The direct link between the district governor and the district shura is deliberate. The district governor should be answerable to the shura of elders that elect him to the office. This will require a paradigm shift and support for this method at the national level in Kabul.

Once these changes are in place in the districts, the governors will be in a much better position to counter Taliban intimidation. A great deal of credence is paid to the importance of governance and development in Afghanistan, but until there is an environment where the average Afghan feels empowered to resist the armed thugs that fill the ranks of the Taliban, the insurgency will continue to grow. We must integrate the district governor into the security architecture and support him over time to ensure sustained advances. Until this type of structure exists at the local level, no political official will enjoy credibility among the tribes. Stability in Afghanistan will emerge at the district level through a structure that reinforces cultural

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traditions and provides an armed force to underwrite the authority of a district governor elected by the district's tribal elders.

## **Optimizing Afghan National Security Forces**

The current number of coalition forces available in Afghanistan, even with the original 2009 surge of 21,000 Soldiers and Marines, is insufficient to combat the Taliban's district offensives. The coming surge of 30,000 additional U.S. troops should address this shortfall, but it is not likely to change

insurgent tactics or what up until now has been an effective strategy. Despite what the high number of coalition casualties since 2008 reflects, the Taliban and foreign fighters focus more on preventing cooperation and severing the link between the coalition force and local Afghans than they do on direct action against coalition forces. This adjustment in insurgent strategy was a matter of necessity. Because U.S. and other coalition forces have continually dealt significant blows to the insurgents in direct contact, the insurgents have turned to coercion, intimidation, and terrorism to send a clear message to the Afghan population—"coalition and Afghan security forces cannot protect you." The insurgents reiterate this message in night letters with accompanying threats to the local population. Historically, the Taliban has targeted district governors, contractors, and coalition force base employees and their families. The Taliban has displayed a knack for attacking targets of opportunity. Increasingly, these targets have become Afghan security forces and Afghan Public Protection Force personnel. As an insurgent strategy, this approach is very effective in keeping counterinsurgent forces off balance and preventing the population from believing that things have somehow improved.

The center of gravity of this mission is protecting the Afghan people and assisting them in meeting their basic needs. This requires robust Afghan security resources at the local and district level, not at the regional level. This comprehensive effort

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should start with a more optimal distribution of Afghan National Security Forces.

The Afghan National Security Forces living on large forward operating bases need to move into the rural districts where the population is at risk and position themselves in the locations that can best facilitate constant engagement with the people. Only then can we effectively cross the pronounced cultural divide into the tribal areas of rural Afghanistan. In order for Afghan National Security Forces to become capable enough to meet this challenge, every single unit and detachment must formally partner with coalition forces. This will only lead to positive effects. Some of these changes are already underway.

**Afghan National Army.** With the current top-down approach, Afghan National Security Forces are often in general support at the provincial level with specific fixed site security responsibilities. We must change this relationship to make the district level the ascendant strategic focus. The Afghan National Army is growing steadily in capability. However, its soldiers are typically deployed in battalion-sized elements and centrally located. In fact, the rural areas generally do not benefit from the existing array of these forces in Afghanistan. We need to consider where they can achieve the most positive effects in counterinsurgency terms.

Optimally, one company of the Afghan National Army should be in each district and one coalition maneuver company should partner with it. These partnerships are necessary among the district governor, the district police chief, the Afghan National Army company commander and battalion commanders, and the coalition force company commander. Depending on the level of violence in a given district and the district's size, it may well be feasible for one coalition force company to manage security in more than one district. In fact, in some cases one maneuver company could handle up to

three districts, though there are obvious exceptions in larger districts. The commander would become the liaison to the district governors and have regular dealings with his counterparts. He would become the subject matter expert responsible for overall security and development in the districts. In this scenario, the primary task for coalition forces would be to achieve and maintain security, apply resources, help in reconstruction and development, assist the district governors in matters of governance, and increase capacity with partnered Afghan security forces. This would continue until the Afghans are able to do the work themselves. Until they reach that point though, coalition forces must take the lead to establish a secure environment and foster growth.

Each Afghan National Army battalion currently deploys to a major forward operating base intended as a launching pad to project force. However, these forward operating bases have essentially become shields from insurgent forces and impediments to maintaining contact with the rural populations. Ideally, one brigade-sized element of the Afghan National Army should deploy to each province in Afghanistan. In certain larger provinces (with more districts) or where the threat is substantially higher, up to two Afghan National Army brigades may be appropriate. Afghan National Army battalions should be distributed over a series of districts and address security in no more than three districts. At least one Afghan National Army company should have a headquarters in each district. A "company-per-district" strategy should drive refinements to the Afghan National Army battalion and brigade battlespace. Every Afghan National Army element—whether company, battalion, or brigade—should have a coalition force counterpart unit to facilitate training, drive combined operations, and provide reinforcement *in extremis*. The logical formula is coalition maneuver companies paired with Afghan National Army battalions, and coalition battalions paired with Afghan National Army brigades.

At the district level, Afghan National Army companies should conduct counterinsurgency operations partnered with coalition forces based out of district centers, rather than from forward operating bases. This partnership must encompass all operations, from patrolling to training to regular engagement and standard counterinsurgency operations. Although this proposal may appear overly

prescriptive, it is the only effective means to build a genuine and lasting capacity in the Afghan National Army and to strengthen the Afghan National Security Force's connection to the Afghan people. Both of these goals are imperative to success.

**Afghan National Police.** The Afghan National Police suffer from a similarly poor distribution of forces. Often the provincial police chief has only a small pool of dependable Afghan police under his control. This makes clear the dearth of well-trained police available at this stage in the war. The police also suffer from insufficient resourcing, ineffective recruiting, and poor local training compared to the army. Ideally, the police would have no less than a platoon-sized force (30 police officers) in each district to back up the district governor and provide a credible deterrent to insurgents.

The appointment of an effective district police chief is critical to this process. In many ways, the mission of the Afghan National Police is more complex than that of the Afghan National Army because the police are responsible for enforcing Afghan law. The police need to focus on maintaining order, rooting out crime, and protecting the district center. Indeed, they should serve as the governor's police force and operate out of a police station adjacent to the district center to facilitate their subordinate relationship to the governor and his priorities.

The demand for manpower is a significant issue. In larger districts, there might be a need for satellite district centers and police stations, and multiple checkpoints in between them and the district center. Securing all these locations is an incredible manpower drain. This role should be shouldered by the Afghan Public Protection Force, or a point security force, a brilliant innovation already in place that keeps the Afghan security force focused on its core counterinsurgency mission.

Innovation is an incredibly effective tool in a counterinsurgency unless it distracts from fundamentals. However, when it comes to establishing an overarching security structure, we must keep in

mind that interactions through representatives, by either proxy or the Afghan Public Protection Force, cannot substitute for direct and constant contact with the population. The Afghan National Police must partner with other forces to optimize effectiveness and ensure direct contact with the Afghan people as the conflict continues. The Afghan National Police and Afghan National Army must routinely work together. At a more fundamental level, the seat of district-level government and focal point of counterinsurgency efforts must be both secure and dynamic.

**Afghan Border Police.** In districts along the border with Pakistan, the Afghan Border Police are charged with disrupting infiltration by the Taliban and foreign fighters. However, the border police are currently the most disorganized and least supported component of the security forces. Yet, in some districts, the border police are supplementing the Afghan National Police. The border police should focus exclusively on operating border combat outposts and checkpoints or they will lose their relevance as a part of the larger national security network. When coalition forces construct a combat outpost, a joint team of coalition forces and Afghan Border Police should initially operate the outposts along the border. When the border police are trained and strong enough, the coalition forces can pull back and let them handle it. The very nature of their mission requires that they work closely with the Afghan National Army to develop a sense of partnership and solidarity in the counterinsurgency fight.

The last refinement to the development of Afghan National Security Force capacity is the command relationship of the coalition force trainers to the maneuver battalion task force. Trainers must be responsive to the maneuver battalion and company task force priorities, instead of either developing their own independent priorities or following those of a distant headquarters detached from ongoing operations. Indeed, the coalition force trainers must be woven into a direct support relationship with the maneuver company to

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reinforce the already existing lines of control. For the training mission to be effective, coalition force trainers must be answerable to the maneuver battalion task force commander. Otherwise, there will always be the potential and even likelihood to work at cross purposes. Coalition training teams not directly responsible to a maneuver battalion task force commander may plan and conduct independent operations completely unaware of the threat picture or ongoing operations that may impact their plans. This is the complex reality of the training mission as it is carried out in the midst of a violent counterinsurgency. Training the Afghan security forces will always be a task that is carried out inside the combat mission, and it should be subordinate to that mission, given the consequences of failure. Partnership with the Afghans must be constant (both on patrols and in training)—we need to build their capacity and take the requisite and valuable time to coach, teach, and mentor. The combat mission is led by the maneuver force, and it is only logical that the training mission not ever be separated from it. The relationship of all security enablers to the maneuver task force must be clear and direct. It follows then that the reconstruction teams should fit into the same command structure.

## Push Down Critical Assets

Most important to this concept of reorganization in Afghanistan is empowering the company maneuver unit. We must meet the challenges unique to the Afghan counterinsurgency environment with new capabilities to lessen insurgent influence and provide a powerful advantage to the counterinsurgent. Key enablers and assets that perform more complex functions in the development realm have historically been distributed to the provincial and regional level. The value of these enablers at the district level is far greater, and the tactical impact is often immediate. These enablers have the potential to dramatically improve security and even achieve transformational effects.

To develop capacity at the district level we should consolidate certain critical assets at the maneuver company level. A maneuver company commander is the coalition lead at the local level for security, development, and governance. He is responsible for synchronizing the efforts of Afghan



U.S. Army, CPT Christopher Weid

**A paratrooper from Easy Company of Task Force Eagle (1-503d, 173d Airborne Brigade) on patrol in Orgun District of Paktika Province, February 2008.**

security forces and coalition enablers. If we keep development and security assets separate, efforts will be uncoordinated and fleeting at best, and damaging to district- and provincial-level counterinsurgency efforts at worst.

The provincial reconstruction team concept remains sound and still addresses a need that counterinsurgent strategists widely agree is imperative—building capacity and proceeding steadily along the development and governance lines of operation. Yet, eight years into the conflict, we must adapt the concept to the changed situation on the ground. The inefficiencies of the provincial reconstruction team model have become more apparent over the last three years. These teams need to be disassembled and the assets distributed to the district level to support counterinsurgency efforts in the rural areas and improve unity of command.

Provincial reconstruction teams are ill-equipped to address broader development and district-level governance challenges. Nearly all reconstruction teams are geographically separated from the rural sections of their assigned province, and they do not possess the capability to venture far beyond the population centers unless they plan their movements well in advance and operate in tandem with the maneuver

battalion task force. This is certainly no fault of theirs and would be the case regardless of how well a provincial reconstruction team functioned. Regardless of the wealth of talent infused into the teams, circumstances and conditions will always challenge them and put them at a disadvantage. The reality is that a provincial reconstruction team's infrequent contact at the district level has the potential to render the concerted efforts it makes a distraction from the development plan a maneuver company may already be in the midst of implementing.

Provincial reconstruction team architecture and location is not the only problem with the teams. One imperative that we must address is the absence of true unity of command. By definition, establishing the hierarchy of command in a conflict environment requires clear lines of responsibility and authority that are not open to interpretation or dispute in the field. Units that fall outside of these command lines can become "orphans on the battlefield" and far more vulnerable to enemy attacks than a cohesive force that works through one commander. In a post-conflict environment, this may evolve to a looser structure where the objective is to achieve a cooperative—if not harmonious—effort. But when an enemy is actively threatening all lines of operation, the responsibility must be that of one military commander at the appropriate level in each battalion-level sector.

To address the existing problems of cooperation and coordination, we must abolish the stand-alone provincial reconstruction team and integrate its assets into the maneuver task force at the battalion level. This should remain a Joint and interagency effort, given the unique talents and perspectives each service and department brings to it.

In this case, a major or lieutenant commander, rather than a lieutenant colonel or Navy commander, would be the commander. Under these conditions, the existing civil affairs B-Team (the provincial reconstruction team project management section

focused on brigade priorities) would then become part of the battalion civil affairs section to expand the maneuver battalion task force governance and development staff capabilities. The senior major would then become the seventh organic company level commander in the task force and the interagency representative advisor to the commander.

Instead of one internal civil affairs field team, there would be five developed for the maneuver battalion task force. One would work directly for each company level commander and become a formal part of their "company team," while the senior major and civil affairs company commander would consolidate and be responsive to their requirements with the dual hat of battalion S9. This system would create an organic capability to draw on during company level maneuver operations and engagements with the district governors.

Integrating these assets would require significant development funding, but as General David Petraeus said early on in Operation Iraqi Freedom, development dollars are as important as bullets in a counterinsurgency. Adopting this decentralized and maneuver-fused approach to development would dictate that all provincial reconstruction team funding earmarked for a given Afghan province be diverted to the maneuver task force at the battalion level and subsumed into its overall development budget.

This integration would empower the battalion-level commander to focus on areas of concern, synchronize mission with maneuver priorities without additional coordination or competition (with a provincial reconstruction team), and push the funds down to the company level for development in the districts. This new capability at the maneuver company level would become one of the two cornerstone initiatives for the counterinsurgency in rural Afghanistan. The other and more potent initiative would be adding native Afghan staff officers with critical expertise to the maneuver company.

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## **Integrating Afghan Intellectual Capital**

Recent policy discussions about the need for a civilian surge of U.S. government agency personnel with development expertise overlook a central point—suitable candidates already exist in



Afghanistan. We must reverse the flight of intellectual capital from rural areas to the cities. It is the rural areas where agricultural and innovative engagement expertise is most needed. Native Afghan cultural, agricultural, and communications experts are a powerful resource in this type of war. Each district requires certain assets and capabilities that native Afghan experts are in the best position to provide. While these experts would work for coalition forces, they would also be valuable for the district governor to use for governance and development purposes. In an agrarian society, these advisors would have a positive effect on the overall agricultural output in the district and help to develop a closer relationship between the population and local government.

Adding these key Afghan positions to a maneuver company headquarters would ideally have two predictable effects. First, it would produce a far superior product because these positions demand an in-depth understanding of cultural nuances that coalition forces can never possess. Second, the population's negative perception of the Afghan government would ideally diminish as a direct consequence of the increased responsiveness to the people's concerns and needs. And these effects would be felt none too soon, because most Afghans currently feel little connection with their government and lack confidence in its capabilities.

We should add three key Afghan positions to a company commander's counterinsurgency team—a native cultural adviser, an agricultural adviser, and an information operations specialist. The addition of these three Afghan professionals has the potential to transform a plodding

counterinsurgency effort at the district level into one that is vibrant and connected to the Afghan people. This small group of Afghan professionals would eventually become permanent members of the district governor's staff. In the end, this effort would focus on what the local community and tribes value and would build capacity. The creation of these three key Afghan positions at the district level would provide the capacity for substantial counterinsurgency progress and set the stage for development of a district governor's professional staff to sustain that progress after we leave. Figure 2 depicts how these three key positions and the Afghan National Security Force embedded tactical trainers would fit into the existing coalition maneuver company structure.

**Afghan cultural adviser.** In light of how critical culture awareness is in any counterinsurgency, and the vast challenge of grasping the nuances of tribal culture in Afghanistan, it is a wonder that the concept of assigning a native cultural adviser at the company level has not yet become formally established. A cultural adviser who is well educated and familiar with the sub-tribal structure and key-elders network in local areas of operation can work directly with a coalition company commander to prevent missteps that have negative effects on the operation.

The cultural adviser should advise the company commander on all matters concerning culture. In this capacity, the adviser would help coalition forces avoid pitfalls, understand cultural mores, and engage the population. Moreover, he could facilitate a close working relationship between the company commander and the district governor. A strong cultural adviser can help develop information operations messages to connect the district governor with the Afghan people. The adviser can take the governor's vision and a commander's intent—weave in Islamic principles, tenets of the Pashtunwali code and tribal history—and communicate with the population.

When I commanded Task Force Eagle in Afghanistan

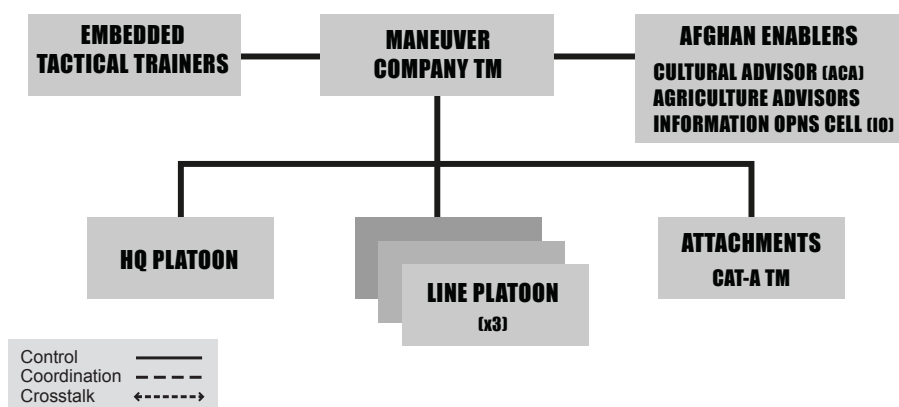


Figure 2. Expansion of coalition maneuver company assets.

from 2007 to 2008, we found ourselves tapping into the experience of the Afghan cultural adviser continuously. For example, in March 2008, an improvised explosive device killed four Afghan guards in the Bermel district of Paktika Province. The Afghan cultural adviser quickly created an information operations message condemning the attack. The message was so compelling that, for the first time, members of the local population conducted their own investigation, discovered the culprits and their location, and informed the Afghan district police chief, who arrested the terrorists responsible for the attack. This was not the first message crafted by the Afghan cultural adviser in the district, but it showed that consistent, compelling communication with the population can transform the environment. Developing civic pride is one thing, but working to improve every Afghan citizen's quality of life is quite another.

**Afghan agricultural adviser.** The vast majority of Afghans in the rural areas, where the Taliban have historically enjoyed freedom of movement, are farmers. An enabler who possesses agricultural expertise has the potential to be a powerful counterinsurgent weapon. The most important economic indicators in most areas of rural Afghanistan relate to agriculture. Because Afghanistan is a largely agrarian society, an adviser with a degree in agriculture should work with the company commander at the district level to develop, plan and carry out agricultural initiatives.

Such an advisor can be a useful tool for the district governor and coalition forces in developing a close relationship with the population. He may run seminars and courses for the local farmers to help them produce larger crops, conduct assessments, advise local farmers on irrigation projects, and distribute agricultural humanitarian assistance. Participants in agricultural seminars may improve their farming operations and perhaps receive a tool-kit, wheat and corn seed, or fruit tree saplings upon graduation.

Task Force Eagle arranged agricultural seminars to help improve agricultural production. The seminars became so popular in Paktika province that we hired an additional agricultural adviser for each company in our battalion task force. In addition, locals requested an agricultural radio program be broadcast on the local radio station. Farmers began asking advisors questions by mail and during visits to the district center. Clearly, such seminars and other initiatives can help the local government win over the population. Creating an institutionalized Afghan capability that focuses exclusively on developing and distributing this sort of critical information is the next logical step to make this approach systematic.

**Afghan information operations specialists.** The most effective information operations in the Afghan war are conducted by Afghans and supported by coalition forces. For best results, we need to fuse coalition force and Afghan information operations.

The company headquarters platoon should have an Afghan information operations cell composed of native Afghan experts familiar with the districts in question. One of the experts should be the advisor for the maneuver company commander, offering insights and proposing methods to "reach" the people most effectively. Another should work at the battalion level to coordinate battalion support for the company under the coordinating hand of the battalion fire support officer. At the company level, at least one Afghan specialist should program and announce radio material. The battalion-level cell should help create messages that resonate with the population and demonstrate that



U.S. Army

Afghan cornfields in Northern Bermel district of Paktika Province. Agricultural productivity increased substantially with a focused investment in subsidizing seed, fertilizer, and saplings, through formalized agricultural training and workshops in Eastern Paktika.

the Afghan district government (district governor) and coalition forces (company commander) speak with one voice to the population. The district governor would have the lead in these efforts, and the coalition force commander would play a supporting role, offering ideas, pressing for action where appropriate, and adding a degree of quality control to the system.

The Afghan information operations specialists can produce leaflets, run the radio station (if available), and ensure that all communications with the populace are well thought-out and effective. These Afghan professionals can play a critical role as they inevitably become the voice of the district government to the population and help break the cycle of rumors and lies propagated by the Taliban through night letters and other forms of intimidation. They could conduct interviews with the district police chief, Afghan National Army commanders, or the district governor to assist in getting important messages out to the people. Local mullahs, loyal to the Afghan government, could run radio shows coordinated by the Afghan information operations team to challenge the inflammatory rhetoric put forth in radical madrassas and mosques across the border in Pakistan. In Paktika province, the Afghan workers that ran the mobile radio station (called a “radio in a box”) typically received over 500 letters a week from the local population in an overwhelmingly favorable response to the programming. The letters ranged from requests for programming to both

pro-government and anti-Taliban poetry, essays, and songs designed to be read or sung on the air.

Adding positions for a native Afghan cultural adviser, agricultural adviser, and information operations specialist has the potential to provide formidable expertise to a counterinsurgency force. These Afghan experts might also advise on the best way to invest the development resources crucial to success in counterinsurgency operations. The possibilities to favorably shape the environment and create even greater opportunities to exploit are innumerable. Figure 3 illustrates relationships across a maneuver company’s sphere of influence. This model optimizes all assets and creates an atmosphere to unify effort at the company level.

### The Power of the People

With the ongoing policy debate surrounding the war in Afghanistan, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that, in the end, the success of the mission is not dependent upon the actions of the Taliban. The mission depends first on the people of Afghanistan contributing to a more secure environment, then on a dramatically improved performance of the Afghan National Security Forces, and only then on our efforts as a coalition force. The mission to establish a secure environment in Afghanistan can succeed, but with modifications to the distribution plan for Afghan national security forces and refinements to the command structure of enablers and tactical assets already in the fight, the momentum will swing toward greater stability.

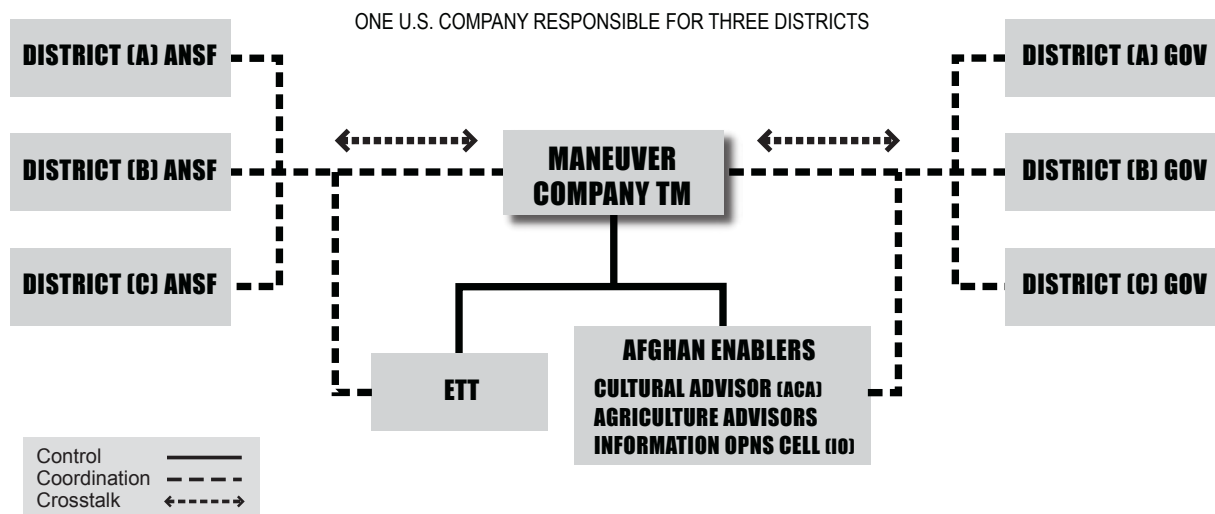


Figure 3. Proposed maneuver company counterinsurgency structure in Afghanistan.

***The mission depends first  
on the people of Afghanistan  
contributing to a more secure  
environment...***

We must make President Hamid Karzai and his provincial governors see the value of empowering the tribal shuras to elect their own district governors. The voice of rural Afghanistan would then emerge. Indeed, district centers must become the security epicenters where Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police co-locate and support a district governor in the daily business of engaging the people and addressing their needs and concerns. Longer-term stability in Afghanistan depends upon the creation of a district-level structure built around the leadership of district governors partnered with coalition maneuver company commanders and a full complement of Afghan security forces.

The more urgent proposition is to redistribute Afghan National Army forces from forward operating bases into Afghan communities and rural areas to live among the people and partner with the Afghan National Police. This move alone would send a powerful message to the people and to the Taliban that the stability and future of the nation is in the hands of the Afghan people and protected by a unified security force. Although the signature elements of this reorganization proposal are Afghan led, coalition maneuver company commanders must partner with district governors and their Afghan

National Army battalion commander counterparts to coordinate governance and security efforts.

Structures that worked well through the first several years of the war must evolve to this decentralized approach to countering the insurgency. An important feature of this restructuring plan is disassembling provincial reconstruction teams in favor of a company level construct that focuses on distributing robust development assets to the maneuver company and interagency advisers to the battalion task force level. We must expand the battalion-level development function to address the distribution of development teams to every maneuver company and empower them to manage more development funds and projects.

The cornerstone of this new tactical realignment of assets will be the integration of Afghan intellectual capital into maneuver companies to assume roles as both conduits and primary staff to their district governor counterparts as native Afghan cultural and agricultural advisers and information operations team specialists. They can provide a stronger capability to wage the counterinsurgency than has yet been at our disposal. Afghans must win this war, but an appropriate cross-fertilization of assets and capabilities will facilitate that victory. **MR**

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