Thoughts on The Battle for the Minds:
IO and COIN in the Pashtun Belt

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PHOTO: U.S. Marine Corps 1LT Michael Kuiper, with 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, talks with an Afghan man during a civil affairs group patrol in the Nawa District of Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 19 July 2009. Kuiper is talking with citizens in order to gauge the needs of the populace and provide information to the U.S. Agency for International Development. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by SSgT William Greeson)

COMBAT OPERATIONS PROVIDE intellectual comfort. It is what we, the practitioners of the military art, are trained and practiced at. It is what we have done historically. Nonlethal, economic, development-based governance operations are less familiar and provide little comfort. Ends are unclear and progress is incremental. A common cry, both from critics and in our internal debate, is "This is not in our lane." Putting aside the debate over who should "own" and resource such operations, the fact is that in the counterinsurgency (COIN) of eastern Afghanistan, the lion's share of nonlethal activity has fallen to the military. We are there on the ground with personnel, organizational support, and resources. The military can fight a counterinsurgency. The expertise and skills that civilian agencies possess—though perhaps more suited for roles in governance, development, and economic advancement—are not necessarily available for this fight because of security, bureaucratic, and political hurdles.

The essence of COIN is nearly 100 percent political. Politics is all about people, and in this case, people are the center of gravity. These battles require human understanding and skills outside our comfort zone. These human skills require different tools, those enabled by an effective information campaign, smart use of a development strategy tied to basic services, and understanding the power of economics to alter the human landscape on a local level one village at a time.[1] Security underwrites a COIN strategy but is wasted without proper means, mechanisms, and institutions that connect people to their government and separate them from the insurgents. Such proper means, mechanisms, and institutions are new territory for conventional forces, territory that lies squarely in the realm of nonlethal operations.

Working side by side with maneuver units, provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) focus their efforts on the nonlethal governance and economic lines of operation. Some PRTs fight; others have no need to. Some PRTs center their efforts on active counterinsurgency; others operate further along the stability operations spectrum. PRTs formally integrate Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, Department of Agriculture, and military efforts. Provincial reconstruction teams are incorporated in the brigade combat team command structure and are tied directly to interagency efforts

U.S. Marine CPT Brent Molaski, an information operations officer assigned to Marine Expeditionary Brigade-Afghanistan, provides security during a patrol in the vicinity of Kaneshin, Afghanistan, 12 December 2009.

and reporting. They often serve as the palatable point of entry for the international community and nongovernmental organizations at the local level. To those accustomed to strict unity of command, they are organizationally messy, through necessity. No two PRTs are the same. Provincial reconstruction teams are well positioned to act in the information operations realm, as they are local, informed, on the ground, and tied closely to the government at the district and provincial level.

A Match of Local Human Skills

Good information operations (IO) are hard. We often try to conduct them in an environment that we dimly understand. Sometimes it is as if we're playing "go fish" at the blackjack table. Some of the world's best poker players are those who have grown up in the modern battlefields of insurgency. Local people develop survival skills. They develop the ability to balance the demands of embedded insurgents connected by family and tribe against the potential gains of working with government and coalition forces who bring resources, education, health care, and economic opportunity.

I cannot stress the words "economic opportunity" enough. In the poker game of counterinsurgency, an appeal to embedded entrepreneurs who desire to expand their economic sphere and move a couple of rungs up Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a card well played. Business opportunity is a game changer, because it gets to the fundamental social and economic incentives that drive behavior. While populations affected by insurgent influences are living in fear owing to lack of security, they have to play the middle to stay alive. These populations know the score better than we do, and they understand the game. The fact that it is a deadly game played for the highest of stakes doesn't eliminate the need to know how to play it, keep a seat at the table, and know when to hold, fold, and play the right cards. The key is to split the seams, sway the middle, and work the margins.

If you are naïve about the rules of the game, and if you do not expect to "get played," you will probably lose your seat at this poker table. We Americans instinctively think we possess the panacea for the wicked problems of the world. This arrogance handicaps us. We seldom understand

how to exercise tactical patience, and typically do not slow down enough to listen. True partnering with the communities and religious and government leaders involves a lot of listening. The intensely local nature of this insurgency demands local responses. Afghanistan is a conglomeration of local entities, not a homogenous zone where one set of rules will work. Decentralization and disaggregation of efforts are the keys to success. Overarching polices that fail to capture local sensitivities or heed local voices are counterproductive. Americans, it seems, are predisposed to solve "problems" they perceive—often to the exclusion of those who know better and have local knowledge and local understanding. Hindered by our lack of immersion knowledge and cultural understanding, we rely on security requirements while forgetting to listen and watch the other players in the game. This neglect, frankly, gets worse up the chain of command, because security requirements exclude more and more of the relevant Afghan opinions that should matter. The deciders make decisions deaf to local voices and local reason.

Engaging a Complex Society

Just because villagers in a remote mountain valley live simply does not mean that they are simple. Like all people, the Pashtuns of eastern Afghanistan are far more sophisticated than we, in our hubris, give them credit for. Information operations messages need to reflect the subtlety and sophistication of the audience, and be crafted *and* delivered free of the crippling obtuseness Americans normally approach them with. The population—the center of gravity—has a more nuanced understanding of the players, the stakes, and the movements of the insurgents than counterinsurgent forces have.

The World Health Organization polio vaccination program was a successful information operation that coalition forces alone simply could not have pulled off. The Kunar provincial governor and I were concerned that the people would reject the polio vaccination program as they had in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces, also heavily Pashtun areas. There, the Taliban had spread the rumor heard frequently in parts of Africa that the polio vaccination program was a "Zionist sterilization program," and the implementation had run into serious difficulties.

U.S. Marine CPL Jerry Weckesser collects information from local Afghans during a patrol in Nawa District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on 8 September 2009.

U.S. Marine Corps, LCPL John M. McCall

We immediately recognized that the solution had to be an Afghan one, and that we must identify anyone against the polio program as against the children of Kunar. The governor and director for public health initiated a public education campaign, engaging leaders at all levels of influence. The governor pitted his credibility against the Taliban's, and he was successful. The Taliban chose to give tacit support to the program, and thousands of children were vaccinated against the disease. The Afghan solution was nuanced, informed, and effective.

That is not to say that every Afghan voice should have the same weight. Not every Afghan is equally qualified, respected, or educated. We have a habit of "falling in love with the guy who speaks English," and we forget that the most respected members of an Afghan community may not be eager to talk to us and no doubt gain some of their local credibility through their independence. When we engage with the wrong person—a crooked contractor, a known shady character, the wrong head of the village shura, or an overly corrupt government official—we send a signal that contributes to a negative perception. Such perceptions undermine our legitimacy and that of the government. When we engage with a respected member of the community, it reflects well on us, the community, and the government. Trust is gained through time and delivery, and, yes, sharing cups of tea.

Relationships and the Target Audience

For Afghans, it is all about relationships. In Kunar Province, the PRT and maneuver forces had to be in tune with three principal centers of influence—tribal authorities, religious authorities, and government officials.[2] Inclusion of one group can mean automatic disenfranchisement of another. Each group has information to share, issues that are important to it, and a sphere of influence with the people. Relationships matter, and must be handled properly.

Winning the battle for minds involves understanding which mechanisms to send the desired message to the target. People often see the first message they receive as the truth. Controlling the content and pace of the information cycle is critical for both sides in an insurgency. Typically, control is harder for the counterinsurgent because insurgents create newsworthy events. Limited access also inhibits the counterinsurgent's control of the information spectrum. Word-of-mouth messages and messages heard in Friday sermons somehow travel faster and deeper into isolated regions than messages on the airwaves. The credibility of the messenger matters most. Low literacy rates in rural and tribal areas—and few radios and televisions—mean that messages travel by storytelling. Stories suffer exaggeration, myth-supporting interpretations, cultural stereotyping, and misinformation. Conspiracy theories run rampant (just as they do in America's semi-literate sector of society). In rural areas, local mullahs, tribal leaders, and village elders reach the widest audience and have the highest legitimacy. These leaders frequently foist their own biases on the people. They also hold a credibility that we do not.

The Tension of Truth—a Critical Vulnerability

Insurgents always enjoy asymmetric advantages. Truth is optional for them. This means they can always beat the story to market. Reports of civilian casualties are a case in point—the dead and wounded are always their people. The battlefield is messy, and clarity is typically lost after the first rounds head downrange. It often takes days to reconstruct the exact details of company-sized operations; it can take much longer to sort out a battalion-sized or larger operation. In an insurgency without uniforms, counterinsurgent claims about civilian deaths are specious by default. We depend on a variety of indicators of enemy activity, supported by commander's guidance, rules of engagement, surveillance asset support, and ultimately—the judgment of our commanders who have to live with the decisions they make. We mostly get this right, and few appreciate just how hard it is.

The insurgents understand that U.S. military forces face public sentiment at home that has become hypersensitive to collateral damage. They understand that we often struggle against our own moral sensibilities and that the words "innocent civilian casualties" can do more to undermine military effectiveness than any combat.

Given the enemy's asymmetric advantages, the counterinsurgent must transmit the facts to the people as soon as possible as well as take the time to get the facts straight. We do more harm when we damage our own credibility than we do through any single lethal

mistake or accident. Mistakes will happen, accidents will occur, and yes, insurgents will complicate the targeting process by placing noncombatants in harm's way, but the race to win the information cycle must not make a casualty of accuracy. Credibility is too important. Rigor in truth wins.

The Battle of Sangar

In the summer of 2007, a platoon-plus element from Able Company, 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry, 173d Airborne, conducted an airborne insertion into Sangar Valley in Kunar province. The insertion was to be of limited scope and duration, to show a presence and conduct shaping operations. The battle for the minds of the people was at a critical stage in this valley, an area historically supportive of the Taliban, but showing signs of opening up to the Afghan government. The construction of a road and a variety of maneuver and PRT projects nearby were transforming the local economy. A nonlethal engagement strategy, coupled with kinetic support and integration, was well underway in a swing area with a strong Taliban presence. The target population was on the fence, stuck between continuing its support for the Taliban fighters, and shifting support, if only tacitly, to the government.

The well-planned operation included Afghan National Army (ANA) troops of the 3d Kandak of the 201st Brigade, coordinated with Afghan National Police elements for security on the roads, and integration of fires and surveillance assets to support planned engagements. Like many well-planned operations, the plan did not survive first contact with the enemy—the enemy in this case being a large, undetected force of Taliban fighters, far more than initially assessed, massing for an attack against coalition forces. A hot, tough engagement ensued. The small operation quickly morphed into the battalion's main effort.

The Taliban engaged exposed elements of Able Company and the ANA with heavy fire from homes in a village. They used civilians as human shields and even placed children on their hands and knees to use as tripod mounts to steady the aim of their weapons. Follow-up reports indicated several brutal murders in the village and the settling of old scores for those suspected of working with the government. A then-current Taliban IO tactic involved contacting local media stringers during combat to report civilian casualties, even if those casualties were local Taliban. In an insurgency without uniforms, this proved an effective tactic that threw coalition forces onto their heels.

Realizing the ferocity and scope of the operation, the PRT and battalion immediately mobilized concurrent coordinated real-time IO with the provincial governor. We sought to beat the Taliban to the news cycle and highlight the atrocities underway. The chaos of the battlefield meant it would be days until we could evaluate the final details, but we had no trepidation about telling the story as it unfolded. We had the moral advantage, ethically and psychologically, which gave us confidence in our targeting decisions. We felt it was better for the people to hear about the battle immediately and from a credible Afghan source. The PRT made quick contact with the Ministry of Defense, and the ANA deputy corps commander flew to the provincial capital of Asadabad within two hours. We immediately held a radio and television press conference complete with maps and relevant details of the engagement, provided constant press updates as the battle unfolded, and maintained a *credible* public dialogue.

By acting *inside* the Taliban's news cycle, we put the insurgents on the defensive. They lost the advantage of initiating a story. In the end, it was a tough battle. Two American Soldiers and eight Afghan soldiers were killed, many more were wounded, and ten civilians died. Dozens of Taliban fighters died as well. Losing the information battle colored many of our tactical successes, but this was not the case in the Battle of Sangar. We did not forget the battle for the minds of the people during the heat of the lethal battle. Our efforts to connect the people to their government were successful, despite the worst of circumstances, and the credibility of the government as a voice of reason and authority in a time of crisis improved. Someone was in charge.

In fact, the local IO effort had a wider effect. The press conferences received national attention, and the story was one of several accounts of the Taliban intentionally targeting civilians. This damaged the Taliban's credibility. With the proper use of conciliatory measures after collateral damage, a COIN campaign can continue unabated if local concerns are addressed fairly. Although there were casualties, truth was not one of them, and trust in government was reinforced.

Target the Real Audience

The mistake of centering the information operations campaign on denigrating the insurgents is an easy one to make. It adds to their legitimacy. We need to tell a better and broader story. The key is to understand the content, intent, and timing of the insurgents' message, and disrupt or supplant it to the point of irrelevance. Rather than just countering the insurgent's message exclusively, the target audience's perspective and perceptions have to be part of the *raison d'être* of the message. This is not the time to fall prey to the trap of cognitive dissociation—the inability to see perspectives other than one's own. Target audience analysis fails if countering the enemy is the primary preoccupation. The concerns of the average citizen on an average day should be the basis for the IO campaign.

An example of a relevant topic involves agriculture. In agrarian eastern Afghanistan, 85 percent of productivity revolves around subsistence farming and animal husbandry. Security means food security as well as physical security. What people care about every day is where their food is coming from and having a normal life in a hard society. Such concepts as vegetable diversity and the ability to obtain wider access to markets matter daily to the average Afghan on the street. Poverty is the real enemy in this insurgency. Agriculture is its language.

When the IO campaign's radio spots, billboards, and public announcements exclusively focus on reporting improvised explosive device (IED) incidents, offer rewards for information about insurgents, or make clumsy attempts to paint the insurgents as bad guys, the audience is not interested. These things are simply not what the average Afghan cares about. It just gives the insurgents "free press." Tell a man how to grow more wheat on his small plot, give him access to a wider variety of food, or tell him about the bridge that will let

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him walk to a market and you have the audience's attention. These are the things that matter, the most effective subjects for the IO campaign.

The contributions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the National Guard's Agriculture Development Teams in Afghanistan cannot be overstated. They have had perhaps the greatest impact per person in Afghanistan. Local farmers who work with USDA representatives to improve the technical aspects of their productivity can improve their yields about 30 percent immediately. The impact of this is huge. The farmer not only has enough food to feed his immediate family—his most pressing need and what he cares about—but also has an excess of food. Now he has the ability to trade and buy and sell goods. The secondary and tertiary effects lead to increased demands for goods in the local markets, sparking further demand for imports and services, and attacking the cycle of poverty. By integrating this type of message into your IO campaign, you become relevant to the right people. You showcase what the insurgents cannot offer.[3]

Perception and Identity Mechanisms

Identity matters, not just for empirical analysis, but also as a starting point for managing perceptions. A COIN strategy framed within the bounds of identity has subtlety and substance. Individuals, whether insurgents, government officials, soldiers, or citizens, identify with a political body, family structure, nation-state, religious group, cultural body or any of a variety of other groups. The preferences of groups are no more than the aggregated preferences of individuals. *The mechanism of identification is the critical element to a successful COIN campaign.*

Ethnic identity is very important to the Pashtuns, although perhaps not to the degree Westerners assume. Certainly, the jihad experience has politicized the national identity of the tribes. Nevertheless, a deep sense of national identity is evident, which transcends tribal affiliation. One could characterize Afghanistan as a weak state bound together by a strong nation. Ethnic identity is important, but not so divisive that it is a matter of life and death. Elements of the Pashtunwali code are certainly central to much of daily life and social

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interaction. However, you cannot truly understand Pashtunwali unless you are a Pashtun. To try to understand Pashtuns by listing their attributes is analogous to understanding Christianity by listing 18th century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's virtues. To categorize the entire moral code of a complex society is a complicated endeavor. Because the counterinsurgent must also reduce the complexity of this reality into a soldier's task, it seems enough to simply understand that respect and dialogue go a long way. Afghans are tough, live simply, and are easy to like. We spend a lot of effort trying to make these simple truths harder than they need to be.

Governance and Perception

We must give governance real critical thought. What is it, really? Is it public services and goods? Is it a building where officials work? Is it democracy and fair elections? These are all aspects of governance, certainly. However, seen through the lens of insurgency, it devolves into something much simpler. Governance is the notion that someone is in charge. That is what the people, the center of gravity, are mostly interested in. Politics and mechanics of governance aside, the focus of our "governance" line of effort should constitute ways to reinforce, support, and add legitimacy to the notion that the government is in charge.

This effort entails entering the realm of perceptions and perceptions management, the messy world of public problems, education, health care, infrastructure, and the rule of law. A government's legitimacy and mandate is ultimately a function of the people knowing that it is someone's job to fix the potholes, keep the electricity on and the water flowing, and provide health care and education. Someone will fix the broken windows. Someone will keep the streets clean. Someone will mandate safety equipment on job sites. Someone will respond to the crisis of the day. Someone must be in charge. The COIN goal becomes enabling the government to fill that role of being the "someone," the hidden hand of order.

Countering Differences

The IO campaign has to account for the notion that identity is a conception of self in relation to others. The tendency is to label one's own attributes as good and those possessed by a competing (or different) group as bad. Insurgent leaders use group identities to mobilize followers and gain support. One specific mechanism is the creation of the "enemy image." The creation of the enemy image fulfills a social-psychological need of individuals encouraging social differentiation even in the absence of a basis for it. The need to belong to a "group" is framed in terms of both individual and social identification with a cluster of distinctive attributes. It is a phenomenon that all outsiders face in the Pashtun belt.

The challenge facing our IO strategy is that identity issues possess staying power. Because of the emotional content they conjure up, little incentive exists to seek expanded information. Images tend to become self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing. Insurgent leaders use the existence of these images to further their cause. Symbolism and identification with "common evils" are effective for mobilizing mass support of uninformed populations. Once these identity issues adopt a particular form, they tend to become strongly entrenched and difficult to change except incrementally at the margins of perception. For example, the semantics of the Global War on Terrorism play into Taliban themes and messages that our war is a war on Muslim civilization. The religious and cultural symbols that are central to this civilization make fertile rallying points for identity-based threats. The politics of identity are a powerful tool for insurgent leaders, a tool that is largely impervious to lethal effects.

The Link between Identity and Governance

How do governance, violence, and identity interrelate, and how do we tie this relationship to an IO strategy? What explains the differences between the Hutus and Tutsis in Central Africa or those between the Quebecois and Anglophones in Canada? Members of both sets of groups possess strong identification with their groups, yet the level

of violence was catastrophic in Rwanda and non-existent in Canada. The institutionalization of the norms of stable governance and political stability is the difference. In stable societies, issues of identity are less likely to cause violence. In Canada, identification with the norms of responsible statehood and civil society tempers the divisive identity issue of language and cultural difference.

The legitimacy of the government becomes a force that holds issues of identity at bay. Information operations themes and messages that reinforce this truth and reinforce the notion of "someone's in charge" are incredibly relevant. Certainly, governance in Afghanistan has miles to go in this endeavor, but an IO strategy that recognizes this truth will not only improve the government's actual and perceived legitimacy but also increase the likelihood that it will become that unseen hand of order that underlies a properly developing civil society.

Traditional and Formal Power Structures

Widespread perceptions that Afghan society is lawless are flawed. Despite the violence and lack of familiar institutions, Afghan society is actually highly rule-based, but not always in a form Westerners recognize. Too often we apply our own perceptions in trying to understand Afghan culture and society and how Afghans process information and relate to their government.

In Afghan society, the relationship between religious and tribal authority is complex. Traditional mechanisms of dispute resolution co-exist uneasily with the relatively new provincial and district governments. Local authority figures are suspicious of the government and expect it will use power arbitrarily. The tribal elders, maliks, and mullahs who make up this informal but deeply established network are loyal to their own tribe, subtribe, or ethnic group, and the extent of their individual authority is sharply bounded by these group identities.

The average Afghan has a different definition of "basic services" and does not necessarily look to the government to deliver them.[4] He distrusts national government and its local manifestations based on his many past experiences of government as a predatory and disruptive force.

The degree to which traditional authorities retain their power and standing within the identity group while accommodating provincial and district government institutions is the critical dynamic to manage with nuance and subtlety. Failure to understand the rule structures, incentives, and institutional frameworks under which this complex society exists will beget a failed COIN strategy. Plunging ahead without this understanding quickly leads down the path of violating the classic maxim to "do no harm." Programs and plans that support the extension of effective and legitimate government to provide basic services may not have the anticipated effect and can lead to miscommunication and lack of trust. In some cases, lack of understanding leads to outright hostility.

Critical Vulnerability Analysis

Wise practitioners understand that IO's most effective use is in conjunction with a critical vulnerability analysis rather than simply in response to enemy action. Critical vulnerabilities can be ideological or tactical or even logistical (the need for cross border support for resupply and safe haven). They can involve local identity mechanisms and inclusion in tribal communities. Critical vulnerability analysis allows offensive IO, a potent tool in the nonlethal kit.

The need for money, equipment, and safe havens is a critical vulnerability of certain insurgent groups. They must "sell" successes to their handlers for continued logistical support and the accompanying endorsement of their efforts, and this can be attacked. If an insurgent element routinely has its attacks foiled, its IEDs found and disarmed, and has no video to successfully document its attacks, its fighters are less likely to be rewarded with more resources. On the other hand, insurgent groups that can point to videos of successful IED explosions, engagements with counterinsurgent troops, and other events to prove their success will receive continued support. The key task is interdicting insurgents' activity whose support lies with the people. Just as success begets success, failure begets failure. Every time an insurgent group retreats to its safe haven for rearming and resupply because it cannot rely on local support, it is a victory for the counterinsurgency. The insurgency begins facing an increasingly risky

operating profile as it strives for results. A mature IO campaign finds ways to attack this seam by highlighting insurgent weaknesses and failures.

Another critical vulnerability of the insurgency is its inability to provide basic government services. While sharia judges hold some appeal, the Taliban cannot build schools, provide healthcare services, construct roads and bridges with local labor, provide goods to serve the basic needs of the people, or underwrite economic and social development. This is our asymmetric advantage, yet too often we fail to recognize this aspect as a critical vulnerability for the Taliban. It is, and we must attack it with perception management and information engagement operations as well as with the bricks and mortar of the projects themselves.

Organizing for Success

We are often our own worst enemy when it comes to the way we align and structure our own organizations to fight the information operations battle. Information operations must be flexible, tailored, persistent, and local. Frequently, the command structures under which we operate are simply not capable of this. Centralization prohibits responsiveness. Actual decentralized execution is rare, although we brief it routinely. We depend on legacy structures, legacy doctrine, and legacy organizations to implement information operations. Public affairs and military information support operations (MISO) task organize and delineate roles, responsibilities, resources, and programs for disparate groups who all work in the information realm. Managing messages, providing information, and fighting the mental battle with the enemy for the population are not disparate activities. They have a natural synergy. Yet, all too frequently, we treat them as disparate activities because we get hung up on legacy stovepipes. This causes us to cede our technological, tactical, and moral advantage to the enemy.

The key to overcoming bureaucratic and institutional walls that prohibit synergy is organizational leadership. Certainly, there are political and legal reasons to maintain separation between IO organizations, but not to the extent that one hand does not know what the other hand is doing. Reacting inside the enemy news cycle to enable creativity and effective messaging requires a flat, talented, resourced, responsive organization. It requires leaders who prohibit stultifying staff oversight, legal reviews, and second-guessing. We must empower leaders who "get it" and give them the tools, resources, and freedom of maneuver to act locally and responsively, across all operational levels from team leader to battalion commander.[5]

Observations and Lessons Learned

Conventional operations are oriented to a great degree on force disposition and employment with a firm basis in doctrine. A counterinsurgent mindset is *by its very nature* outside the doctrinal box. Intel prep for counterinsurgency is complex. The concepts of will, allegiance, and incentive are not easily analyzed or quantified.[6] Bullets and bombs produce an immediate effect. Nonlethal effects may not satisfy this need for immediacy, but they can have a strategic, far-reaching, and lasting effect. Information operations can have great impact in "extinguishing the spirit of the enemy" and rendering him irrelevant.[7] A persistent, nuanced, and informed IO campaign should be at the center of the COIN strategy in Afghanistan, and the core of this strategy must reinforce the hidden hand of the government that delivers basic services, underwriting security for the long-term.

COIN and IO are thinking man's games. Every organization and enterprise has its talent, its thinkers, and its innovators. Treat a thinking man as a resource, and deploy him appropriately. Put your brightest minds on these complex problems. This is not a realm for stolid conformists tied to legacy stovepipes and those who cannot think their way past the doctrine to develop tailored solutions with local relevance.

Agriculture matters. A good USDA presence training and mentoring farmers and *properly implemented* USAID programs to support rural development have the impact of an infantry battalion in terms of securing stability. Integrate successful agriculture and husbandry programs front and center into the IO campaign.

Building governance takes time. Governance and development lines of effort tackle some of the most wicked problems of humanity.[8] They have fundamentally different outlooks, time frames, and challenges than security lines of operation. We are

fundamentally trying to alter long-standing expectations regarding the role of government in society. Leaders must accept a long-term time frame with marginal improvements, not quick victories. Wins will be incremental in nature. When governance and development brief well, the commander should be wary of overly optimistic assessments.

Be sophisticated in what is measured. Sophistication in the selection of metrics by which to measure programs and initiatives is critical. Beware of metrics in a counterinsurgency, or be prepared to devote incredible resources to getting them right. Metrics can drive behavior and lead to solutions in search of a problem. They may over-simplify complex dynamics and divert energy and resources from problem solving to data collection and packaging. For example, the number of attacks in a province or district is an unsophisticated measure. The relative price and price trends of an AK-47 on the open market in the arms bazaars near Peshawar is a more sophisticated one.

Progress is incremental, and thus not sexy. Some main-line combat units embrace nonlethal effects. Some do not. It is difficult to show progress during a single tour of duty. Non-lethal "effects" brief well, but measures of effectiveness are problematic, and they lose substance when tied to data-driven, effects-based methodologies and short-term measures. We should learn to accept—as the world of public policy does—that incremental progress toward a known good is the reality when working with the "wicked problems" of humanity.

Build Afghan COIN capacity. Afghans themselves are an oft-overlooked critical asset in the battle for the minds of the population.[9] We too seldom include those *whose country it is* in planning for information operations. Develop an organic civil affairs capability in the Afghanistan National Security Forces. Train and enable Afghan-centric information operations and community outreach programs.[10]

It takes more than a civil affairs cell. Throwing all of the "development stuff" into the "lane" of the Civil Affairs community removes an important COIN tool from the main effort, and is *intellectually dishonest*. Deploy organizational talent where it has the most impact.

Local understanding requires local presence. Getting *inside* the mind of the enemy and understanding the mind of the people are notoriously hard to do, until one spends significant time *outside* the wire where the people are. Too many Westerners limit their exposure to Afghans to those who work on bases, and they form skewed opinions based on that limited exposure.

It's in the delivery. Clear examples of poor target audience analysis abound. The devil is certainly in the details, and these details can offend an audience if handled improperly. Adhere to the principles of immersion knowledge and local legitimacy. Bad information operations help the insurgents.

Our IO are often unsophisticated and clumsy. As aforementioned, we frequently forget to listen to our audience and don't give them enough credit; or worse, we target the wrong audience. Remember, just because the people live simply does not mean they are simple. Focus information engagement strategies on that which the people care about and don't give unintended relevance to an enemy.

Seek a local opinion. Do not disseminate IO or MISO products without a sanity check from Afghans from the area. Ask them questions, knowing that you will often get an answer of "what they think you want to hear." Wade through that and get a straightforward assessment.

Use a credible voice. The best information operations come from respected Afghans with local credibility, not coalition forces. Quit falling in love with the guy who speaks English and deal with members of the community who command respect.

Relationships matter. Rotations exacerbate the challenge of relationship building. We are always either coming or going before we have gained local immersion knowledge. Governance and economics lines of operation require expertise gained through study, observation, and relationships with local leaders who understand the needs of the people.

Learn to listen and drink tea. Understand how we Americans contribute to the problem when we immediately roll up our sleeves to start fixing something, instead of asking smart questions first and realizing we are in a negotiation. Relevant information about the Pashtun street is not gained through briefs but through local conversation. The only measure of effectiveness that really matters in the IO front is what the local people think. Learn to listen and drink a lot of tea.

Shura is a process. Afghans live in a conciliatory, consensus-based society. You will rarely see

an open disagreement in front of Western eyes, nor are decisions truly reached at shuras, at least, not in the sense we are used to. Our military is composed of "type A" results-oriented people. We confuse the concept of shura with that of a meeting. They are not the same, yet shura is the Afghan way. It is a process. Decisions—even from strong leaders—are rarely discrete events. Rather, they take shape through a complex system of formal and informal consultations. The most respected leaders are not those who promise results, but those who broker disputes. The harder the dispute resolved, the greater the credibility gained. A military leader who walks away from a "meeting" thinking he has brought about a discrete decision is naïve and likely has been told what he wanted to hear.

Development of local media is important. Find ways to increase the professionalism of local media outlets and expose them to standards of transparency and factual reporting.

Afghanistan is not Iraq. There are fundamental differences between Arab and Pashtun societies and cultures. Our unit training systems and courses have focused overwhelmingly on Iraq for years and fail to effectively reflect fundamental differences between Arab and Pashtun societies.

Get U.S. faces away from the microphone. Government legitimacy does not develop when every grand opening ceremony of a school, bridge, health clinic, governance initiative, and every road opening takes place under the blatant aegis of the U.S. government or the international community. Stand aside and let local government officials take the credit. Enable the government's legitimacy at every step of the planning and implementation process. *MR*

U.S. Air Force, Senior Airman Nathanael Callon

U.S. Soldiers with Provincial Reconstruction Team Zabul and Afghan government officials hold a shura with elders in a village in Qalat district, Zabul province, Afghanistan, 21 July 2010.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of human skills in contrast to those that are purely technological, see Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone* (Minneapolis, MN: Zenith Press, 2006), 106.

2. See Dave Kilcullen's recent book, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77-82. Killcullen perfectly describes the complex governance, tribal, and religious influences on the population as well as the current state of Taliban influence.

3. The exact same dynamic exists with veterinary services, as livestock are an integral part of the rural makeup of this population.

4. See Marina Kielpinski's "Kunar Handbook," *IDS International*, 2008, and "A U.S. Government Strategy for Kunar"—a paper written for the Department of State Office of Stability and Reconstruction in conjunction with the Kunar Provisional Reconstruct Team, PRT. Both of these excellent resources detail the complex interactions inherent in Kunar Province and are indicative of similar complexities in other provinces.

5. Field Manual 3-24, para. A-19 notes that leaders must look beyond rank and position within their organizations to see those with a gift for COIN.

6. MG Robert Scales, "Culture-Centric Warfare," *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, October, 2004, 32-26.

7. Miyomoto Mushahsi, *The Book of Five Rings: The Classic Guide to Strategy*, trans. from the Japanese by Victor Harris (The Overlook Press, Woodstock Press, 1974), 81.

8. A term borrowed from domestic public policy.

9. See Kilcullen, chap. 2, for a cogent discussion on the shortfalls in providing counterinsurgent-training opportunities for Afghan Security Forces.

10. See *United States Institute of Peace* working paper "Securing Afghanistan: Getting on Track", January 2009, by Christine Fair and Seth Jones of the RAND Corporation, for a solid discussion regarding the importance of developing indigenous security forces in this counterinsurgency. This paper also is spot-on with regard to the complex systems at work in this insurgency, the challenges of governance, given fractured fiscal policies, and the local nature of problems in this society. See also Daniel Marston and Carter Malkasian's *Counterinsurgency in Modern Warfare* (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2008), chap. 12, for a discussion of the challenges faced by the international community in developing Afghan National Security Forces.

U.S. Army War College
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Essay Contest 2011

The United States Army War College and the United States Army War College Foundation are pleased to announce the annual **STRATEGIC LANDPOWER** Essay Contest.

The topic of the essay must relate to the strategic use of landpower. A specific topic of interest, for this year's contest is the application of design in conflict termination.

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STRATEGIC LANDPOWER   Essay Contest Rules:

1. Essays must be original, not to exceed 5000 words, and must not have been previously published. An exact word count must appear on the title page.

2. All entries should be directed to: Dr. **Michael R. Matheny, USAWC Strategic Landpower Essay Contest, U.S. Army War College, Department of Military Strategy, Planning and Operations, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013-5242.**

3. **Essays must be postmarked on or before 17 February 2011.**

4. The name of the author shall not appear on the essay. Each author will assign a codename in addition to a title to the essay. This codename shall appear: (a) on the title page of the essay, with the title in lieu of the author's name, and (b) by itself on the outside of an accompanying sealed envelope. This sealed envelope should contain a typed sheet giving the name, rank/title, branch of service (if applicable), biographical sketch, address, and office and home phone numbers (if available) of the essayist, along with the title of the essay and the codename. This envelope will not be opened until after the final selections are made and the identity of the essayist will not be known by the selection committee.

5. All essays must be typewritten, double-spaced, on paper approximately 8 ½"x11". Submit two complete copies. If prepared on a computer, please also submit the entry on a disk, indicating specific word-processing software used.

6. The award winners will be notified in early Spring 2011. Letters notifying all other entrants will be mailed by 1 April 2011.

7. The author of the best essay will receive $4000 from the U.S. Army War College Foundation. A separate prize of $1000 will be awarded to the author of the second best essay.