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CREATING WHITE SPACE: INTERACTION AND THE ADAPTATION OF TEAM SOCIAL IDENTITY IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

by

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March 2019

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American military teams are increasingly embedded at the grassroots level in foreign environments to create white space. White spaces are pockets of stability within nations whose populations often suffer from instability, factionalism, civil strife, isolation, and extreme deprivation. The information warfare literature espouses soft power at the level of policy; however, it does not provide explanations for the challenges on the ground. The aim of this study is to identify the environmental conditions that impact American military team interactions while conducting village stability operations (VSO) in Afghanistan. To this end, the research question asks: What are the conditions that facilitate or hinder interaction between American teams and Afghan groups in complex cultural environments? This is a phenomenological study of the lived experience of special operators. Using a grounded theory methodology of critical incidents, this study explores the conditions that facilitate interactions with Afghan hosts and proposes a substantive theory exploring the meaning-making and social identity adaption process of American teams. American teams adapt their social identities based on the expression of intent, monitoring of cues, and interpretations of Afghan expectations before, during, and after interactions. Further research could be undertaken to operationalize the typologies, action strategies, and propositions brought forth by this research.

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CREATING WHITE SPACE: INTERACTION AND THE ADAPTATION OF TEAM SOCIAL IDENTITY IN COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

American military teams are increasingly embedded at the grassroots level in foreign environments to create white space. White spaces are pockets of stability within nations whose populations often suffer from instability, factionalism, civil strife, isolation, and extreme deprivation. The information warfare literature espouses soft power at the level of policy; however, it does not provide explanations for the challenges on the ground. The aim of this study is to identify the environmental conditions that impact American military team interactions while conducting village stability operations (VSO) in Afghanistan. To this end, the research question asks: What are the conditions that facilitate or hinder interaction between American teams and Afghan groups in complex cultural environments? This is a phenomenological study of the lived experience of special operators. Using a grounded theory methodology of critical incidents, this study explores the conditions that facilitate interactions with Afghan hosts and proposes a substantive theory exploring the meaning-making and social identity adaption process of American teams. American teams adapt their social identities based on the expression of intent, monitoring of cues, and interpretations of Afghan expectations before, during, and after interactions. Further research could be undertaken to operationalize the typologies, action strategies, and propositions brought forth by this research.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AACP	Afghan Anti-Crime Police
ABP	Afghan Border Police
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANASF	Afghan National Army Special Forces
ANASOC	Afghan National Army Special Operations Command
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANG	U.S. Army National Guard
ANP	Afghan National Police
ARSOC	U.S. Army Special Operations Command
ATM	Anti-Taliban Militia
AUP	Afghan Uniformed Police
BCS	battered children's syndrome
CA	civil affairs
CAO	civil affairs operations
CENTCOM	U.S. Central Command
CIA	U.S. Central Intelligence Agency
CJSOTF-A	Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force – Afghanistan
CNA	cultural network analysis
CNP	Afghan Counter Narcotics Police
COCOM	combatant commander
COP	combat outpost
CP	checkpoint
CR	civil reconnaissance
CT	counter terrorism
DA	direct action
DoA	U.S. Department of the Army
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoN	U.S. Department of the Navy
EOD	explosive ordinance disposal
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas (Pakistan)
FID	foreign internal defense

GIRoA	Government Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HA	humanitarian assistance
HIG	Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin
ICC	intercultural competence
IDLG	Afghan Independent Directorate of Local Governance
IED	improvised explosive device
IRB	institutional review board
JFC	joint forces commander
JTAC	joint terminal attack controller
LEO	lines of effort
MIO	military information operations
MISO	military information support operations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	U.S. Army Non-commissioned Officer
NDS	Afghan National Directorate of Security
ODA	Operational Detachment – Alpha
PII	personally identifiable information
QDA	qualitative data analysis
RTA	Radio Television Afghanistan
SEAL	sea, air, land
SFA	security force assistance
SFG	special forces group
SOC/SOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
SOF	special operations forces
UAS	unmanned aerial systems
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
USG	U.S. Government
UW	unconventional warfare
VSAT	vertical small aperture terminal
VSO	village stability operations

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-cultural interactions between groups from industrialized and non-industrialized nations are challenging under any circumstances. However, cultural misunderstanding is only one of the many different and connected parts that can cause interactions between these groups to turn hostile. The complexities associated with interactions between culturally different groups become magnified when they occur in non-industrialized nations affected by factionalism, civil strife, isolation, and relative deprivation (Gurr, 2015). Environments such as these are defined as complex cultural environments in this research. American military teams are increasingly embedded at the grassroots level of these complex cultural environments and are faced with the challenge of influencing and fostering stabilization programs.

The U.S. Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF-A) in Afghanistan coined the term "white space" to describe the "pockets of stability" that American teams carved out of insurgent controlled areas. Influencing leaders of local populations to support and develop sustainable stabilization programs that made up "white spaces" means that American teams need to enact interactive strategies based on methods of attraction and not solely coercion (Pratkanis, 2014). Non-coercive strategies are used by American teams to facilitate interactions with groups culturally different than their own during attempts at "wining the hearts and minds" of indigenous populations (Arquilla & Rondfeldt, 1999; Pratkanis, 2014, p. 56). The use of these strategies by the lowest levels of the U.S. military are no more apparent than during the counterinsurgency wars currently being waged by the U.S. in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. These strategies are an application of "soft power" at the lowest levels. They are used by American teams during information campaigns designed to extend U.S. influence into indigenous communities heavily influenced by insurgent groups (Nye, 2016; Nye & Owens, 1996).

The information warfare literature provides explanations and descriptions for the application of "soft power" at the higher, strategic and operational levels of military campaigns; however, the literature does not provide descriptions or explanations for the conditions that affect the application of "soft power" in lower-level military organizations,

those residing at the tactical-level (Nye, 2014; Nye & Owens, 1996). The successful application of "soft power" at the tactical-level, at its core, is dependent upon the American teams' ability to foster interactions with indigenous groups (Nye, 2014; Nye & Owens, 1996). Interaction enables the reciprocation of actions, influence, and information between culturally different groups. This research explores the dynamic learning process American teams used while conducting the village stability operations (VSO) mission in Afghanistan from 2010-14. This is a study of the meaning-making process in which American teams attempt to convey intentions, monitor cues through interaction, and make sense of confirming or disconfirming cues about team social identities (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Hogg et al., 1995; Weick, 1995; Gioia et al., 2013; Tajfel, 2010).

A. MOTIVATION

The motivation for taking on such an investigation traces back to my own personal experiences advising an Iraqi Army Division in East Baghdad from 2010–11. I offer caveat to enhance the reader's interpretation of my findings. Our mission was to advise and assist the division on how to secure and stabilize portions of the city. The mission required my team to live with the division for a full year. We ate, slept, and learned how to interact with our counterparts. We exposed ourselves to great risks during this period, yet fortunately, we were able to establish trusting relationships. As trust grew and developed between our groups, it allowed my team to unlock knowledge about a complex cultural environment from an emic perspective. The experience was personally rewarding and left indelible impressions on me. However, this experience also left me questioning how we were able to establish trusting relationships across the layers of ethnic, tribal, and religious divisions that fractured East Baghdad at the time. It was an environment in which any one member of the American team's actions or behaviors was interpreted as representative of the entire organization. My lived experience interacting with Iraqi groups (security, government, and development), as a member of an American team, inspired my pursuit to explain the processes we used during this endeavor.

I did not enter this research as an entirely disinterested outsider given my personal experiences advising foreign military groups in their fractured nations. However, I was

entirely disconnected from the village stability operations (VSO) missions experienced by the Special operators interviewed for this research. Members from the Special operations community I interviewed share a common bond with me that is based on background, I assert that they were more willing to be open in sharing their stories because of this shared background. During the data collection process, I sensed that those interviewed also sought more transferable answers about the processes that teams used to successfully interact in their complex cultural environments.

B. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The qualitative methods I that use below rely upon the critical incidents technique (Flanagan, 1954), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014), and Gioia, et al.'s (2013) method for presenting qualitative rigor in inductive research. Critical incidents were extracted from the transcripts of interview narratives and coded using Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory technique. An emergent theoretical core (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was identified after coding reached theoretical saturation, meaning no novel concept or themes were discovered during the coding process. Coding was a non-linear process; codes were provisional and open for re-coding if further analysis dictated. Evolving theoretical frameworks influenced changes in interview protocols based on the discovery of fresh concepts or themes during coding. After theoretical saturation was reached a data structure was constructed as graphic evidence of the qualitative rigor and as a tool to assist with theoretical coding (Gioia, et al., 2013). Codes were then aggregated into theoretical constructs leading to propositions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gioia, 2013; Charmaz, 2014).

C. RESEARCH QUESTION

The focus of the research question is to determine how American teams fostered and maintained meaningful interactions necessary for forming partnerships with their indigenous partners. Two key conditions that affected the interactive process between these groups are culture and salient conditions existing in the environment. Both conditions contributed to the complexities American teams faced during interactions. Interactions are

the core mechanism that teams use for the application of "soft power" (Nye, 2014; Nye & Owens, 1996). Subsequently, given the framework under which it is being studied, the research question focuses on the conditions that facilitated or hindered American team interactions. Answers to this question are inductively derived based on the "lived experiences" of Special operators, who are considered "knowledgeable agents" (Gioia, 2013).

D. DISSERTATION OUTLINE

This chapter introduced the complexity of cross-cultural interactions in unstable environments. It defined culturally complex environments within the scope of this research. It highlighted the importance of cross-cultural interactions during the application of "soft power" at the lowest-levels of military organizations (Nye, 2014; Nye & Owens, 1996). The motivation and methodological framework used during this study have been introduced. The chapter closed by presenting the research question and the how the rest of this dissertation is organized for answering this question. Chapter II presents a review of the literature. Chapter III explains the methodological framework and processes used to derive substantive theory. Chapter IV describes the research setting, including relevant historical events and environmental conditions that comprise Afghanistan's physical, human, and information layers. The chapter also describes and explains the formal goals of American teams that conducted the VSO mission (CJSOT-A, 2011). Chapter V explains the emergence of adaptive identity types and 14 action strategies used to enact identity. Chapter VI presents the emergence of a substantive theory for adaptive social identity. Chapter VII discusses 10 propositions that are transferable and supported in the research findings.

II. RELATED RESEARCH

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter introduced cross-cultural interactions as the bedrock on which American teams apply "soft power" at the lowest-levels of military organizations. It discussed how teams must have the ability to convey intentions, monitor confirming or disconfirming cues, and then adapt their social identity to accommodate for environmental conditions. This chapter explores the literature related to cultural interaction, meaning-making, and social identity. Cultural differences are one among the primary conditions that contribute to the complexities that American teams faced. The dynamic process of American team meaning-making encapsulates sense giving (conveying of intent), sensemaking (interpreting of cues), and information seeking (monitoring cues) (Gioia, et al., 2013; Weick, 1995; Johnson, 1996). The team's image and identity are "provisional" and continuously adapting (Ibarra, 1999). The chapter concludes by presenting the most relevant social identity literature (Tajfel, 1970; Ibarra, 1999; Grunig, 1993; Dukerich & Dutton, 1991; Weick, 1995).

B. CULTURAL INTERACTION

Research on interactions between culturally different groups is certainly not novel. Face-to-face interactions require specific awareness about the culture of other groups with whom they will be interacting (Adler, 2017). The following section explores the literature on inter-cultural interaction.

1. Interaction in Complex Cultural Environments

Cultural interaction is the reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, and information between disparate groups. According to Ang (2016) individuals function more effectively when they have enough cultural understanding about members of a group. It is under this premise that group meaning-making and social identity are being examined. The patterns of human behaviors that comprise culture, explains Keesing (1974) are too complex and "interwoven" for the application of simplistic static models often used to

explain and describe the phenomenon (p. 74). Keesing cites the need for "complex interactional models" that view culture as an "adaptive system" (p. 74). He further argues that contemporary beliefs about cultural roots held by many cultures throughout the world are sustained by "ideology and faith," but these popular notions cannot be supported through modern science due to the "interwoven" complexities associated with the development of culture (p. 74). Keesing proposes an "adaptive systems" theory based on "broad assumptions" where most scholars working in the field agree (p. 75). Keesing interpreted cultures as "systems (of socially transmitted behavior patterns) that serve to relate human communities to their ecological settings" (p. 75). This "cultural adaptationists" approach call for viewing culture "broadly as behavior systems characteristics of populations" focused on the human artefacts that are distinct from the contents of the mind (p. 75). Keesing's describes culture as an "adaptive system" as such:

> Cultures change in the direction of equilibrium within ecosystems; but when balances are upset by environmental, demographic, technological, or other systemic changes, further adjustive changes ramify through the cultural system. Feedback mechanisms in cultural systems may thus operate both negatively (toward self-correction and equilibrium) and positively (toward disequilibrium and directional change). (1974, p. 76)

Cultural communications are an important tool for successful organizational interaction. Samovar and Porter (2001) viewed cultural communications as a dynamic process. Therefore, organizational culture is a critical resource in which organizations must adapt to dynamic and changing environments to survive in the long term (Costanza, 2015). Unfortunately, a lack of clarity exists in the conceptualization of adaptive and resilient cultures, and few empirical researchers have investigated its impact on the survival of organizations in the long run (Costanza, 2015). Regardless of the means for interacting, changes occur when "cultures are constantly being confronted with ideas and information from outside sources" (Samovar & Porter, 2001, p. 43). While Samovar and Porter (2001) did not view cultural communications using a "systems thinking" perspective, they did describe it as a "dynamic" and not "static" process (p. 43). Several common "mechanisms" highlighted by Samovar and Porter (2001) which served as feedback in their description of the dynamics involved in cultural systems are "innovation, diffusion, and acculturation" (p. 43).

Sieck et al. (2010) define culture as:

> Mental models, and other contents of the mind, that are distributed across members of the population over a given period. It also includes the resulting behaviors and other traces that foster prolonged survival of the shared ideas by providing "habitats" for them. (p. 240)

Cultures are social constructs that have been ingrained into the minds of individuals belonging to a certain society. "Mental models" and "contents of the mind" are outside the scope of the current study; however, the artefacts of these mental models "that are distributed across members of the population" are related to this research, including the systems thinking approaches taken by Sieck et al. (p. 240).

2. Interactions between In-groups and Out-groups

Literature supporting two key characteristics affecting interactions between in-groups and out-groups are presented in this section. The discussion is divided into in-group and out-group characteristics covering the dynamic circumstances affecting interaction and the role that physical distance plays in how a group perceives the intentions of another group (Bochner, 1982). The concepts associated with cultural interactions are important for understanding the actions and behaviors used by American organizations interacting in foreign environments.

a. In-group and Out-group Dynamics

There are universal in-group and out-group dynamics that are independent of any specific culture that facilitate or hinder interaction between culturally disparate groups. In-groups are defined as indigenous to the territory where interaction is taking place; conversely, out-groups are foreign to where interactions are occurring. In-group and out-group interactive dynamics are categorized as being either "hostile" or "harmonious" (Sherif, 1970; Bochner, 1982, p. 11). Hostilities between in-groups and out-groups are the result of "competition for goals desired by both groups but only attainable by one of them," such as "competition for scarce resources" (Sherif, 1970; Bochner, 1982, p. 11). "Harmonious" interactions between in-groups and out-groups, on the other hand, "occur

when the parties share superordinate goals," such as goals that are "only attainable through cooperation" (Sherif, 1970; Bochner, 1982, p. 11).

Tajfel (1970) concludes that differences between in-groups and out-groups by themselves are enough to cause "distinctions and discriminatory behavior" (p. 96). Tajfel also concludes that in-group members "learn that the appropriate attitude is to favor a member of the in-group and discriminate against a member of the out-group" (p. 100). Bochner (1982) asserts that just being a member of the out-group "is sufficient to make that person a target for treatment that is less favorable" by members of the in-group (p. 12).

Other researchers discovered in-group and out-group interactions that counter the conclusions of both Sherif and Tajfel (Schild, 1962; Feldman, 1968; Bochner, 1982). These researchers discovered instances where out-groups were "treated leniently and/or favorably" by the in-group, even when the out-group violated societal or cultural norms (Schilds, 1962; Feldman, 1968; Bochner, 1982, p. 12). They attribute these "lenient or favorable" in-group responses to empathy, notably in situations where sojourners have not yet learned indigenous customs (Schilds, 1962; Feldman, 1968; Bochner, 1982).

Research linking the concept of deindividuation provides further explanations on in-group discriminatory behaviors toward out-groups. The less familiarity in-groups have about the out-group, the greater their likelihood to display hostility towards them (Zimbardo, 1969; Bochner, 1982; Milgram, 1974). Conversely, the concept of individuation can be associated with greater in-group familiarity about the out-group (Bochner, 1982). "Individuating" is a process in which members of different cultural groups distinguish between one another based on individual character, not based on discriminatory cultural stereotypes (p. 13). The "distinctions" between in-groups and out-groups "may become blurred because of individuating" (Bochner, 1982, p. 13).

Cultures can also change across time due to in-group and out-group dynamics when specific cultures are able to interact and accommodate the cultures of other social groups. In-group/out-group dynamics are affected by the circumstance and conditions in which the culturally disparate groups are interacting (Bochner, 1982; Feldman, 1968; Schild, 1962; Sherif, 1970). The dynamic also holds true for interactions between in-groups and out-

groups with "no history of social conflict or hostility" toward one another, in which differences alone are enough to foment relational tensions between groups (Bochner, 1982, p. 11; Tajfel, 1970). Previous researchers contend that the conditions affecting in-group and out-group interaction are both dynamic and dependent upon circumstance.

b. The Role of Distance during In-group and Out-group Interaction

The physical distance between in-groups and out-groups during interaction conveys meaning and shapes understanding about each group's expectations and intentions. People create physical boundaries around themselves to include groups in which they consider themselves members. When strangers violate these bounded areas, humans "feel threatened" and generally default to defending against such violations (Felipe & Sommer, 1966; Goffman, 1971; Sommer & Becker, 1969). Defensive reactions to invasions of the bounded areas people create are dependent upon the "transgressor's" identity and their relationship with "the owner of the territory" (Bochner, 1982, p. 13). The interactions between and among groups should be interactive yet must be characterized with peaceful coexistence.

Interpersonal distance can also be blurred by cultural appropriation in situations where an individual is affiliated with a specific culture but is able to adapt to the cultural values of groups for which he is not a native member. Researchers categorize the "four zones of interpersonal distance" as "intimate, personal, social, and public" (Hall, 1966; Bochner, 1982, p. 13). The reasons that people have these boundaries are cited as "lovemaking, friendship, social and formal activities" (Hall, 1966; Bochner, 1982, p. 13). Researchers also cite the psychological consequences of violating boundaries as "stress, discomfort and embarrassment" (Hall, 1966; Bochner, 1982, p. 13). Bochner (1982) defines a "general principle of spacing," stating that "the correct interpersonal distance depends on two things, the nature of the activity that the persons are engaged in, and the nature of the relationship existing between them" (p. 14). Bochner further extends this general principle to in-group and out-group interactions, stating that it is "appropriate for members of the in-group to be physically closer than members of the out-group" (p. 14). He further asserts that members of out-groups are initially viewed as "invaders" by

members of an “established in-group” (p. 14). Bochner theorizes that initial interactions between in-groups and out-groups follow a “vicious cycle” of hostilities toward one another, ending in one of two outcomes, “either the newcomers are repelled” or the out-group is eventually no longer viewed as “outsiders” (p. 15). Team members’ subjectively construed identities about who they are, are key to understanding, comprehending, and explaining almost everything that happens in and around organizations comprised of diverse cultures (Brown, 2014). The concept of social identity may play a major role in bridging levels of analysis and cultural boundaries, and sketches possible future identities (Brown, 2014).

Different meaning for intentions and expectations are conveyed between in-groups and out-groups based on their physical distance from one another during interaction. These are give-and-take situations, dependent on the nature of the activity, one group’s proximity to another could create stress, anxiety, discomfort, embarrassment, or feelings of hostility (Bochner, 1982; Felipe & Sommer, 1966; Goffman, 1971; Hall, 1966; Sommer & Becker, 1969). In some instances, in-group responses to an out-group’s invasion of their space, cause the out-group to become offended, especially in circumstances where cultural interpretations of boundaries and acceptable personal space differ between the groups. The literature presented in this section represents the effects of violations of physical space during in-group/out-group interactions at both the individual and group levels. The dynamics and physical spaces within in-group/out-group interactions need to be taken into consideration along with other conditions that affect group interactions.

3. Conditions Affecting Cultural Interaction

There are internal and external conditions affecting the ways in which culturally disparate groups interact with one another. In Bochner’s (1982) “dimensions of contact” research, the author categorizes the effects of conditions according to interactions occurring between either culturally disparate groups, meaning “within” the same societies or “between” groups from different societies (p. 8). Within the setting of the current study, interaction occurs “between members of different societies;” therefore, evidence from the literature supporting claims that conditions affect culturally disparate groups will focus on

interactions "between societies" (p. 8). Bochner lists the "major dimensions of cross-cultural contact" as: "(a) on whose territory the contact occurs;" (b) the time span of the interaction; (c) its purpose; (d) the type of involvement; (e) the frequency of contact; and (f) the degree of intimacy, relative status and power, numerical balance, and distinguishable characteristics of the participants" (p. 8). According to Bochner, "There is a major difference regarding within-society and between- society cross-cultural contacts" (p. 8). For instance, "between-society" describes situations in which one group is foreign and the other native to the territory where interactions are taking place for a "short or medium-term," such as "tourists and overseas students" (Bochner, 1982, p. 9).

Other examples describing the conditions affecting cultural interaction found in the literature involve categorizing cultures as "simple," "complex," "tight," and "loose" for the purposes of analyzing differences (Freeman & Winch, 1957; Pelto, 1968). Bochner (1982) claims that although "conceptual and measurement problems have not been fully resolved, it is possible in principle" to use categories to illustrate "similarities and differences" between culturally disparate societies (Boldt & Roberts, 1979; p. 10). Bochner (1982) introduces "dimensions of contact" to illustrate the necessity of categorizing conditions that affect interactions between culturally disparate groups (p. 8). The literature presented warrants the use of categorization as a tool for constant comparisons used in the construction of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Gioia, et al., 2013).

4. Cultural Competency

Learning and understanding how to communicate with culturally different groups, especially for groups temporarily residing in foreign countries, is crucial for successful interaction (i.e., visitors and hosts). Argyle (1982) listed multiple groups that required intercultural communications skills for work in foreign environments. Of the groups he cites, "members of the Peace Corps" more closely resemble the American teams used in this study (Argyle, 1982, p. 61). His work also categorized sojourner reactions to indigenous culture into one of four different response types (Argyle, 1982). Argyle identifies visitors' reactions to the indigenous cultures in which they were immersed as one of the following: "(a) detached observers; (b) reluctant and cautious participants in the local

culture; (c) enthusiastic participants, some of whom come to reject their original culture;" or (d) "settlers" (pp. 61–62).

Two measures affecting the placement of visitors within Argyle's reactive categorizations are "subjective rating of comfort and satisfaction with life in another culture" and "performance in role-played inter-cultural group tasks" (Chemers, Lekhyananda, Fiedler, & Stolurow, 1966; Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1977). These measures fit within the analytical framework of this study and the range of intercultural competency skills possessed by American teams. Visitor responses to indigenous culture, combined with measures of intercultural effectiveness, have enabled researchers to "recognize three dimensions of intercultural competence (I.C.C.): (a) ability to deal with psychological stress, (b) ability to communicate effectively, and (c) ability to establish interpersonal relationships" (Argyle, 1982, p. 62; Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978).

Argyle (1982) concludes that intercultural competency is a skill set, not unlike that of other professions where visitors in foreign environments need to possess cultural competencies to facilitate interactions and foster relations. The concept of intercultural competency adds to environmental complexities affecting interactions because there exists "a wide range of situations and types of performance involved, together with a variety of goals" (p. 62). Argyle's (1982) claim that "there are often a number of themes or modes of interaction in a culture which are common to a wide range of situations" presents itself in the research setting (p. 62). Groups foreign to an environment use a combination of their "subjective" assessments based on their interpretations after interactions that affect their teams "performances in role-played inter-cultural group tasks" (Argyle, 1982, p. 62).

At its most basic level, culturally competent individuals are those who show respect for and understand diverse ethnic and cultural groups, including their histories, traditions, beliefs, and value systems; these individuals can interact in different cultures effectively and efficiently (Rice, 2016). Culturally competent individuals are what make up culturally competent teams, whose collective actions demonstrate the reverence necessary for successful interactions with groups from different cultures.

5. Intercultural Communications

Verbal and non-verbal communications play a significant role in the facilitation of interaction between culturally disparate groups. Words have meaning; however, given the differences in language and social practices between interacting groups from different cultures, misinterpretations of spoken language and social behaviors can lead to communications breakdowns that hinder present and future interactions. Intercultural communications problems adversely affect interaction according to the perspectives found in the literature. The topic of intercultural communications is introduced by discussing common verbal and non-verbal communications differences between culturally disparate groups.

The importance of language in cultures cannot be denied. Language allows cultures to communicate and transfer knowledge. According to Argyle (1982), language is one of the "most important differences" and the biggest "barriers between cultures" (p. 63). Regardless of the visitor's proficiency in the local language, "serious mistakes" can still occur when speakers attempt to vocally convey their intentions (Argyle, 1982, p. 63). Researchers have evidence that being both proficient and confident in the local language is "necessary for adjusting" to life among a foreign culture (Argyle, 1982, p. 64; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1966). Having the ability to fluently speak in the native language, however, does not necessarily translate into successful communications for speakers that do not understand the language's "polite usage" (Argyle, 1982). Cultural issues arise in the usage of a language if the speaker is too direct, frank, or inappropriately uses "sequential structure," such as improperly telling their hosts "no" in response to a request or discussing business prior to an informal period designated for informal conversation (Argyle, 1982, p. 64; Brein & David, 1971).

It has been established that verbal communications are important for facilitating interaction and fostering relations between sojourner groups and their indigenous hosts. Non-verbal communication, however, is equally important during intercultural communication, particularly in circumstance where interlocutors, such as interpreters, are being employed. Researchers support the important role of non-verbal communications during interactions between culturally disparate groups (Argyle, 1982). Interpretations of

non-verbal communications provide cues and meaning about culturally disparate groups' attitude which influences their interpretations of the other groups' behaviors (Argyle, 1982). Argyle (1982) identifies attitudinal interpretations of non-verbal communications that signify "like—dislike, expressed emotions, supported speech by elaborated utterances, provided feedback from listeners, and managed synchronizing" as crucial in the interaction process (p. 64). Characteristics of non-verbal communications, such as "facial expressions, gaze, bodily contact, gestures, and the non-verbal aspects of vocalization" supply the cues used in the meaning-making processes of observers during and after intercultural interactions (Argyle, 1982, p. 66–67).

Facial expressions and other non-verbal forms of communications are equally as important as verbal communication. Researchers identified the following two key characteristics concerning the facial behaviors and non-verbal communications: "The face is the most important source of non-verbal communications," and "similar basic emotional expressions are found in all cultures" (Argyle, 1982, p. 65; Chan, 1979). Facial expressions and behaviors convey different meanings within different cultures, however, problems occur when these expressions are interpreted using a foreign perspective (Argyle, 1982; Ekman, Friesen, & Ellsworth, 1972). Gaze is also recognized as a universal form of non-verbal communications (Watson, 2014). Scholars studying multiple cultures indicate that the length of time that a gaze lasts holds very similar meanings; most often, a gaze that last too long is interpreted as being "disrespectful" or "threatening" (Argyle, 1982, p. 66). Conversely, too short of a gaze signifies a lack of attention or even "dishonesty" (Argyle, 1982, p. 66). Touching or close contact with others also has different meanings across cultures. "High contact" cultures, such as "Arabs, Latin Americans, Africans, and Southern Europeans," also gaze for longer periods of time (Argyle, 1982, p. 66). In the United States, standing too close in public spaces or public body contact of any sort is considered "taboo;" such behavior is reserved only for greetings, family relations, or professional services, such as doctors (Argyle, 1966).

Intercultural communications include skills that go beyond verbal and include nonverbal communication. Researchers have considered gestures such as "bodily movements, posture, and vocalization" as forms of non-verbal communications unique

within certain cultures (Argyle, 1982, pp. 66–67). Bodily movement and posture convey very differing meanings across cultures. Saitz and Cervenka (1972) observe that "many gestures are distinctive to a particular culture or cultural area," which make them a considerable source for misinterpretation by sojourners. The pitch or decibel level of vocalization is another form of non-verbal communications that conveys different meaning within different cultures (Argyle, 1982, p. 67). Speaking loudly could be interpreted as anger in one culture or as assertive in others (Argyle, 1982).

Both verbal and non-verbal communications play a significant role that affects not only intercultural communications, but the interaction process overall. Different cultural origins have different systems of meaning when using respective languages (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015). Differences in interpretation have the tendency to confuse people across cultures and make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to understand one another (Argyle, 1982). Language is a perpetual problem, regardless of fluency, based on understanding the languages "polite usage" (Argyle, 1982). Other challenges associated with language differences, especially when interlocutors are used, were identified as directness, frankness, and "sequential structure" (Argyle, 1982). Researchers have recognized universal forms of non-verbal communications such as facial expressions and gaze across cultures while establishing that non-universal forms of the medium, such as gestures and vocalization, hold meaning unique to a location (Saitz & Cervenka, 1972). This section established a connection between intercultural communications and its effects on group interactions. Verbal and non-verbal communications significantly contribute to facilitating interaction in cultural environments; however, there are other factors that influence the communication process.

Understanding and responding to the cultural rules governing local societies facilitates interaction with indigenous populations. According to Argyle (1982), rules exist to "regulate behaviors so that goals can be attained, and needs satisfied" (p. 67). It is important to also understand a language that is widely spoken by people of different cultures (Adler, 2017). Argyle (1982) identifies the use of common cultural rules within non-industrialized societies, such as bribery, nepotism, eating and drinking, seating guests, and ideology. What is considered "bribery" in industrialized nations is often considered a

“commission” or government officials just taking a fee for services provided to the local populace in many non-industrialized nations (Argyle, 1982, p. 67). “Nepotism” among government officials is not only acceptable, it is considered an insult by friends and family if it is not practiced in most non-industrialized nations (Argyle, 1982, p. 67). Within industrialized countries, bribery and nepotism is not only frowned upon, it is illegal, particularly among members of the government (Argyle, 1982, p. 67). The ethical differences governing cultural rules are often the cause of significant communication problems between groups from industrialized and non-industrialized nations. Misunderstandings create hostility between culturally disparate groups if cultural rules are not considered empathetically, by both parties interacting.

Another cultural rule serving as a source of problems during intercultural interactions involves the seating of guests, eating, and drinking (Argyle, 1982). According to Argyle (1982), the seating of guests holds more significance in some cultures than in others. In cultures where guest seating holds significance, seating orientation and positioning are indicative of status and power. Religious cultures restrict the consumptions of certain foods and drinks, such as pork and alcohol in Muslim cultures. Other cultures implement rules for how to ask or decline seconds and the types of utensils used for eating. Groups of sojourners failing to follow the rules governing the seating of guests, eating, or drinking run the risk of insulting their indigenous hosts, especially after being immersed within the host culture for an extended period. Communications conflicts arise from the violation of these either rules for two reasons: (1) sojourners ignorance or (2) their inability to overcome their cultural own cultural values, as is often the case concerning bribery and nepotism (Argyle, 1982).

6. Social Motivation and Trust in Cultural Environments

Societal motivational differences between culturally disparate groups affect both interaction and the development of intercultural trust. Argyle (1982) attributed these motivational differences to the “pursuit of differing goals” and “gratification that stems from differing rewards” (p. 71). An example of societal motivation from the literature was given as “societies which are constantly at war with their neighbors” that are motivated to

“encourage aggressiveness in their young male” population (Zigler & Child, 1969; Argyle, 1982, p. 71). Other motivational factors affecting interaction between cultures include individual efforts at “hard work, risk taking, money accumulation, social status, and the improvement of business enterprise” (Argyle, 1982, p. 72). However, other cultures value “social position” over individual “effort” as the motivation driving reward expectations (Argyle, 1982, p. 72; McClelland, 1967). Lastly, the concept of “saving face” in relation to a cultural group’s dignity and honor is defined as a significant motivator (Argyle, 1982; Molinsky, 2007). Molinsky (2007) defines “face” in this context as the “image that one presents in social interaction with relevant others” (p. 628; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Goffman (1959), who first used the term in academic research, defines “face” as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 213). Causing an indigenous host to “lose face” is not only insulting but is likely to hinder future interactions (Argyle, 1982). Differing societal motivations across cultures influence the establishment of trust between culturally different groups and must be considered in the process of interaction (Buchan, 2009).

A focus on intercultural communication studies is important when interactions take place in complex environments based on positionality (Adler, 2017). Non-verbal communication such as eye contact may reflect underlying cultural values, and the interpretation of non-verbal behaviors according to one’s own cultural norms is likely to lead to misunderstandings. Buchan (2009) modeled the development of trust within cultures as residing along a continuous trajectory whose point of origin was based on either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Buchan (2009) concludes that Far Eastern societies initially start the trust development process based on extrinsic motivations such as “network sanctioning” or “contracts” (p. 380) and posits that in industrialized cultures, trust development initiates between parties based on intrinsic motivation, such as each party’s “values or attributes” (p. 381). Regardless of the motivational differences between westernized and Far Eastern societies, the ideal motivational goal for trust development in Buchan’s (2009) model is “benevolence” (p. 407).

Motivational differences and their effects on trust development have a significant influence in facilitating interactions between culturally different groups. Trust resides on a dynamic continuum based on the context and circumstances surrounding group interactions. Differing motivations across cultures affect the development of trust (Argyle, 1982; Buchan, 2009). Understanding the differences in societal motivations and how these differences affect trust development across cultures is essential for facilitating intercultural interaction. Characteristics such as in-group/out-group dynamics, environmental conditions, cultural competencies, intercultural communications, and motivations for the development of trust are all equally important.

7. Outcomes from Cultural Interaction

There are identifiable outcomes that result from the interactions between culturally disparate groups. In describing the effect of an expanded awareness of cultural differences and an increased respect for other cultures, interviewees revealed that their perspectives became more open and appreciative of other cultures through their experiences. Culture and cross-cultural understanding are vital because daily interactions require that visiting groups demonstrate cultural reverence and understanding (Kramsch, 2014). Instances of miscommunication can always be eliminated among people who speak different languages if effective communication is employed (Kramsch, 2014). Even those who belong to different cultural groups can also find methods to properly and effectively coexist if due respect is present. A changed perspective is significant, as this process begins with the establishment of a positive perspective about cultural differences.

Bochner (1982) classifies the overall outcomes of interactions between culturally disparate groups into one of three following categories: assimilation, segregation, or integration. He explains that these outcomes can result from either contact "between societies" or "within societies" (Bochner, 1982, p. 24; Bochner, 2003, p. 3). Assimilation "occurs when a group or an entire society gradually adopt … the customs, beliefs, folkways and lifestyles of a more dominant culture" (Bochner, 1982, p. 24); meanwhile, "segregation is a policy of separate development" derived from "protectionist policies" imposed by ethnic groups that control power within a region (Bochner, 1982, p. 26). Segregationist

policies are implemented to "keep the unwanted people, ideas, and influences" of disempowered ethnic groups out of sectors of societies designated for only members of the power group (Bochner, 1982, p. 26). The outcome of sociocultural interaction is that of integration (Bochner, 1982). Bochner (1982) defines integration as "occurring when different groups maintain their cultural identity in some respects, but merge into a superordinate group in other respects" (p. 26). Integration often results in the creation of "third culture" or "hybrid teams" (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; Howell, 1982; Useem & Useem, 1967). Bochner (1982) further describes the concept of "third culture" as the coexistence of differences among groups with "varied aspects of life" such as those concerning values, thoughts, and ideas (p. 26). The term to describe integration patterns between or within societies is "cultural pluralism" (p. 26). Howell (1982) labels this phenomenon as "third culture," which he defines as "a collective of persons living by standards and customs selected from participating cultures plus acceptable compromises" (p. 248). All outcomes from the interactions between culturally different groups presented in this section fit within the analytical framework for the current study and their existence is supported within the literature. The effects of these outcomes contribute to complexities within cultural environments and influence the meaning-making and social identities that visitors to foreign lands present to their native hosts.

8. Conclusions

There are many ideas, concepts, and theories about culture and cultural interactions presented in this section. The goal was to present literature which brings to light the challenges that cultures pose to American team meaning-making and social identity. The combination of in-group/out-group dynamics, environmental conditions, levels of cultural competency, language proficiency, and the ability to establish trust all contribute to the complexities experienced by groups of visitors attempting to reside temporarily within foreign cultures. The consequences of interactions between these groups, both influence and shape their interpretations, understanding, and the knowledge they derive on how to successfully facilitate future exchanges of actions, influence, and information.

C. MEANING-MAKING

This section focuses on the meaning-making literature. The components of meaning-making are defined as the sense-giving, sense-making, and information-seeking processes used by teams attempting to facilitate interaction in complex cultural environments.

1. Sense-Giving in Cultural Environments

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) defines sense-giving as the "process of attempting to influence the sense-making and meaning construction of others," (p. 442). These researchers, however, approached the framework of group sense-giving from the perspective of "influencing the sense-making and meaning construction" of indigenous populations (p. 442). Gioia, et al., discovered the "sense-giving tactics" implemented by a "new university president" during his quest to initiate strategic change throughout the organization he led, through shared vision and the presentation of hypothetical scenario (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 58). Bartunek, Krim, Necochea, and Humphries (1999). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) describe the process as "leadership constructed opportunities" that "appealed to the values" of the organizations audience (p. 38). Other researchers explore organizational learning and change initiatives, that use "storytelling" as method to "support change initiatives" about organizational successes (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 58; Snell, 2002).

Scholars emphasize that sense-giving is a process for both leaders and subordinates regarding change initiatives (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). An example for these collective organizational sense-giving strategies given in the study performed by Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, and Miner-Rubino (2002) in which committees comprised of subordinates attempted to sell their change ideas ("issue selling") to organizational leaders as a bottom up driven change initiative (p. 355). Corley and Gioia (2004) examine the sense-giving process from the perspective of identity change where organizational leaders utilize a strategy that "provided new labels defining the company" or create "new meanings" to re-define the company's image during the creation of a new subsidiary branch (p. 196; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007, p. 58). Osland and Bird (2000) and Sieck et al. (2013) investigate sense-

making in cultural environments from the individual perspective. This research builds upon previous findings in the sense giving and sensemaking literature and views both processes as sub-components of team meaning-making. The findings of previous scholars support the claim that collective sense-giving projects images and intentions, while it simultaneously influences the sense-making of other group during interactions.

2. Sense-Making in Cultural Environments

Sense-making is essential to organizations because it is a process that allows them to reach understanding about often novel or confused issues (Maitlis, 2014). Collective sense-making provides understanding about the expectations of other groups for whom organizations are interacting, which in turn causes changes to the organization's social identity. Weick (1995) states that "sense-making involves placing stimuli into some kind of framework" in explanations that conceptualize the process (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51). Sensemaking's "frameworks" are mechanisms that "enable them [organizations] to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" responses to novel circumstances (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51; Weick, 1995, p. 4). Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) describe the process as "the reciprocal interaction of information-seeking, meaning ascription, and action" (p. 240). Thomas et al. described the process of sense-making as including more actions than stimuli, (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Weick, 1995). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) defined sense-making as "meaning construction and deconstruction" (p. 442);

Instances of sense-making are composed of seven properties: "identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, ongoing events, cues, and plausibility" (Weick, 1995, p. 3). Sense making allows the ability to freely transform information into practical values that can be of use to the organization. Weick (1995) constructed these seven properties after studying the medical communities long process of acceptance of battered children's syndrome (BCS) as a psychological reality. Weick (1995) observed that doctors first recognized the problem and marketed its existence throughout the medical community via academic writings; however, he emphasized that BCS went through a long process of collective sense-making prior to being entirely accepted throughout much of the medical

community. Weick's (1995) analysis of this acceptance process recognize that the community needed time to identify and understand the cues associated with the BCS, namely children whose parents (i.e., identity) could not explain their children's injuries. The medical community needed time to retrospectively process the children's ongoing problem, namely multiple visits to the emergency room (i.e., social contact) to make sense of the indicators associated with BCS. It was only after the medical community acknowledged the plausibility of this affliction that the diagnosis of BCS became accepted within the community and systems (i.e., enactment or expectations) for reacting to abused children were developed (Weick, 1995).

Weick (1995) analyzes sense-making from a collective perspective versus an individual process. He emphasized the significance of novel events, or surprises. An organization's sense-making processes are invoked not only when presented with novel events, but whenever "discrepancies" or errors are discovered between what an organization expects (i.e., abstract) versus what has occurred (i.e., pragmatic).

The behaviors of organizational actors are influenced by their capability to employ sense-making in their decisions. Rasmussen, Sieck, and Osland (2010) explain that sense-making involves "processes for understanding events and behaviors in a broad sense," whereas cultural sense-making is a more focused "process by which people make sense and explain culturally different behaviors" (p. 2). Sieck et al. define the cultural sense-making process as the "metacognitive" learning processes individuals go through while coping with "anomalous behavior," a process they labeled as "cultural surprises" (pp. 1008–1010). This process describes how individuals or groups learn while immersed within a foreign culture and confronted with situations where their indigenous hosts behaviors deviate from expectation (Sieck et al., 2013). Their cultural sense-making research tested a priori cultural competency hypotheses. These scholars attempt to provide explanation for how outsiders "understand, predict, and solve problems within … cultural systems" (Osland & Bird, 2000; p. 1008; Seick, et al., 2013). Osland and Bird (2000) studied cultural sense-making to explain how individuals "learn to develop explanations of behavior that fit within the cultural meaning systems" of the group (p. 1008).

During the reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, and information between groups, sense-making provides meaning and influences the alteration of group social identity. Cultural environments affect the sense-making process based on the novel situations, behaviors, and actions encountered during interactions. Collective sense-giving and sense-making are simultaneous processes that force groups to deal with uncertainty about their responses. Groups interacting in cultural environments develop information-seeking methods to reduce these uncertainties, described as "cultural surprises," experienced during interactions with the indigenous groups they encounter (Sieck et al., 2013).

3. Information-Seeking

Information-seeking contributes to the meaning-making process. It occurs continuously, is synchronized with, and provides cues used in group sense-giving and sense-making. Shannon and Weaver's (1963) research on telecommunications systems raise the question on just what exactly information from a purely mechanistic and engineering perspectives (Johnson, 1996). Concerns about how to send messages in the form of electrical signals across communications medium with the least possible distortion (Darnell, 1972; Johnson, 1996; Shannon & Weaver, 1963). Johnson (1996) views Shannon and Weaver's (1963) perspective as unrepresentative of the overall meaning of a message and most importantly the representation of information within the sphere of human perception (Darnell, 1972; Littlejohn, 1992; Turner & Rowley, 1978). Shannon and Weaver's (1963) theory was developed around the concept of entropy (Johnson, 1996). Entropy is inversely proportional with certainty, according to Shannon and Weaver's (1963) theory on messaging within telecommunications systems (Johnson, 1996); "With greater entropy, you also have higher levels of uncertainty, so that the more familiar a situation is, the less information it generates" (Darnell, 1972; Johnson, 1996, p. 6). Johnson (1996) explains that "something is information only if it represents something new, thus a measure of information is the surprise value of a message" (pp. 6–7).

Miller (1969) defines information from the perspective of human perception uses the perspective of what and how humans perceive things (Johnson, 1996). Howell (1982)

defines information as “Not only facts and figures, but all the relationships, vague ideas, hunches, feelings, in fact everything people have stored inside them or have picked up from the outside world” (p. 246). For groups interacting in cultural environments, it is not only a matter of knowing whether something should be considered information but of determining what information is needed to facilitate interaction with indigenous groups. Groups interacting in complex cultural environments need to reduce uncertainty through interpretations of interactive cues acquired through information-seeking.

The reduction of environmental uncertainty plays a significant role in the meaning-making processes used in group cross-cultural interactions. Uncertainty is defined as the “difference between the amount of information required to perform the task and the amount of information already possessed by the organization” (Galbraith, 1977, pp. 36–37). Galbraith described several ways organizations can reduce uncertainty, but regardless of the methods identified, information needs to be acquired to reduce organizational uncertainty (Johnson, 1996). Johnson (1996) defined information-seeking as “the purposive acquisition of information from selected information carriers” (p. 9). Johnson elaborated on the construct of information-seeking as being either goal oriented or process driven.

The information environment affects the type of information-seeking strategies implemented by groups and organizations, according to Johnson (1996). Emory and Trist (1965) initially derived a typology of information environment types (Johnson, 1996). The two following information environment types describe the conditions found within complex cultural environments: “disturbed reactive,” and “turbulent field” environments (Emory & Trist, 1965; Johnson, 1996). “Disturbed reactive” information environments require organizations “to deal with the presence of direct competitors” in which information collection efforts need to focus on “what their competitors are doing” (Emory & Trist, 1965; Johnson, 1996, p. 41). Johnson (1996) explained that when organizations find themselves unsuccessful at acquiring information about their competitors, the information environment transitions into a type that Emory and Trist (1965) described as “turbulent field,” in which the “very existence of the organization is threatened” by competitors (p. 41). Johnson (1996) discovered that organizations interacting within

“turbulent field” information environments find themselves in positions where they “must search its environment for information that will help it, while it is rediscovering who it is and searching the environment for niches in which it can prosper” (Emory & Trist, 1965; p. 41). “Turbulent field” environments require novel methods for acquiring information (Emory and Trist, 1965). It is an environment where the traditional and trusted information channels and networks, simply “no longer provide answers” (Johnson, 1996, p. 42). it is essential for each organization to be able to implement innovative process to address the dynamism in social identity.

4. Conclusions

The work of previous scholars supports the components of meaning-making used in this research. The literature also supports sense-giving, sense-making, and information-seeking as plausible components of group meaning-making. The literature establishes that group sense-giving projects an image conveying intent during interaction with culturally different groups. It also supports the claim that collective sense-making provides understanding about the expectations of culturally different groups, in retrospect about the outcomes from interactions. Thus, collective sense-making, in turn, changes group social identity. Conclusions from this literature link the role information-seeking plays in both the sense-giving and sense-making during group meaning-making.

D. SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Image and identity are key components that contribute to the creation of social identity during cross-cultural interactions. Links were established that connect image to sense-giving and identity to sense-making as components of meaning-making. These connections are constructed under the premise that group image conveys intent and group identity changes based on interpretations about the expectations of culturally different groups.

1. Image

Specific images are created by groups based on the general and inherent characteristics about the group for whom they are interacting. The projection of group

image in cultural environments conveys intentions that affect the sense-making of other groups. Various interpretations of image are present in the literature, but Grunig's (1993) definition for organizational image, defined as "receivers construct meaning—images—from their personal observations of reality or from the symbols given to them by other people…image as some sort of compromise in the minds of publics" most closely relates to this studies use of the term (p. 126). Gioia et al. (2000) cited Grunig's (1993) alternative definition due to its encapsulation of cognitive, visual, auditory, and symbolic characteristics, all of which were not found in other interpretations of the idea. Gioia et al. (2000) asserted that "image often acts as a destabilizing force on identity, frequently requiring members to revisit and reconstruct their organizational sense of self" (p. 67).

Social identities relate to the social groups they represent such as the community, the nation and the state (Bradford, 2012). Social identities develop image of how social inclusion is present which can also have the tendency to create social exclusion for those who do not exhibit a similar social identity image (Bradford, 2012). To examine the relationship and influence an organizations image has in affecting its identity, it must be asserted that the organization has a sense of who they are as an organization prior to the process (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 67). Organizational image—or the perceptions that outsiders have of the organization—is a reciprocal relationship that causes organizations to make adaptations to their identity based on feedback from social interactions, environmental circumstances, and contextual situations (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Ibarra, 1999; Weick, 1995). Gioia et al. (2000) described the adaptation and projection of image as an illusory strategy in which the identity of an organization is rarely revealed (p. 66). These scholars summarized organizational image strategies as an "attempt to convey a socially desirable managed impression that emphasizes selected aspects of identity" (Gioia et al., 2000, p. 66). Organizations highlight these "aspects" of their "identity" to create new organizational images that project plausible superordinate goals to individuals and groups outside of the organization (Bernstein, 1984; Gioia et al., 2000, p. 66). These new organizational images are composed of targeted "aspects" of their identity, not their entire identity, and are used to influence the sense-making of those surrounding the organization (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia et al., 2000). The intent of this re-imaging process is for those with whom the

organization is interacting to "adopt" the organization's "viable interpretations of a new reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Organizational re-imaging, or altering the impressions that others have of the organization, is a reciprocal process which forces organizations to dynamically alter their identities based on social interactions, contexts, and situations that arise within the environment.

2. Identity

Group identity reflects meaning and understanding about the expectations and perceptions of other groups during interaction. Albert and Whetten (1985) defined organizational identity as "that which is believed by members to be central, enduring, and distinctive about its character" (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, p. 520; Gioia et al., 2000, p. 63). This definition was broadly accepted by leading academics until Dutton and Dukerich's (1991) investigation of how the problem of how homelessness was dealt with at the New York and New Jersey Port Authority. Dutton and Dukerich (1991) discovered "a new view of organizational adaptation" based on an organization's image and identity. These authors determined that "an organization's image and identity" are essential for reaching an "understanding of the relationship between actions on and interpretations of an issue" (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, p. 520). Dutton and Dukerich (1990) explained that an organization's image is as an instrument for determining "the way they believe others see the organization" and that any perceived deterioration of the organization's image is a trigger for individuals to take corrective action, since the organization's image is also tied to an individual's "sense of self" (p. 520). Dutton and Dukerich (1991) highlight the interplay between identity and image in both impression management and organizational adaptation (p. 517). Organizational adaptation means that an organization can create policies to accommodate different social identities and employ team members that are able to act collectively regardless of cultural differences.

Interactions with other groups can be made more meaningful by ensuring that individuals, comprising the organization, are aware of their own identity and how they identify with others. Weick (1995) described the composition of identity as being formed "out of the process of interaction" further stating that "to shift among interactions is to shift

among definition of the self" (p. 20). Gioia et al. (2000) posited that organizational identity and image become extremely challenged in unstable environments. The identity of organizations operating in "complex and turbulent environments" becomes shaken and needs to be continually made more "durable" for its survival (p. 63). Gioia et al. argued that "durable" organizational identity is "illusory," and that any enduring characteristic associated with organizational identity is in fact "unstable" (pp. 63–64). Gioia et al. discovered that organizational identity adapted continually in response to dynamic changes in the environment and that labels were generally all that endured after adaptations (p. 64). Meanings that define labels also change continuously, and organizational identity is viewed as "mutable" (Gioia, et al., 2000, p. 64).

Ibarra's (1999) research findings on the adaptation of organizational identity both supported and expanded those already present in the organizational literature. Her organizational identity research focuses on the process, members new to an organization, go through to develop their organizational identity. In this quest, Ibarra constructs the concept of the "provisional self" which she defines as a "temporary solution[n] [that] people use to bridge the gap between their current capacities and self-conceptions and the representations they hold about what attitudes and behaviors are expected in the new role" (p. 765). Individuals develop a "provisional self" after they "observe role models" as examples of how they should identify with other and who they should emulate (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765). During this process, individual learn to "experiment with provisional" identities, and "evaluate experiments against internal standards and external feedback" (Ibarra, 1999, p. 764).

Identity focuses on shaping the lives of individuals and so they can better understand how their individual social interactions must be performed (Turner, 2014). The findings discussed in this section support a view of organizational or group identity as an adaptive process. Organizational identities change to accommodate social interactions, situations, contexts, and circumstances that organizations encounter in turbulent environments.

3. Social Identity

Different cultures have different concepts of individual and collective social identity. Image, identity, and meaning-making contribute to the construction and adaptation of novel social identities based on interaction. According to scholars, social identities make up a "repertoire" of the multiple social groups in which individuals socially identify (Berger, 1966; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 259; Tajfel, 2010). Given the fuzziness that exists between identity and social identity, this section will introduce literature that provides a brief background distinguishing between their similarities and differences.

Social identity allows different cultures to cross-reference as being the same or different. Social identity aligns individuals with social groups comprised of members that share beliefs and values (Swann, 2015). Hogg et al. (1995) explained that given the "parallel but separate universes, with virtually no cross-referencing" that existed between identity theory and social identity theory, similarities and differences needed to be established between the two theories (p. 255). Researchers compared literature on the two theories to determine that both topics "placed major theoretical emphasis on a multi-faceted and dynamic self that mediates the relationship between social structure and individual behavior" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 255). According to Hogg et al., general differences between the two theories are attributable to the disciplines under which their respective theories were derived. The reasons for this disconnect between theories were cited by Hogg et al. as concluding that identity theory was derived from psychology with a focus on the individual level of analysis and social identity theory was discovered within sociology with a focus on "intergroup relations" (1995, p. 255).

Having a social category is essential because the concept of the self is often based on groups with which individuals associate. Social identity is "the basic idea that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, sports team) into which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category—a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept" (Hogg et al., 1995, p. 259). Tajfel (2010) recognized that individuals identify with many different social groups in what became known as social categorization. Thus, he defined social

identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 69). Tajfel further concludes that an individual’s adoption or membership into a social group is a dynamic process comprised of four linked components defined as: “social categorization, social identity, social comparison, and psychological distinctiveness” (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel, 2010, p. 69). He defined social categorization as “the ordering of social environment in terms of social categories that is of groupings of persons in a manner which is meaningful to the subject” (Tajfel, 2010, p. 69). Social categorization was considered “a system of orientation” in which individuals “create and define” their “own place within society” (Tajfel, 2010, p. 69). Before the concept was recognized as social categorization, Berger (1966) described that “every society contains a repertoire of identities that is part of the objective knowledge of its members” (p. 106). Berger’s descriptions of social categorization were based on how individual’s come to view themselves as members of a society, through “socially defined terms” in which the adoption of multiple kinds of identities become a part of the individual’s lived “realities” (p. 107). Examples of groups forming social identities that could be contained within an individual’s “repertoire” are citizens, ethnic groups, military organizations, families, churches, social clubs, and bowling leagues.

Social identity is important element that provides meaning and understanding during and after cross-cultural interaction. Tajfel (2010) discovered that an individual’s membership in a social group is based on his or her “recognition of identity in socially defined terms,” in which individuals choose to either become members or leave social groups. An individual’s willingness to stay or leave is based on the group’s “contribution to the positive aspects” of their “social identity” (p. 69). In situations where individuals want to leave a social group, but cannot, Tajfel found they are more willing to “accept the situation” and then work to change the features of the group for which they do not like by “engaging in social actions” (p. 69). This dynamic process was conceptualized by Tajfel as social comparison. Social comparison is linked to both social identity and categorization in which individuals, through comparison, notice both objective and subjective characteristic similarities and differences with other individuals within a society.

Social groups occur because of difference in orientations and the distinctiveness of cultural upbringings. Categorization of social groups within a society takes place based on these comparisons (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel, 2010). An individual's membership to a social group, therefore, is based on the "emotional and value significance" that the individual places in membership (Tajfel, 2010, p. 69). Hogg et al. (1995) explained this comparison process using the term "self-enhancement," which "guides the social categorization process such that in-group norms and stereotypes largely favor the in-group" (p. 260). Psychological distinctiveness or the group's ability to "preserve" its "contributions" to "those aspects of an individual's social identity are positively valued" by members and "keep its positively valued distinctiveness from other groups" (Tajfel, 2010, p. 69). Social identities are formed and adapted based on the differences and distinctiveness between social groups. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) discovered the "reconceptualization of the multiple identities model" linking meaning-making to "the perceptions and salience of student's multiple social identities" (p. 1). This same reconceptualization could be applied to the multiple identities' groups change and adapt in cultural environments. Identity, image, and meaning-making are established components within the construction and categorization of social identities within societies (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel, 2010).

4. Conclusion

Literature supports the existence of social groups as entities in which individuals derive the numerous social identities making up their "repertoires" (Hogg et al., 1995; Tajfel, 2010). The findings reviewed in this section supported the claim that image, identity, and meaning-making contribute to the construction and adaptation of novel social identities during cross-cultural interactions. The literature reviewed in this section also provides understanding about the dynamic process in which social groups create, define, and adapt their memberships to specific social groups and subsequently assume multiple social identities.

E. SUMMARY

This chapter presents cultural, mean-making, and social identity literature that supports this study's findings. The literature is introduced from a perspective that views culture as an adaptive system that affects group meaning-making and social identity adaptation. Within the context of this research, collective meaning-making encapsulates sense giving, sensemaking, and information-seeking and literature on these topics are introduced to support the use of this framework. The social identity literature presented began with an introduction to the image and identity constructs as individual phenomenon and then transitions into explanations of social identity theory as a collective process. The triad of topics (culture, meaning-making, and social identity) are intended to support research findings that address the conditions that facilitate or hinder American team interactions in complex cultural environments. The next chapter details the methodological approach this study uses to answer the research question.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the system of methods used throughout this inductive study. The overarching methodology applied grounded theory before and during the analysis of critical incidents. The chapter also details the procedures the research used for: organizing data; handling researcher bias; and for maintaining research ethics. Critical incidents emerged from narratives after semi-structured interviews were conducted and were analyzed using grounded theory coding as a method. Once "theoretical saturation" was achieved, the research used methods developed by Saldaña, Gioia, and Charmaz to derive the theoretical codes this study used for theory building (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gioia, et al., 2013; Charmaz, 2014). Finally, the research used a variation of the Gioia (2013) method for the presentation of its findings. Gioia's method was also used to illustrate the rigor of this inductive research.

1. Organization of Data

The system for handling and organizing the data in this study was a careful and deliberate process. This system was influenced by a combination of experience using qualitative methods and the procedures for handling human subjects research dictated by the NPS IRB. To maintain the operators' confidentiality while obfuscating personally identifiable information (PII) associated with research subjects, an interview numbering system was developed to maintain anonymity. The organization system enabled the labeling of all digital recordings and transcribed interviews in a manner that stripped PII from both file titles. Interview numbers were assigned using an alpha-numeric system, where the hyphenated researcher's and primary investigator's last names were used on all numbers; then, a four-digit number starting at 0001 was incremented for each additional interview in the list. Other details listed in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for each interview listed were the interview number, rank, branch of service, specialization (e.g., SEAL, Special Forces, or Civil Affairs), and the locations where each participant's VSO

teams conducted VSO. Figure 1 illustrates excel spreadsheet that used as a ledger for the interviews conducted for this research.

Once digital recordings of interview proceedings were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents titled by interview number, they were uploaded into QDA Miner Lite 4.2, a qualitative data analysis software. These transcriptions were loaded in QDA Miner 4.2 to analyze them for the discovery and extraction of participant's critical incidents. Once critical incidents were identified, they were copied and pasted into a Word document. Word documents detailing critical incidents were labeled using an assigned sequential incident number starting at 1. The incident's title included an "in vivo code" representing the incident's "theoretical or substantive definition of what is happening in the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 190). An example of a critical incident's title in the current study is "Incident #1 Debating the Taliban Mullah."

Transcripts were organized in QDA Miner 4.2 according to their interview number during the analysis, discovery, and extraction of critical incidents. A more detailed description of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) is provided later in the chapter. Figure 1 illustrates the process of identifying and organizing narrative accounts according to critical incidents.

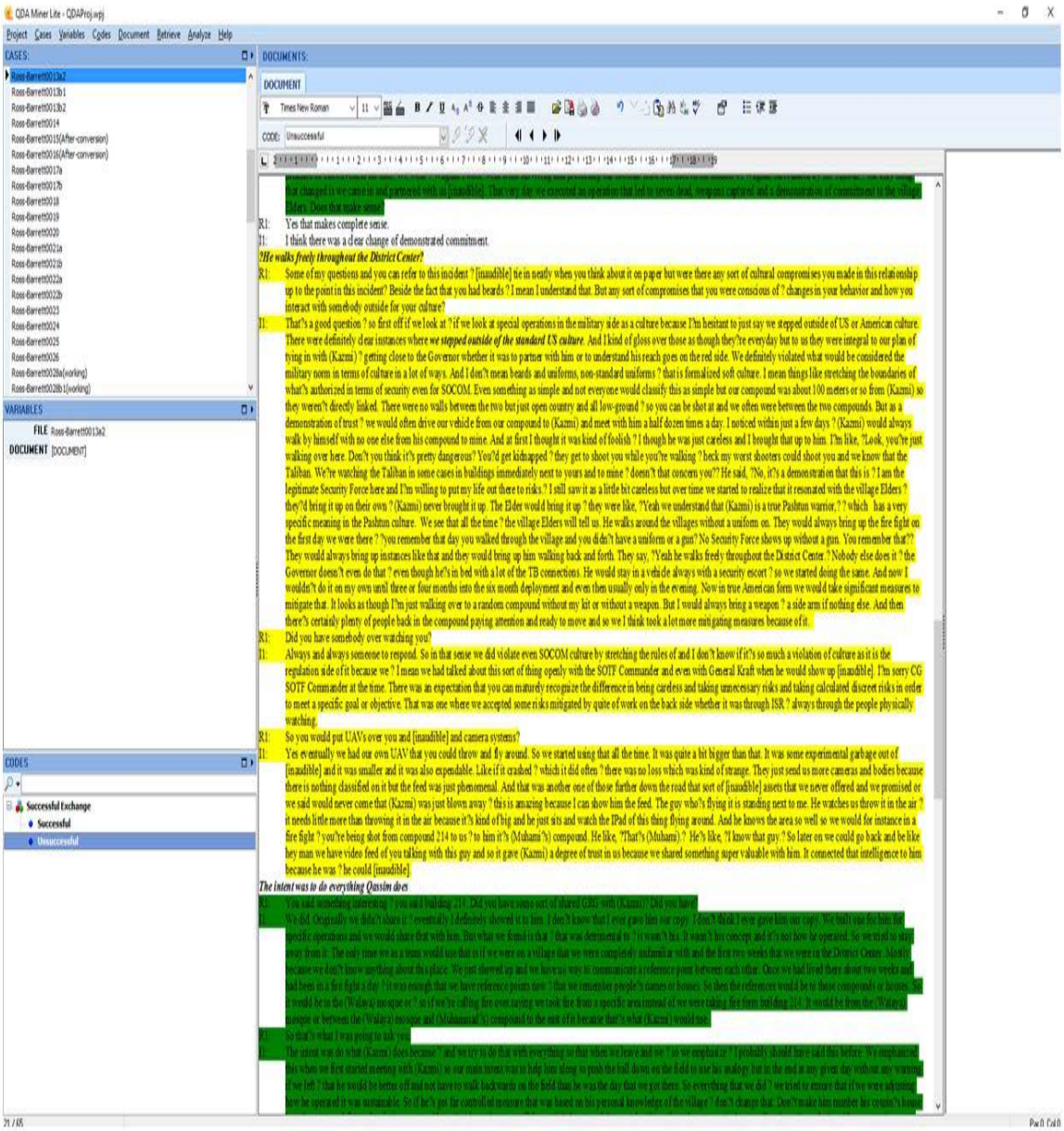

Figure 1. Organizing critical incidents in QDA Miner 4.2

Emergent categories were discovered within transcribed narratives where the operators' described the setting in which their teams interacted. Figure 2 illustrates the coding process used to draft the setting chapter.

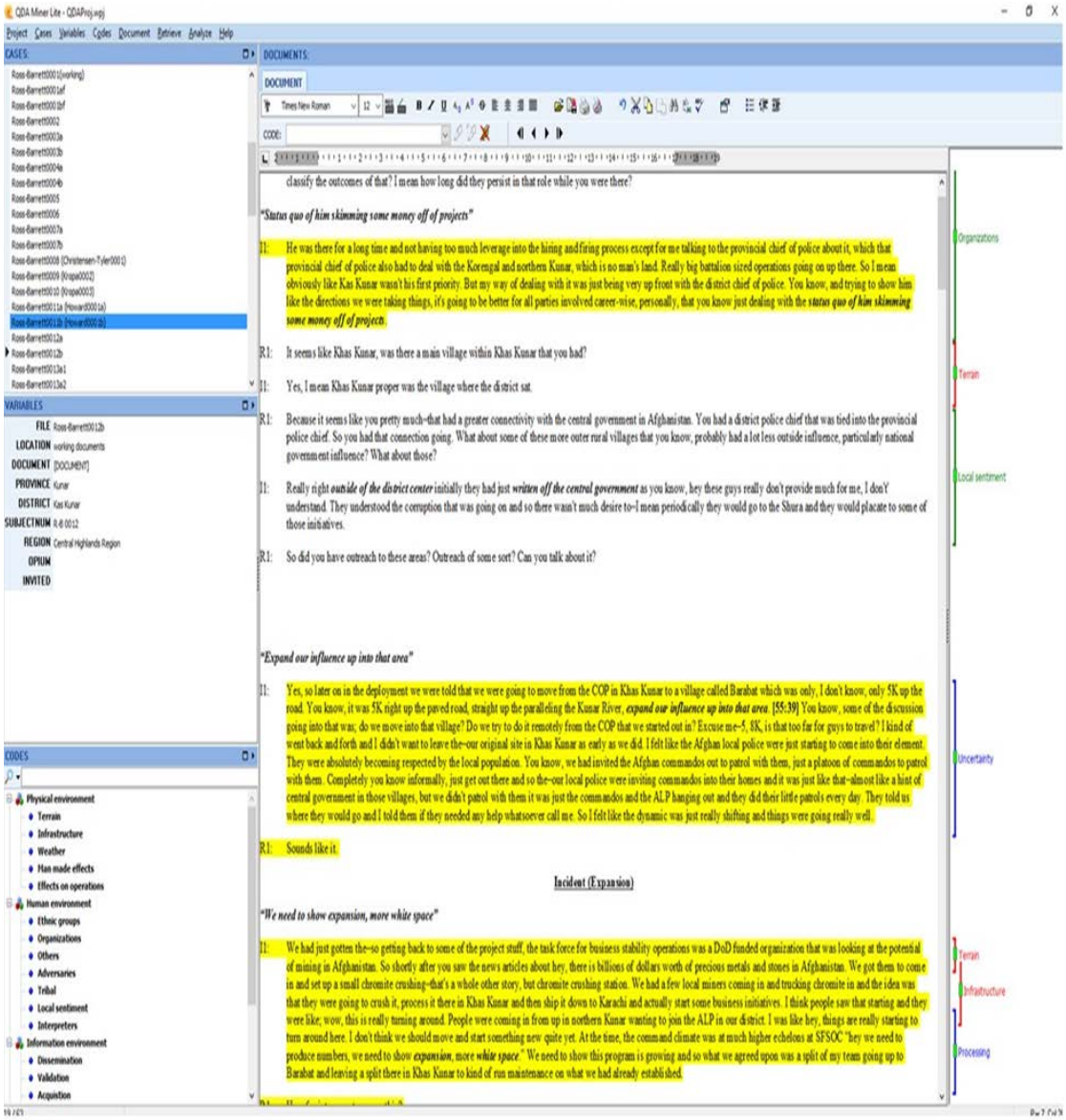

Figure 2. Coding and organizing categories of the overall environment

During analysis of the environment using QDA Miner 4.2, emergent themes were discovered as falling within three categories that made up the physical, human, and information domains of the environment. Each of these three key categories had five to seven properties identified as emergent patterns discovered throughout participant narratives. The last area that must be addressed is the organization and analysis of critical incidents within QDA Miner 4.2. All 73 critical incidents were uploaded into a QDA

Miner 4.2 project file for the coding, comparative analysis, memorandum writing, and identification of emergent themes. This organizational method enabled the tracking of all initial and focused coding. QDA Miner 4.2 enabled comparative analysis, write memorandums, and then export findings into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for further analysis and organization, all from a centralized software application. Figure 3 provides an example of a screenshot of the QDA Miner 4.2 Project File that used to code the critical incidents for this research.

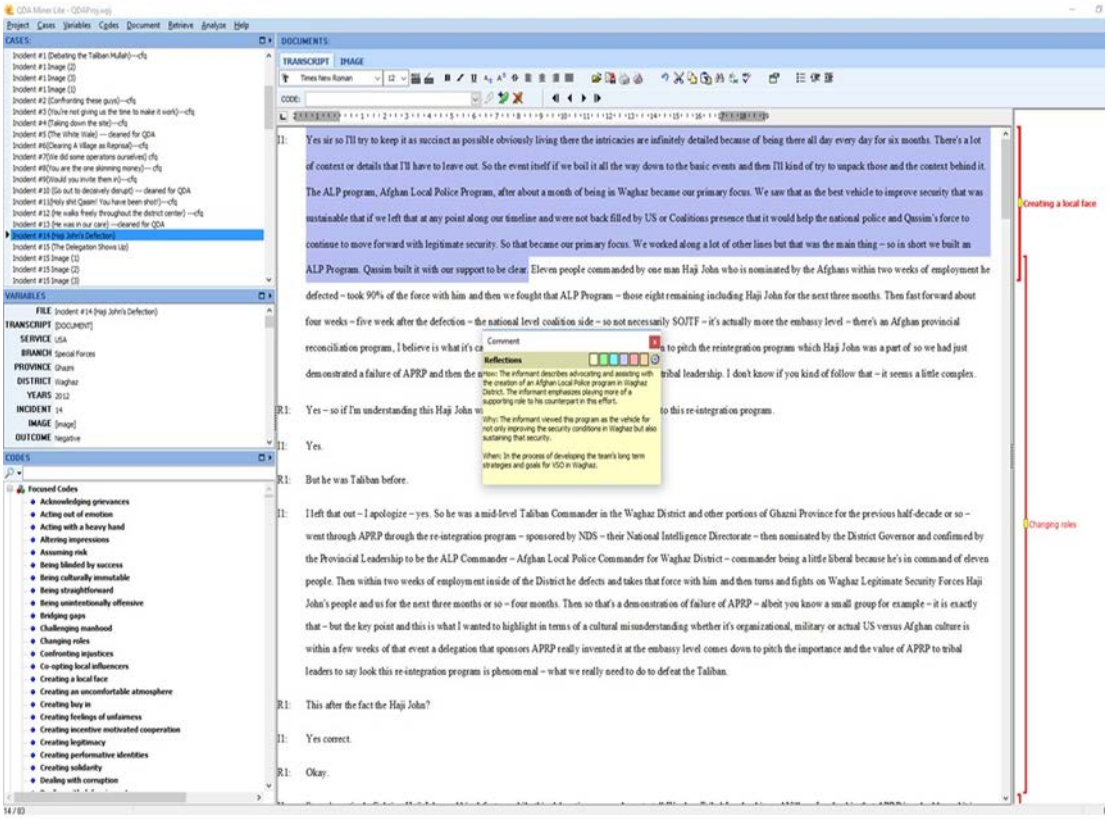

Figure 3. QDA Miner 4.2 project file example of organization and coding

2. Transferability

This research analyzed the "social construction processes" American teams' used to interact in complex cultural environments (Gioia, et al., 2013, p. 16). The research focused "more on the means by which" American team members "went about constructing

and understanding their experiences than on the number or frequency of occurrences" (p. 16). This approach provided the level of adequacy necessary for "scientific theorizing about the" operators "experience" as a team member (p. 16). This research uses the "assumption" that the American teams' actions and behaviors are socially constructed. Professional Special Forces Soldiers "knew what they were doing" and are capable of "explaining their thoughts, intentions, and actions" while conducting the VSO mission (p. 17). Therefore, the combination of the researcher's and operators' experiences make them "knowledgeable agents" on the research topic (p. 17). The knowledge and experience of the researcher and those sharing their experiences add credence for research findings.

Analysis of similar and dissimilar patterns of actions and experiences extracted from the operators' stories provide convincing evidence that support the research's findings. The use of critical incidents is intended to sensitize readers to the setting and reasons American teams took certain actions or displayed behaviors within the context of the circumstances surrounding interactions (Charmaz, 2014). This approach was used as a method to convince readers that general principles emerging from the story are socially constructed truths based on similar patterns of action and behaviors used by many different operators (Gioia et al., 2013).

Research findings discovered a substantive theory; however, that does not mean general principles emerging from the research's very focused study of VSO teams in Afghanistan cannot be applied across other domains (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 24). According to Gioia et al., "many concepts and processes" emerging from this research "are similar, even equivalent (Morgeson and Hoffman, 1999), across domains" (p. 24). Transferability is dependent upon the emergence of "obvious" and "relevant concepts or principles" generated through the construction of grounded theory (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 24). This research articulates transferable concepts and principles using propositions, which is the goal of "good grounded theory" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 24).

3. Researcher Bias

The researcher possesses similar and related experiences with the operators that participated in this research. Related experience may have biased or influenced research

findings. This section clarifies all the biases possessed prior to starting this investigation (Creswell, 2014). The researcher and research participants are members of the active duty U.S. military. Both have shared experiences advising and assisting foreign armies on the stabilization of nations affected by internal conflict. The researcher also possesses a general level understanding about Iraqi culture going into the deployment, like the operators that participated in this research. It was only through constant exposure and interaction with Iraqi groups before a localized understanding and knowledge of the culture was developed.

4. Research Ethics

The moral principles defined by the Naval Postgraduate School which are used to guide research were adhered to throughout the course of this investigation. Protection of participants' personal information was a priority over any knowledge derived by this research. Ethical considerations and practices discussed in this section cover the conduct for ethical writing, protection of the operators, and the role of the researcher during interviews. Ethical writing meant being cognizant about any potential plagiarism (Creswell, 2014). Credit was given for the thoughts and ideas of others through citation; quotes were placed around exact words of authors when extracted from their written works (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010; Creswell, 2014). The practice of ethical writing also applied to the use of written language. Another goal was not to offend or disparage individuals or groups based on language that could be perceived as prejudiced towards people's religion, race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, age, or sexual orientation (APA, 2010).

The protection of the operators' rights was another ethical consideration concerning the protection of the operator's anonymity and privacy (Creswell, 2014). The operators who volunteered to participate in the current study were required to sign an informed consent form prior to participation. Informed consent enabled the operators to choose to either be identified by name or remain anonymous in the final report. Regardless of the operators' choice, they were not referred to by their real names anywhere within the final report. During the presentation of the informed consent, the operators' confidentiality was assured regarding the disclosure of sensitive details relinquished by them during

interviews. Situations such as these never arose during the collection of data; however, recording of the interview would be stopped and the advisement of the primary investigator sought about how to proceed if the issue had arisen. The final ethical consideration dealt with reciprocity, meaning is intended to be shared with participants (Creswell, 2014). The goal of sharing these research findings was twofold; it gave operators the opportunity to either refute portions of the findings, as well as to share in the benefits of any published work resulting from the current study (APA, 2010; Creswell, 2014).

The final ethical consideration involved the researcher's role during interaction with operators and the environment where semi-structured interviews occurred. The first aspect of this ethical consideration was intended to avoid suffering from "Stockholm Syndrome" by automatically assuming the same position as the operators interviewed for the current study (Creswell, 2014). Some repercussions of this condition could lead to the non-disclosure of negative incidents or situations that resulted in interactive outcomes that could be interpreted as ending in failure (Creswell, 2014). Mindfulness about disrupting the environments in which interviews take place was maintained and interviews were scheduled in locations external to the informants' organizations. Due to conflicted scheduling and time constraints, however, it was not possible to adhere strictly to this consideration.

B. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this research was a four-step iterative process where the interview protocol was adjusted for each successive iteration based on findings discovered in preceding iterations. This section will discuss the sampling methodology and recruitment of operators. The section then discusses the tools used for capturing data, analyzing data, and presenting research findings. The section concludes by detailing the procedures used for handling data during and after the conduct of this research.

1. Purposeful Sampling

This research used the purposeful sampling method for the "identification and selection of information-rich" operators with extensive interactive experiences serving as members of specialized American military teams in Afghanistan (Coyne, 1997; Patton,

2002, Ritchie et al., 2013; Palinkas, 2015, p. 2). The purposeful sampling discussion begins by defining it as a type of theoretical saturation. Reasoning is given for why this method was chosen and how it was used during data collection. The discussion closes with an explanation of theoretical saturation's influence on the research's iterative sampling process and sample sizing.

Purposeful sampling was influenced by a grounded theory process known as theoretical sampling. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967),

> Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal. (p. 45)

Ritchie et al. (2013), describe theoretical sampling as a "particular kind of a purposive sampling in which incidents, people, or units were sampled based on their potential contribution to the development and testing of theoretical constructs" (p. 80). Theoretical sampling mirrors the purposeful sampling technique used during data collection for this research.

The key criteria used for the purposeful selection of operators were derived out of the research question and subsequently were also used to define research's analytical framework. Therefore, the research purposely selected operators with extensive American Special Operations team experiences while serving in environments meeting the following sampling criteria:

1. Long periods of persistent warfare, including civil war
2. Heterogeneous societies comprised of disparate ethnic, tribal, and religious groups
3. Societies affected by failing or absent governments, broken tribal systems, and sub-group conflict
4. Areas whose control was heavily contested by insurgent groups

These criteria contributed, both spatially and temporally, to the significant interactive complexities American teams faced within the setting. The initial set of semi-structured interviews included operators with interactive experiences met the criteria for purposeful sampling; however, their mission type and location were too diverse. Therefore, subsequent interviews were collected solely from special operators with interactive experience on teams that had conducted the same mission in the same location. After analysis of the initial set of interviews, Special Operators with experience conducting village stability operations (VSO) in Afghanistan from 2010–2014 were determined to have the richest interactive experiences. This population was selected because they had the greatest amount of prolonged immersion amongst Afghans at the village level. The collection and analysis of a homogenous group of operators allowed for a more "detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context" (Ritchie, et al., 2013, p. 79).

The collection of interview narratives detailing operator's interactive experiences was an iterative process comprised of four interview periods that took place over a period of two-years (2015-2016). The first two interview iterations collected narratives from 18 graduate students enrolled in the Defense Analysis program at the Naval Postgraduate in Monterey, CA. The third iteration of narratives were collected from former members of various U.S. Army Special Forces Groups (SFG) in which the researcher traveled to the Washington, D.C., area, Fort Bragg, NC, and Eglin Air Force Base, FL. The 15 operators interviewed during the third interview iteration were all current or former members of the 3rd or 7th U.S. Army Special Forces Group. The fourth and final interview iteration occurred in Coronado, CA with 6 current members of SEAL Team Two.

The semi-structured interview protocol changed between the initial and second interview iterations. Freshly discovered concepts and themes found in operator narrative which caused changes in the research's direction, thus requiring the sampling of new participants, and an adapted interview protocol. The altered interview protocol was used during the final two interview iterations. T altered interview protocol was designed to explore interactions between American teams and Afghan groups that operators described as ending in success or failure. A total of 39 interview narratives collected from a diverse

mix of operators from the Army and Navy's Special Operations community. Table 1 reflects the iterative process of purposeful sampling used within this research.

Table 1. Purposeful sampling strategy

Iteration	Location	Size	Branch	Criteria
1st - spring 2015	Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA	N = 8	U.S. Army Special Forces and U.S. Navy SEALs	Special Operations decision making in chaotic environments in GWOT
2nd – fall 2015	Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA	N = 10	U.S. Army Special Forces, Civil Affairs	Special Operations sociocultural interactions while conducting VSO
3rd – fall 2016	Pentagon, Washington D.C. Fort Meade, MD Fort Bragg, NC Eglin AFB, FL	N = 15	U.S. Army Special Forces	Special Operations sociocultural interactions while conducting VSO; example of one positive and one negative incident
4th - fall 2016	Naval Special Warfare Command, Coronado, CA	N = 6	U.S. Navy SEALs	Special Operations sociocultural interactions while conducting VSO; example of one positive and one negative incident

The number of operators sampled was determined by theoretical saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) defined theoretical saturation as "the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category" (p. 61). As emerging concepts came to fruition during the collection and analysis of data, relationships between concepts become more apparent, so did refinement of the semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview protocol was continually adapted in ways that influence operator recollections on emergent concepts.

Theoretical saturation was described by Glaser (2001) as having occurred when:

> [The researcher is] not seeing the same pattern over and over again. It is the conceptualization of comparison of these incidents which yield different properties of the pattern, until no new properties of the pattern emerge. (p. 191)

Theoretical saturation was determined to have been achieved after four periods of interviewing were conducted. In accordance with the goals specified within the canons for qualitative grounded theory, theoretical saturation was reached at N = 39 samples that included the coding of 73 critical incidents. Sample size for qualitative research remains the subject of debate between qualitative researchers, to some it is considered a judgement call reserved for the researcher (Charmaz, 2014).

2. Data Handling Procedures

A Sony ICD-PX440 Digital Audio Recorder was used to capture the operators' narratives during the semi-structured interviews. The audio recorder, along with downloadable Sony Sound Organizer software, allowed the recorder to be plugged into a computer, and download, label, and organize all interview recordings. A government contracted transcriptionist service was used for translating audio information into Microsoft Word document for further analysis. After transcription were determined to accurately reflect information contained in the audio file, the word documents and audio recordings were deleted. One copy for each audio file was preserved, on the NPSOwn Cloud for a period of 10 years as required by the IRB. Analysis and grounded theory coding of critical incidents was completed using qualitative data analysis software. Provalis's QDA Miner 4.2 was used for its ability to upload text narrative in multiple formats, including Microsoft Word documents.

C. CRITICAL INCIDENTS

The "critical incident technique" was used as the unit of analysis for this research (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). The critical incident technique was the most effective method from which to categorize, analyze, and then code narrative about American team interaction. This method systematically allowed the researcher to sort through and piece together, many disconnected testimonies given by operators. Flanagan (1954) described the "critical incidents technique" as:

> A set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. (p. 327)

According to Flanagan (1954), critical incidents are “any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act” (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). This process for the collection and analysis of data was an evolutionary process at the time of its discovery. During Flanagan’s explanation on the emergence of the critical incident technique, the author described studies conducted by the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII in which scholars collected anecdotal evidence and participant testimony concerning why pilots were dropped from flight school and ineffective at leadership (pp. 328–329). The pilots within these U.S. Army Air Corps studies were asked to:

> Report incidents observed by them that involved behavior which was especially helpful or inadequate in accomplishing the assigned mission. (Flanagan, 1954, p. 328)

The “critical incidents technique” influenced adaptations of the interview protocol used during the third and fourth interview periods (Flanagan, 1954). The interview protocol shifted from asking broad questions on decision-making in violent, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments to asking operators for critical incidents about “observed human behaviors” used by American teams during their interactions with Afghans (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327).

Flanagan (1954) provided the following example on the successful military application of this technique conducted by the U.S. Army Air Corps during WWII and based on:

> Factual incidents that were used as a basis for planning research on the design of instruments and controls and the arrangement of these within the cockpit. (p. 329)

Through personal observation and validated in Flanagan’s (1954) work, individuals are often selected, and procedures are developed based on a higher ordered list of characteristics. It is the goal of qualitative research incorporating the critical incident technique to develop selection criteria, procedures, and systems dictating human behavior based on the analysis of effective and ineffective (Flanagan, 1954). Critical incidents are derived from the sharing of experiences about human behaviors within the system being studied including antecedent events and consequential outcomes.

The discovery and categorization of experiences of operators into critical incidents greatly enhanced the analysis and synthesis for these research findings. It assisted to reduce the burdensome process of initial coding interview transcripts in their entirety. The researcher extracted 73 critical incidents based on operator experience. Grounded theory research is non-linear, and the process of initial coding began during the initial stages of this research; however, it was only after deriving a core emergent theory, adapting the interview protocol, and extracting examples of critical incident that the initial coding in earnest truly started.

D. GROUNDED THEORY

This section describes and explains how Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory coding methodology was applied for the analysis of critical incidents. The discovery of concepts, themes, and formal theory resulted through a non-linear process of grounded theory coding. Charmaz's grounded theory coding methods involve iterations of initial, focused, and theoretical in which the researcher often finds themselves repeating the process and re-visiting narrative. This section sequentially presents the non-sequential coding process used during analysis.

1. Initial Coding

After identifying 73 critical incidents, the specific text associated with these incidents was copied over to Microsoft Word documents, thus segregating the incidents from the greater interview transcript. Once all incidents were detailed within their own Microsoft Word documents, they were loaded into a QDA Miner 4.2 project file for initial coding. This process differed from initial coding the entire interview transcript, as the researcher did for the initial set of interviews. This initial process involving coding the entire interview narrative during the initial stages of the current study was what Charmaz (2014) defined as the "goal for initial coding" (p. 114). According to Charmaz, initial coding is a process where the researcher remains "open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by their readings of the data" (p. 114).

The codes discovered during initial coding contain the "language, meanings, and perceptions" of those interviewed (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114). This comes from the

philosophy that the researcher did not observe his interactions with operators from the perspective of an unbiased outsider. The researcher viewed himself as part of the interactions and interpretations of operator experience based on the "specific use of language reflected" the researcher's "views and values" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 114). Data collection and coding were an interactive part of this process in which the researcher was "a part of the human experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p 114). This was also a method of initial coding that prevented the researcher from either "taking off on premature flights of theoretical fancy" or blindly accepting the operators' points of view concerning their team's experiences (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125).

Initial coding was conducted throughout all phases of the study. A line-by-line coding technique was used where the researcher arduously developed codes for every single line of narrative (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). Each line-by-line code was constructed using a gerund, or a phrase that originates as a verb but functions as a noun, to "turn them [codes] into topics" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 120). Line-by-line coding enabled the researcher to interact with the data, tear it apart, and understand "tacitly" what the operators were trying to convey from "their perspective" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). The use of gerunds encouraged coding for action and process, not for topics or themes (Charmaz, 2014). Coding for action and process enabled the researcher to ask the "how" and "why" questions concerning "compelling events" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125). Line-by-line coding contributed to the emergence of salient categories and properties that provided direction and shaped the alteration of the interview protocols used in the collection of follow up data. Performing initial coding in this manner also assisted in the comparative analysis process, wherein the researcher discovered patterns of both similar and dissimilar behaviors in reaction to comparable environmental conditions.

It took over two years to reach the theoretical saturation necessary to conclude the initial coding process. Given the non-linear nature of grounded theory methods, there were periods that required the researcher to go back and reexamine initial codes during the focused coding process. Because of the process for initial line-by-line coding, the researcher derived 4,801 initial codes for 52 of the 73 critical incidents. The initial codes were constructed using gerunds that incorporated the operator's own language, thereby

keeping the findings grounded within the data. The grounding of the data in this way is illustrated in the data structure found in the theoretical findings (Gioia et al., 2013). This type of initial coding also assisted in the development of an emergent theoretical core based on the adaptation of social identity.

2. Focused Coding

The use of focused coding assisted in "highlighting what he [the researcher perceived] to be important within his emergent analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). In keeping with Charmaz's (2014) coding methodology, the research used focused coding methods as a next step in the analysis of critical incidents. Focused coding, like initial coding, is an emergent process (Charmaz, 2014). Because of this emergent process, as new categories and properties were discovered, the process required the revisiting of previously coded incidents (Charmaz, 2014). This recursive process of analysis and discovery, a revisiting of previously analyzed data, occurred continuously throughout all phases of coding analysis. A key emergent characteristic of the emergent process of focused coding was that it revealed gaps in the data for further exploration about the investigated phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding assisted in expediting the analytical process compared to the time it took for initial coding (Charmaz, 2014). This process allowed the researcher to "sort, sift, and synchronize large amounts of data" collected (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138).

The focused coding process started with the comparison and analysis of salient initial codes, after recognizing similar patterns of actions, processes, and sequences based on similarity (Charmaz, 2014). Once an initial code was salient enough within the data, it was raised to the analytical level by being distinguished it as a focused code (Charmaz, 2014). This process was described by Gioia, et al. (2013) as "distilling." Focused codes also used gerunds; however, the gerunds constructed used the researcher's terminology, not the operators. The focused codes constructed served as a link between the data and any future theoretical findings. This process allowed observations that the participants "witness or experience" but have never "conceptualize[d]" to be clarified (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140).

The use of Charmaz's (2014) focused coding methods contributed by boosting the researcher's confidence in the emerging analysis, particularly given the massive amounts of data that needed to be analyzed. It also contributed to the construction of the anatomy (Gioia et al., 2013) or conceptual structure of an emergent substantive theory. Overall, 86 focused codes were discovered after the initial coding process (Charmaz, 2014). Focused coding provided direction for the construction of theoretical codes and the emergence of a substantive theory about team social identity adaptation.

3. In Vivo Codes

In vivo codes kept analysis mindful about the operators' "special terms" or the vernacular used by members of the Special Operations community used during the VSO mission (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). In vivo codes were extracted from interview transcripts and then used for follow-up discussions with the operators to obtain clarity about the operators' meanings and experiences with these terms, phrases, or figures of speech (Charmaz, 2014). Once extracted and then expounded upon by the operators participating in later interviews, these in vivo codes were compared and analyzed against multiple instances of the codes use throughout the data (Charmaz, 2014). Comparative analysis was a method incorporated for determining the usefulness of in vivo codes as a possible category, property, or focused code contributing to the overall analysis. An example of an in vivo discovered within the study is as follows:

> BUY IN: Attitudes and beliefs an individual or group holds towards someone or something and is reflected in their behaviors during interactions with people, places, or things.

This in vivo code was found consistently throughout multiple operators' narratives. The operator used the in vivo as an adjective to describe the team's attitudes and beliefs towards the local population and the VSO mission in general—that is, the team did not buy into the mission. The operator's use of the in vivo was discovered consistently throughout other operators' narratives, regardless of their service branch. Other uses of the in vivo code described the American team's efforts to gain support and legitimacy from the local populace—for example, attempting to co-opt a local elder's buy in for the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program.

In vivo codes contributed significantly in the process for finding similar behaviors. Consistent use of a particular in vivo code—often a doctrinally military term, such as "white space"—symbolized a commonality of meaning, actions, and behaviors standardized across the Special Operations community. The discovery and analysis of in vivo codes was instrumental toward efforts at integrating categories, but it must be expressed that these codes did not stand on their own. The codes were discovered, analyzed, and a determination was made whether they are useful properties within a category. These categories contributed to the determination of focused codes that comprise the theoretical anatomy (Gioia et al., 2013).

4. Theoretical Coding

Previous scholars have referred to theoretical coding as a process of conceptualizing or "conceptual coding" (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978; Saldaña, 2016). Glaser (1978) described this level of coding as determining "how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into a theory" (p. 72). Charmaz (2014) referred to the practice of theoretical coding as "sophisticated" and a process that incorporates the use or "following" of codes discovered during the focused coding process. This author discovered that focused codes, like the substantive codes described by Glaser (1978), are emergent (Charmaz, 2014). Saldaña (2016) further elaborated that the function for theoretical coding is to "account" for all the emergent "codes and categories" discovered during both initial and focused coding (p. 250). He further explained that the theoretical coding process focuses on the integration of codes and categories into an explanation about the "emergent theoretical core" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2016, p. 250).

The researcher used a non-linear system of memorandum writing and operational model diagraming for the integration of categories and codes that explain the emergence of a substantive theory. Memorandum writing began during the initial coding phase where the researcher reflected on interpretations, contexts, relationships, actions, and processes that were taking place for salient instances of initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). It was during this focused coding process that the memorandums began to be sorted, synthesized,

analyzed, and developed into theoretical codes (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). Memorandums were produced using both Microsoft Word documents and the comment features found in the qualitative data analysis software. Charmaz's (2014) suggested memorandum formats were used for writing both initial and more advanced memorandums. The qualitative data analysis software facilitated the drafting of focused and advanced memorandum styles that explained the "how," "why," and "when" for emergent categories and codes (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016).

Focused coding ended when theoretical saturation was achieved, the researcher defined 14 general and emergent action strategies used by American teams that exemplified the emergent theoretical core for the research. It was at this point that theoretical coding switched from the sole use of memorandums and peer discussion to a more visual process. Techniques Saldaña (2016) defined as "operational modeling diagrams" and "table top categories" he referred to as visual aids assisted with the integration of theoretical codes and categories (pp. 226–231). It was during this process of theoretical coding that narrative and visual explanation for a substantive theory of social identity adaptation emerged (social identity).

E. GIOIA METHOD

Gioia et al.'s (2013) methodology was used during the analysis, theoretical coding, and presentation of findings. Gioia et al.'s paper on a methodology for "Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research" served as a guide, not a procedural set of rules as conducted within empirical research (p. 15). Gioia et al. used the example of a research article submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal which was rejected based on a lack of rigor by one of the journal's reviewers as motivation for creating the methodology. The rejection of this article led to the development of a methodology for conducting and presenting grounded theory research that illustrates the presentation of rigor for inductive research using a more compelling argument (Gioia et al., 2013).

Gioia et al.'s (2013) methodology was applied toward the construction of a data structure, which will be presented in Chapter VI. The methodology supports the transition of grounded theory research from a "data structure" to "theory" construction (p. 22).

During theoretical coding and theory construction, the data structure (static model) was used to assist in the creation of a process model illustrating the emergent substantive theory. It was important to not only visually illustrate the anatomy and physiology supporting the derived theory, but also to build a compelling and convincing argument that supports the theory (Gioia et al., 2013).

1. Data Structure

According to Charmaz (2014), "Coding is the pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory to explain these data" (p. 113). Charmaz's philosophy was applied to all phases of grounded theory coding, in which codes were defined as "transitional" objects used to assemble an anatomy reflecting the rigors behind the data's "analysis" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 113). The data structure is intended to illustrate the theoretical anatomy based on concepts (initial) codes that grounded in the data. The data structure provided direction and insights into the integration of concepts and themes into theoretical codes used to identify substantive theory (Gioia et al., 2013; Charmaz, 2014).

2. Process Model

The emergent substantive theory arising from the inter-workings of the assembled anatomy are comparable to human physiology (Charmaz, 2014; Gioia et al., 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data structure can be referred to as the anatomy (Gioia et al., 2013) of the theory and reflects a static snapshot that is comparable to a human "skeleton" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). The physiology of the theory represents the theory in motion and reflects the dynamic interrelations between theoretical codes as interpreted from the realities of the operators' "lived experiences" (Gioia et al., 2013). Coding, therefore, served as the link between the researcher's observations, analysis, and interpretations of VSO team's actions and behaviors before, during, and after interactions with Afghans. The process model developed illustrates American team social identity adaptation and is presented in Chapter VI.

F. CONCLUSIONS

The application of a grounded theory methodology to the critical incidents explored in this research sought plausible explanations and novel insights in response to the research question. This chapter detailed the procedures and system of methods chosen for this exploration into the conditions that facilitated or hindered American team interaction with Afghan groups. It explained the qualitative approach used based on the complexities American teams faced in the setting. The next chapter is designed to highlight and sensitize readers to the multiple other feedbacks that work in conjunction with culture and contribute to an increased level of complexity American teams experienced within the environment.

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IV. SETTING

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the operational setting based on the interviewees' descriptions of their team's experiences. The experiences are approached in terms of three categories that contributed to their challenges: destabilizing events, the complex environment, and the teams' mission. Salient elements of the environment are further subcategorized into physical, human, and information layers. I viewed the setting as a gestalt during analysis; however, in this chapter, categorization and sub-categorization of the setting serve to organize and simplify its description. Culture is addressed from the perspective that it needs to be viewed as an "adaptive system" (Keesing, 1974, p. 74). Cultural practices differ within each of Afghanistan's many provinces, districts, and valleys. Local practices are influenced by the people's perceptions of events and conditions within their unique environment. Learning the details and complexities of isolated remote Afghan village cultures required prolonged interactions with them. Culture as an "adaptive system" a fundamental part of the setting's components as described in this chapter.

B. DESTABILIZING EVENTS

Afghanistan had already experienced nearly three decades of turbulent events, which significantly affected the environments where American teams attempted to interact. These destabilizing events created a setting that Isby (2011) characterizes as a "vortex." He likens Afghanistan to a vacuum where most of the nation's energy is focused on conflict, competition, and rivalry, more bent on destruction than building (Isby, 2011). Three distinct events are identified which shaped the prolonged state of internal warfare and civil unrest throughout Afghanistan: (1) the Soviet Union's invasion, (2) civil war, and (3) the U.S. invasion. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to rescue its floundering communist government. The Soviet military occupation was popularly opposed, and they withdrew military support to the country's failing government in 1989. The withdrawal of Soviet military forces contributed to the communist government's collapse. This absence of Afghan governance created a power vacuum that witnessed

nearly ten years of widespread civil war. The Taliban movement, one of the many religiously motivated factions involved in the civil war, assumed control of Afghan government.

The twenty-year period between the Soviet invasion and Afghanistan's civil war created a haven for radical Islamic terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, to plan and coordinate attacks against the U.S. In 2001, Al Qaeda, based in Afghanistan, was linked to the devastating 9/11 attacks throughout the northeastern U.S. When U.S. demands for the surrender of Al Qaeda and its leader were not met by the Taliban government, the U.S. invaded. The invasion successfully toppled the Taliban government. However, both the U.S. and its coalition military partners focused most of their governance, security, and development efforts on strengthening Afghanistan's newly formed democratic government. The U.S. and coalition post-invasion military strategies neglected to establish security in remote districts located at the country's periphery. The absence of security in these districts created a power vacuum that a re-emergent Taliban movement filled.

The prolonged effects of these three turbulent events created pockets of safety for insurgent groups. The violence associated with the events destroyed or damaged Afghanistan's antiquated and already limited transportation infrastructure. Roads and bridges were destroyed or damaged, separating communities that were once connected physically to the outside world. The turbulence also allowed insurgent groups to undermine or destroy traditional tribal systems used to adjudicate justice. The destruction of schools prevented literacy and enabled the insurgent groups to control the information that the rural populations consumed. The destabilizing effects also prevented Afghanistan's development of an information infrastructure that would enable its citizens to access the internet and the outside world, and influenced village level perceptions, local cultural practices, and their ways of developing trust

C. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Different feedbacks within Afghanistan's physical environment significantly contributed to the complexities experienced by American teams in the research setting. The most salient components contributing to complexities from the physical environment were

determined to be the terrain, poor or non-existent infrastructure, and the use of manmade effects by insurgents. Apart from a few urbanized hubs representing regional capitols, these components of the physical environment persisted throughout a majority of the nation. Geography divides Afghanistan into distinct regions based on the influence of the Central Highland Ranges. The Central Highland Ranges is comprised of a large series of mountains in which the Hindu Kush stands out as the dominant terrain feature (Ewans, 2002). Therefore, the section is ordered in a manner that discusses terrain and infrastructure for each of these distinct regions.

1. Terrain and Infrastructure by Region

The prominent terrain features of the Central Highlands Ranges shape the boundaries for three distinct regions comprising Afghanistan (Ewan, 2002). This section discusses the terrain and limited infrastructure that make up Afghanistan's Central, Northern, and Southern Regions. It also serves as a sensitizing mechanism for the complexities American teams faced while attempting to interact in the setting's physical environment. Out of the 39 narrative accounts based on phenomenological experience operator's teams conducted VSO in the following Afghan regions: 32 in the Southern, six in the Central, and one in the Northern. Further discussion about terrain and infrastructure limitations are ordered based on the regional distribution of American teams analyzed.

The southern region has an average altitude of 3,000 feet, with most of the mountainous terrain being in the eastern part of the region that borders Pakistan (Emadi, 2005). Nearly a quarter of the region is occupied by the barren and inhospitable Registan Desert (Emadi, 2005). The desert and semi-desert plains of the southern region contain mostly arid soil, except for the areas around the Helmand, Arghandab, and Lurah River Basins. Arid and semi-arid soil is formed out of the region's sandy deserts and semi-desert plains, most of it is barren and no use for farming (Emadi, 2005). Afghanistan's southern region stretches across the nations southern boundaries and is bordered by Pakistan in the east and Iran in the west (Emadi, 2005). The region's limited transportation infrastructure is antiquated and left damaged or destroyed from the nation's conflicts. The region is the most ethnically homogenous in comparison with Afghanistan's other regions, most of its

population is Pashtun with small Hazzara, Kuchi, and other communities mixed throughout. The Southern Region is also the birthplace of the Taliban Movement and its leader, Mullah Omar who helped give to the movement in 1994. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Kabul), Afghanistan cultivates two thirds of the world's opium supply (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016). The southern region accounted for 59% of the 201,000 hectares cultivated throughout the country in 2016 (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016). The cultivation and production opium are used to fund many nefarious activities throughout the nation, including the activities of terrorist groups.

The Central Region of Afghanistan is made up of "high mountains" and "deep and narrow valleys" formed from the Hindu Kush (Emadi, 2005, p. 1). In the center of the region sits the Kuh-e-Bab Mountain, which forms the region's highest peak at 15,000 feet (Emadi, 2005). Just west of the Kuh-e-Bab Mountain range there are two smaller, yet significant mountains following the Hindu Kush Range: The Afid Kuh to the north and the Siyah Kuh to the south. Three of the region's provinces—Nangarhar, Wardak, and Logar—possess major stretches of the nation's few improved roads. The Kabul-Islamabad Road runs east to west following the Kabul River through Nangarhar Province, originating in Kabul, running westward, and crossing the Pakistani Border at the Khyber Pass. The Kabul-Kandahar Road runs north to south through Wardak Province and connects Kabul all the way through Quetta, Pakistan (Emadi, 2005). The Kabul-Khost Road runs through Logar, Paktia, and Khost Provinces, connecting Kabul to Khost (Emadi, 2005).

The Northern Region of Afghanistan comprises the northern side of the Hindu Kush Mountain Range (Emadi, 2005). This area defined by its "wide expanses of fertile foothills and vast agricultural lands" and it is known as the "breadbasket of the country" (Emadi, 2005, p. 3). The regions maximum altitude averages at approximately 2,000 feet in its southern portions and steadily descends to 600 feet at the regions northern border. The Oxus River marks the region and the nation's northern border, and separates both from Tajikistan (Emadi, 2005). The northern region is the most ethnically diverse and densely populated region of the country (Emadi, 2005). It is home of the ancient city of Balkh, a transient destination along the old Silk Route, where ancient traders traversed back and

forth between Rome and China (Emadi, 2005). The northern region has one major improved road originating in Kabul, which travels through the Central Highlands Mountains via the Salang Pass tunnel, where it eventually runs north into Mazar-e Sharif all the way to the Uzbekistan Border (Emadi, 2005). The Kabul-Mazar-e Sharif Road has sections of paved highways branching off along the way that connect it to Kunduz, Shirbirghan, and Jowzlan Provinces in the west (Emadi, 2005).

Afghanistan's jagged and arid terrain carved most of the rural areas where American teams were deployed into remote and isolated pockets occupied by culturally and ethnically diverse populations. The situation was no different for teams operating in or near Afghanistan's Registan Desert areas where the terrain was less jagged yet still inhospitable. The transportation infrastructure linking these isolated communities together was either non-existent or insufficient for supporting Afghan government accessibility. The isolation and accessibility to these areas added complexities to the American team's mission. Terrain and infrastructure obstacles faced by American teams often meant the movement of supplies and personnel had to be accomplished using aerial assets. These situations also increased the difficulties teams had in establishing relationships between remote village elders and Afghan government leaders at the district or provincial levels. Effects from the physical environment also posed an existential threat to teams, particularly if accessibility was via air only. Because American helicopters have a limited payload capacity, reaction times and the number of trips it would take a quick reaction force to place sufficient military forces on the ground in these areas, meant they might not be able to rescue a team threatened by overwhelming insurgent forces. The terrain and infrastructure complexities worked to the insurgents' advantage. It provided them with cover routes into and out of areas that operators referred to as "rat lines." Terrain and limited infrastructure provide insurgents with safe havens for basing, controlling, and executing operations that are undetected by coalition or Afghan government security forces.

2. Climate

Afghanistan's winters are marked by cold air blowing out of the north and northwest that create large snowfalls in the mountainous regions and frigid temperatures throughout most of the country (Emadi, 2005). According to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Afghanistan receives an average precipitation of just slightly less than 39 inches in the northeastern mountain ranges, most of it in the form of snow, and a little over two inches in the deserts of the southwest region (Burroughs, 2008). NOAA climate data for Afghanistan illustrate "higher mountain valleys" receive 10 to 30 days of snowfall per year, with the number of snow days increasing at higher elevations (Burroughs, 2008). According to the NOAA snow can often be found on the ground as early as August and remain as late as June in different parts of the country (Burroughs, 2008). Below zero-degree Fahrenheit temperatures have been recorded during Afghanistan's winter months (Burroughs, 2008).

In the summer months, the Indian monsoons crashing into the mountainous near the Pakistani Border regions bring "light rain and humidity to the central and southern regions" (Emadi, 2005, p. 4; Ewans, 2002). These rains, however, are not sufficient enough to support most types of agriculture. Less than 12% of Afghanistan's land mass is considered arable (United States Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2016). However, Afghans are adept at irrigating crops in semi-arid soil by digging trenches and canals that distribute the excess water produced from snow thaw of warmer months (Ewans, 2002). According to the NOAA, temperatures can exceed over 120 degrees Fahrenheit during Afghanistan's summer months (Burroughs, 2008).

Afghanistan's climate added to the complexities encountered by American teams while attempting to interact in the research setting. The frigid winter months limited human activities taking place in these remote areas, including those of insurgents. It also increased the time it for accessing more remote portions of a team's area and requiring many aerial assets. In some instances, the winter months created a false sense about the local population's willingness to interact with teams based decreased insurgent activity. Teams lured into this false sense of cooperation with locals discovered a less willing, more standoffish population as temperatures warmed and insurgent activity increased. The

warmer spring and summer months marked what is known as “the fighting season.” These warmer months ushered in greater amounts of human activity, particularly from local insurgent groups. The spring and summer months were marked by increased attacks and intimidation of the local population by a more active insurgency.

3. Manmade Effects on the Physical Environment

Manmade effects are tools used by groups to clear or hold areas that are physically or psychologically controlled by adversarial groups within the physical environment. The research categorized manmade effects as either offensive (clear) or defensive (hold) on the intended purpose of the tool. The goal for these tools was to assist belligerent groups in control of areas within the physical environment. Two types of offensive tools that emerged from operator narratives were mortars and mines. The use of mortars or mines was salient throughout operator narrative as offensive tools used for clearing or disrupting adversarial activity in areas controlled by adversaries. Insurgents used mortars to disrupt and psychologically affect American team activities, such as recruiting and training local security forces and American teams used these tools to clear areas or convince insurgents to break contact. Mines came in two variants within operator narrative, homemade or commercially produced, and were used solely by insurgent groups. Homemade mines, in the form of improvised explosive devices were locally manufactured and deployed by insurgents. These deadly devices destroyed vehicles and personnel, disrupted movement, and in the worst cases denied American teams or their Afghan partners access to remote communities. The deployment of military grade anti-tank or anti-personnel mines was not discussed in any detail within research narratives.

Manmade effects for defensive purposes were used for holding terrain. The use of these defensive manmade effects was discussed from an American perspective in operators’ narrative accounts. Three salient types of tools constructed for physically holding terrain were forts, checkpoints (CPs), and combat outposts (COPs). Forts were larger more permanent structures built on the highest terrain overlooking village areas and were manned by local Afghan defense forces. Symbolically, forts represented significant obstacles for insurgents attempting to access the village communities residing in the

shadows of these fortifications. As a matter of honor, insurgents could not bypass forts to directly attack a village without being viewed as dishonorable. The local Afghans garrisoning forts, did so from a commanding position using heavy weapons. In the event of an attack, forts only needed to hold out for short duration. According to operators, local insurgent groups generally did not want to risk valuable assets on attacking forts. Checkpoints were used for physically marking the boundaries of "white spaces" with small, Afghan manned, fortified positions on roads and intersections. These smaller, boundary-marking fortifications were intended to report then hold out against insurgent groups attempting to infiltrate American team "white spaces." The Department of the Army doctrinally defines a combat outpost as "a reinforced observation posts capable of conducting limited combat operations" (Department of the Army [DoA], 2015, p. 1-17). American teams established combat outposts near population centers to securely base and direct efforts for creating and expanding the Afghan Local Police program. Combat outposts were fortified structures used for housing American teams, directing operations, and providing a secure location for meeting with indigenous leaders.

D. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

This section provides a look at the people and organizations in Afghanistan as cited from the literature. Four key areas characterizing the terrain emerge as: (1) the Pashtun tribal system, (2) government, (3) Afghan security forces, and (4) adversaries making up the human environment.

American teams operated around and interacted with other Afghan ethnic groups, their targeted ethnic group for VSO/ALP was Pashtuns. The war between insurgent groups and coalition forces was focused on winning the sentiments of the indigent Pashtun community. To the insurgents, many of whom shared kinship with the Taliban, control of the remote Pashtun population represented control of Afghanistan. The Pashtun population and Taliban both share ethnic, cultural, and religious values. The local population served as a recruitment pool, provided sanctuary, and served as a revenue source for the Taliban. For the Afghan government, winning the sentiments of the rural Pashtun population symbolized the single most important unifying act toward the establishment of a legitimate

government (Barfield, 2010). Owning the sentiment of the rural Pashtun Tribes located at the periphery of Afghan civilization had historically determined the nation's stability (Barfield, 2010).

The U.S. Department of Defense (2010) defines a coalition as "an arrangement between two or more nations for common action" (p. 39). The term *coalition* is used to describe multinational forces comprising Afghan, American, and military personnel from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Coalitions included Afghan national police, local police, and local militia forces conducting security operations in partnership with American teams. To facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the processes used to forge functional relationships between operator teams and partners acting in coalition, background is provided into the ethnic and cultural norms used by these predominately Pashtun populations.

1. Pashtun Tribal Systems

Tribalism plays a central role within the fabric of rural Afghan culture and society. The Pashtuns are said to be the "most tribalised group of people in the world" (Liebl, 2007, p. 492). The rural Pashtun Tribal population has control over the stability of the country. Glatzer's (2002) theory of "segmentary solidarity" and its effects on Pashtun's power struggles within the modern Afghan State explains the nature of conflict and unity between Afghan sub-groups (p. 272). *Pashtunwali* is an important tribal value system that was instrumental in shaping many operators' understandings of how to interact with Pashtun groups. Descriptions of *Pashtunwali* provide an understanding of the challenges foreign that nations faced during their attempts at restructuring Afghanistan's political systems.

Several patterns of political instability can be attributed to "segmentary solidarity" (Glatzer, 2002, p. 272). Repeated patterns of instability resulting from Pashtun tribalism include (a) the leveraging of collective military power, (b) the near continuous control of national level leadership, (c) the relationship between national leaders and Pashtun tribes at the peripheries, and (d) the lack of understanding possessed by foreign powers attempting to restructure Afghanistan's political system (Barfield, 2010; Ewans, 2002; Glatzer, 2002; Isby, 2011; Jones, 2010).

The collective military power of Pashtun tribes in conflict with one another can be mobilized through *loya jirgas* (grand assembly) used to unite tribes in response to external or internal threats to Pashtun control of Afghanistan. The basic premise behind a *jirga* is equality, where every male has a right to have his voice heard during decision-making (Ewans, 2002). *Jirgas* are often hastily formed meetings between tribal elders and all concerned adult males to discuss how to approach pressing issues such as the succession of national level leadership (Ewans, 2002). While foreign invasion is easily understood, it must be explained that collective mobilization in reaction to internal unrest was usually due to the death or leadership shortcomings of the Pashtun affiliated head of state (Barfield, 2010). The research will review the effect of "segmentary solidarity" using brief examples of the phenomenon (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002). Three wars with Great Britain throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries provide examples for the collective military mobilization of Pashtun tribes occurring in response to attempts at restructuring Afghanistan's political architecture (Ewans, 2002; Isby, 2011; Jones, 2010). Great Britain attempted to restructure the Afghan government's administrative and financial systems, which viewed stipends paid to Pashtun tribal leaders as corrupt, thus attempting to supplant the concessionary measures necessary for maintaining stability within the country. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan to supplement a failing Afghan communist regime that had summarily sought to usurp religious authority, tribal customs, and redistribute tribal lands to create state run farming collectives. These tribally unifying events provide similar examples of the local conditions under which American teams operated in the research setting.

To facilitate a greater understanding of the premises behind the mobilization of the Pashtun tribal military power within Afghanistan, it is also necessary to explain the causes for division among tribal groups; this can best be described using the millennia-old adage "the enemy of mine enemy, is my friend." The complex Pashtun tribal system in Afghanistan needs to be articulated to provide further understanding behind what unifies them ethnically and what segregates them at the tribal and sub-tribal levels. Pashtun tribal lineage is based on the notion of a one-descendant patrilineal relationship in which all of humanity is ultimately viewed as being one tribe. The one descendent theory has biblical

roots stemming from Adam and the book of Revelations in the New Testament (Glatzer, 2002). Eventually, in the lineage of patrilineal descent, it is believed by Afghans that the greater Pashtun tribes were formed, including Ghilzais, Durranis, and Ahmadzais, to name a few (Glatzer, 2002). These larger tribal units break down into smaller and smaller sub-tribal segments based on tribal lands, terrain conditions, and political alliances (Glatzer, 2002). This segmenting of the greater tribal population is what social anthropologists have defined as segmentary lineage societies or states, under which category the Afghan Pashtun tribes fit definitively (Glatzer, 2002; Geertz, 1973). One noted cultural anthropologist described the political structure of segmentary tribes as:

> Delicate balances among scattered centers of semi-independent power, now building up under the guidance of tribal myth and civic ritual toward some apical point, now sliding away into clan jealousy, local rivalry, and fraternal intrigue. (Geertz, 1973, p. 329)

Glatzer (2002) expanded on the relationship between Pashtun sub-tribes, describing them as not only containing segmentary attributes, but also as containing political relationships for solidarity reasons among the different sub-tribal segments. As example, sub-tribe A of Durrani Pashtuns may ally themselves politically and militarily with sub-tribe B of Durrani Pashtuns during a feud or conflict between sub-tribe A and sub-tribe C of Durrani Pashtuns. At the end of hostilities between the sub-tribes, however, sub-tribe A may return to conflict with sub-tribe B. This is an example of what Glatzer (2002) defined as "segmentary solidarity." Segmentary solidarity creates several problems, because it adds a dimension of prioritization concerning loyalty. Members within segmentary lineage societies utilize what Glatzer (2002) defined as "social nearness and farness" (p. 272) factors for loyalty during competition and conflict. Glatzer provided an example of this "nearness and farness" factor by describing a scenario where two members of the same tribe are fighting, a third-party member of the tribe witnessing the conflict will ally with whichever member is patrilineal closest to him, for example giving loyalty to a brother over a cousin.

Understanding the volatile relationship dynamics of the segmented Pashtun tribal society within rural Afghanistan was essential for operators (Glatzer, 2002). Understanding that in these segmentary relationships, that family loyalty takes precedence over tribal or

ethnic loyalties was important towards maintaining the balance of power in a family factionalized village. Before delving into how the collective military power of these segmented tribal groups could possibly be harnessed for repelling foreign armies or backing a national level leader during periods of internal turmoil, the unique egalitarian principles under which Pashtun tribes exist must be explained. All Pashtuns are considered as being born equal based on sharing one common ancestor (Glatzer, 2002). Social status and wealth are not inherited; rather, they are determined meritoriously through individually demonstrated abilities and intellect (Glatzer, 2002). The egalitarian nature of Pashtun tribes helps provide explanation for what Barfield described as "bloody tanistry," which took place during the transition of national level leaders (Barfield, 2010). The fact that nearly every leader within the modern Afghan state up to the communist takeover of the country in 1978 has ascended from the Durrani Pashtun Tribe—apart from temporary control by members of the Ghilzai tribe in the years 1721, 1978, and 1996—explains why most transitions of leadership have been violent, even resulting in what could be considered civil wars (Barfield, 2010). Barfield's notion of "bloody tanistry" is used to describe the violent battles that have taken place among tribes and sub-tribes allied with the various brothers, sons, and cousins of a dead or exiled leader during periods of political transition in the country. This ascendancy of rulers within a monarchical society runs counter to western monarchies, which use hereditary lineage to determine succession (Barfield, 2010).

The same principles for acquiring leadership within Pashtun society are invariably applied from the very top level of national leadership all the way down to the selection of family elders, with a family being the smallest unit within the tribal structure (Glatzer, 2002). The power of leaders within the Pashtun tribal system is extremely limited due to the egalitarian nature of the organization (Glatzer, 2002). Any loss of confidence in a leader's ability to acquire external resources, gain material advantage, or provide protection for the people he is leading usually precipitates swift leadership changes within that tribal unit (i.e., family, sub-tribe, or tribe). Knowing that all experienced males are equally capable of rising to lead a tribal unit, the ways of gaining power are through an individual's abilities to gather external resources, increase his tribal unit's material advantage, and provide physical security for his tribal unit (Glatzer, 2002). Potential tribal leaders also

need to demonstrate a strong intellect through "superior rhetoric skills, and the ability to increase the size of the subtribe through lavish hospitality" (Glatzer, 2002, p. 274). To maintain their positions as leaders, these individuals' must demonstrate these skills continuously in front of the people that they are leading (Glatzer, 2002).

Given the conditions for gaining power within the Pashtun tribal system, it is important to understand that it applies from top level national leaders all the way down to the smallest tribal units. Knowledge of this egalitarian political system provides greater understanding about the fragile relationship between both the national level leadership and tribal entities (Barfield, 2010; Jones, 2010; Isby, 2011). Past monarchs were responsible for acquiring external resources, generally in the form of aid from other nations, while paying stipends from that aid to the various Pashtun tribal leaders located at the periphery to maintain power (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002). The segmentation along Pashtun tribal and sub-tribal lines created independent, locally governed areas that the national level leader had very little control over, without forming in solidarity with other tribes to leverage collective power (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002). If confidence was lost in this national leader or the leader prematurely died, the different segments within the tribal systems would form a "charter of segmentary solidarity" to militarily battle with other tribal segments under similar charters and determine a national level leader (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002).

Great Britain and the former Soviet Union failed to understand the role that "segmentary solidarity" played in maintaining stability within Afghanistan. The policies emplaced by these foreign powers interfered with the traditional power structure between national leadership and the independently governed tribal areas. These political interferences caused the rural Pashtun tribes, often in conflict with one another, to put their differences aside to fight in relative tribal solidarity, the common enemy (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002). More progressive Pashtun leaders, after experiencing the west, pushed modernization and socially progressive policies while attempting to restructure Afghanistan's political systems; these policies threatened traditional Pashtun tribal independence and control. Because of these progressive policies, remote tribal leaders

banned together in solidarity and violently implemented regime change (Barfield, 2010; Glatzer, 2002).

Operators located in Pashtun villages with multiple competing families chronicled varying levels of understanding about the dynamics behind these relationships. Most of the operators in these situations described eventually understanding that recruiting ALP from only one rival family could significantly upset the balance of power within these villages. Understanding the sensitivity of these relationships in conjunction with forming the cooperation necessary for creating successful local defense initiatives often required operators to have an even deeper understanding about the sociocultural value systems used in these remote areas. Some operators, not all, discussed the importance of understanding *Pashtunwali*, the common sociocultural value system used by remote Pashtun tribal populations and the significance of its influences on successful interaction within predominately Pashtun areas.

Pashtunwali is defined as the "way of the Pashto"; it is a system of "religious, ethnic, and moral norms" derived by Pashtun tribes over the course of centuries (Ibrahimov, 2011, p. 97). It is a set of customs more strictly practiced among the "isolated and historically independent" rural Pashtun populations (Ibrahimov, 2011, p. 97). The discipline and effects to which *Pashtunwali* is followed by a family, clan, or tribe varies by the amount of exposure a Pashtun population has to external influences, according to Ibrahimov (2011). A point that can be clarified by examining the two main tribal groups comprising the Afghan Pashtun population, the Durranis and the Ghilzais (Ibrahimov, 2011). The Durrani Pashtun's have traditionally held the seat of power at the national level since the creation of the modern Afghan state in 1747, only losing control of this position for a brief period in 1920 (Barfield, 2010; Ewans, 2002). Their understanding and adherence to *Pashtunwali* tenants vary drastically based on their exposure to external influences from the multiple other ethnicities comprising Afghanistan and through their associations with the international community while executing the offices of the state. The Durranis obedience to the social controls established by *Pashtunwali* differs significantly from Afghanistan's other main tribal group the Ghilzais (Ibrahimov). The Ghilzais, whose population is believed to make up the majority of the Afghan Taliban's population, has a

more conservative interpretation and approach towards the practice of *Pashtunwali* (Ibrahimov, 2011). Mullah Omar, whose Hotak Tribe descended from the Ghilzais, established validity for the previous statement that the Taliban is heavily supported by this faction of Afghanistan's Pashtun population (Ibrahimov, 2011). As previously noted, *Pashtunwali* is adhered to in varying forms all the way up to the national levels of Afghan governance. Even non-ethnic Pashtuns within Afghanistan follow its tenets in one form or another (Liebl, 2007). Understanding the significance of *Pashtunwali's* implications was often critical for the types of interactions and soliciting the cooperation necessary for assisting with the improvement of security, governance, and development in these unstable Pashtun tribal areas.

Pashtunwali is comprised of three key overarching beliefs based on the concept of honor; it is referred to as *nang* in Pashto (Ibrahimov, 2011; Liebl, 2007). The first of these key beliefs is *malmastia*, or the providing of hospitality, to include the protection of guests, including foreigners (Ibrahimov, 2011; Liebl, 2007). A subset of *malmastia* that is worth noting is *pannah*, which gives a Pashtun host the authority to grant asylum or a safe retreat. A violation of *malmastia* on the part of an Afghan host—usually a village elder, Malik, or Mullah—would bring *haya* (shame) on the individual responsible for providing this hospitality (Liebl, 2007). Once under the protection of *malmastia*, the tribal member proffering this hospitality is expected to give their life or the life of family members to protect a guest.

The second of the overarching beliefs is *nunawati*, which requires Pashtuns to provide refuge for individuals seeking to escape war or persecution. *Nunawati* also requires Pashtuns to accept legitimate offers of peace, including "the forgiveness for wrongs" (Ibrahimov, 2011; Liebl, 2007). Forgiveness is a concept that is extremely difficult for Pashtuns to accept (Liebl, 2007).) Noted Department of Defense subject matter expert Liebl (2007) stated, "There is no 'turn the other cheek' within the Pashtun culture" (p. 507). At least one research participant discussed leveraging this *Pashtunwali* belief successfully in order maintain a strong rapport and cooperation with the local tribal elders after having the district market suffer extensive damage caused by an external coalition special operation forces strike team. The operator explained that by invoking *nunawati* at the local

shura held immediately following the incident, the team presented their operational detachment as a *khel* (clan), which required them to be viewed as a subservient clan to the super tribe, the overall dominant tribe in the province. The operator compared the team's action of invoking n*unawati* as being comparable to saying the Act of Contrition during a Catholic Mass. He described professing not necessarily wrong doing, but that the team was not as powerful as the super tribe, after which he described the ODA's relationship with the Kharoti tribe in the area as being like a non-blood family bond or marriage between the two entities, where the ODA team were viewed as a subordinate clan under the Kharotis.

The third and final overarching belief is associated with the right of vengeance or revenge and is translated as *badal* in Pashto (Ibrahimov, 2011; Liebl, 2007). This belief has been described as the catalyst for long-running blood feuds between families, clans, and tribes within the Pashtun communities. These feuds often result in a back and forth series of vengeance killings between rival Pashtun groups that have been described as lasting over the course of generations. *Badal*, as Liebl (2007) described, may be invoked for any perceived insult or slight, no matter if it is real or imagined. Often, the only way that a *badal* is resolved is through the payment of what one operator defined as "blood money" (Liebl, 2007, p. 507). The proper recompense for resolving these often-bloody strings of revenge killings between families, clans, or tribes is formulated through *loya jirgas* (grand assembly) or *shuras* (consultation) comprised of the elders and adult male populations from both feuding parties (Liebl, 2007). Another factor of *badal* with a more positive connotation is the reciprocation of "any good deeds done" (Liebl, 2007, p. 507). The reciprocation of good deeds emerges persistently throughout operator narrative in this research, emerging most consistently in narrative where the operator discussed interactions that ended positively between their teams and the indigenous population.

Some of the lesser obligations associated with *Pashtunwali* will be discussed in lesser detail, but are nevertheless important for understanding given the significant role these beliefs played in the near daily interactions operators had with Pashtun groups. Other obligations focused on concepts such as "persistence *(isteqamat*), defense of personal or tribal property and honor (*ghayrat*), righteousness (*imamdari*), steadfastness (*sabat*), and most importantly bravery (*tureh*)" can be found conceptually throughout operators'

narratives about their team's behaviors while interacting with Pashtun groups (Ibrahimov, 2011; Liebl, 2007, p. 507).

Ibrahimov (2011) expounded on these lesser obligations by citing the "defense of one's female relatives" (p. 97), referred to as *namus* in Pashto, as important for the sociocultural understanding of American military teams operating among rural Pashto populations. Ibrahimov's (2011) advice to American teams whose goals are to win the sentiments of the rural Pashtun populations is to be cognizant of their affinity for never showing "emotion," demonstrating "impatience" or "anger" as these characteristics are perceived to be "signs of weakness" in the eyes of the Pashtun (p. 97). Liebl (2007) further elaborated on understanding the ambiguous obligations associated with *Pashtunwali* by discussing how Pashtuns have a hard time giving forgiveness or "turning the other cheek" (p. 507), which on the surface highlights the conflict between obligations such as *nunawati* and *badal* American teams experienced. Further, Liebl (2007) concluded that Pashtuns will "never forgive or forget a wrong, however slight," and cited their obligation towards *badal*, where they "will defend their honor, even to the death" (p. 507).

A concluding discussion about how Islam intersects with *Pashtunwali* is necessary to establish the deep-seated understanding that operators needed while attempting to interact successfully in these environments. Liebl (2007) cited that the notion of Islam was not established ideologically within *Pashtunwali* (p. 507). According to Liebl, Afghans ascribe to Islamic *Fatwas* (religious findings), so long as they are in accordance and do not violate *Pashtunwali*. When it comes to social or religious decisions, Afghans will inherently elect to follow obligations of *Pashtunwali* over Islamic *Fatwas*, which are proclaimed from Islamic scholars who are both foreign to Afghanistan and do not practice Afghanistan's predominately *Sufi* form of Islam (Liebl, 2007). These *Fatwas* are adhered to as long as they come from *Sufi* religious leaders and in consensus with Pashtun *jirga* approval (Liebl, 2007). The xenophobic nature of *Pashtunwali* has been the driving force behind the expulsion of foreign invaders over the course of millennia; according to Liebl, will is the same resistant force that will not allow the replacement of its traditional *Sufi* influenced sect of Islam by foreign groups that practice more dogmatic *Wahhabis* strains of *Islam*, such as Al-Qaeda. These *Wahhabis*-influenced groups are considered to be using

Taliban groups in their fight against the west, where their belief is that they will cleanse elements they consider to be apostates once this goal is accomplished (Liebl, 2007). In the end, however, it is believed that the Pashtuns will reject their intolerant form of Islam, viewing these foreign groups as just that—outsiders (Liebl, 2007).

Pashtunwali (way of the Pashto) is a "traditional legal and moral code that has determined social order and responsibilities" throughout Afghanistan since the creation of its modern state (Barfield, 2010; Ewans, 2002; Liebl, 2007). Its influence and implications at the highest levels of national leadership down to the smallest family units located within the periphery must be understood. *Pashtunwali's* effects on the organizations that operator teams were sent to assist needed to be understood as well for these teams to attain any measure of success within their assigned missions. Understanding *Pashtunwali* not only helped American teams to successfully interact, but also to develop the cooperation necessary to implement successful local security organizations based on this knowledge.

Other ethnic groups discussed within operators' narratives and worth mentioning were Kuchis, Hazaras, and Tajiks. These ethnic minority groups added to the level of complexity that operators faced while attempting to create a secure and stable environment. The presence of non-Pashtun minorities within American Teams' areas of operation were described by operators as requiring them to establish relationships and build rapport with populations that were untrusted and viewed with a wary eye by the Pashtun majority. For the lone case of the operator serving in the Central Region, the inverse was true; here, the Pashtuns were treated discriminately and viewed with an untrusting eye by the Tajik majority. In either set of circumstances, operators found that an additional layer of complexity was added to their already daunting task.

Kuchis, whose name is a "derivative of Persian meaning 'those who move,'" are a group composed of mainly Pashtun (80%), with the rest descending from the Balochis (20%; Liebl, 2007, p. 508). This group is traditionally descended from nomadic and pastoral herders; however, after 30 years of continuous warfare, the devastation forced an estimated 1 million of the 3.5 million population to become sedentary (Barfield, 2010; Ewans, 2002; Liebl, 2007). Of the remaining non-sedentary portions of the population, scholars have estimated that less than 200,000 still assume the traditional pastoral herding

role, with the rest said to be living in destitution while serving as migratory laborers (Liebl, 2007).

The ethnic Hazaras represent an estimated 15% of the total Afghan population (Barfield, 2010). Their traditional home of Hazarajat is in the Central Hindu Kush region comprising the current Afghan Provinces of Bamyan, Daykundi, Uruzgan, and Ghazni (Barfield, 2010). Hazaras have traditionally maintained a living by "subsistence farming and livestock breeding" (Barfield, 2010, p. 26). Hazaras speak a dialect of the Persian language, and they are predominately Shia Muslims (Barfield, 2010). After being conquered by the Pashtuns at the end of the 19th century, they were "victimized and even sold into to slavery" by their Pashtun oppressors (Barfield, 2010, p. 26). According to Barfield, Hazaras ranks at the bottom in relation to Afghanistan's other ethnicities, and they are "historically the victims of prejudice on religious and racial grounds" (2010, p. 26). Hazaras found any sort of "social mobility" difficult up until "achieving parity with other groups after the signing of the countries new constitution in 2004" (Barfield, 2010, pp. 26–27). Hazaras speak Hazaragi, a Persian Dialect, they are descended from early Mongol conquerors of the region, which is reflected in their "strong Mongoloid facial features" (Barfield, 2010, p. 26). These strong Asian facial features are what make them easily distinguishable from the rest of the Afghan population. One operator working with Hazaras in Uruzgan Province confirmed Barfield's assertions about their persecution while describing beatings Hazaras received from the Pashtun majority within the district.

Ethnic Tajiks account for 30% of Afghanistan's ethnic population (Barfield, 2010). Like the Hazaras, they speak Dari, a Persian dialect (Barfield, 2010). Unlike the Hazaras, however, they are predominately Sunni Muslim (Barfield, 2010). Tajiks lacked the ethnic unity shared within Afghanistan's other ethnic communities. They show no strong affinity toward tribal ascendency, and when queried about ethnicity, they will often identify their regional affiliations (Barfield, 2010). Most importantly, Tajiks are known to occupy the urban areas of Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e Sharif (Barfield, 2010). Tajik literacy in the Persian language, which is "the regional language of government administration, culture, and foreign relations, has given Tajiks a strong role in the nation regardless of who is in power" (Barfield, 2010, p. 26).

2. Afghan Governance

There was a mixed number of both sanctioned and unsanctioned Afghan organizations at the sub-national government level that American teams were expected to cooperate with to improve governance and development in their assigned areas of operation (AO). This section will describe and discuss provincial, district, municipal, and village level governance, national level security forces, including the nation's intelligence agency, government sanctioned local security forces, and unsanctioned local militias. It also makes comparisons between the formalized design of the sub-national government structure and how its informal administration. Inherent problems within the sub-national government structure and the effects of these problems on the provincial, district, and village populations will also be discussed.

The research defined sub-national government as any government entities not at the national level of influence within Afghanistan (Nijat, Gosztonyi, Feda, & Koehler, 2016). The organizational structure, formalized processes, and inherent problems within the national level Afghan government go beyond the scope of this dissertation work, these structures, processes, and problems affected the operators' ability to influence sub-national governance. This section will focus on the structure, general, and common problems associated with the sub-national governance at the provincial, district, municipal and village level.

The national level, often referred to as the central government, maintains a very authoritative relationship over Afghanistan's 34 provinces and roughly 400 districts (Nijat et al., 2016). It is a non-secular, unitary government designed around a democratic framework. What makes the constitution non-secular is its strict adherence to the tenets of the Quran. The constitution's adherence to the Quran is necessary for legitimizing its amendments; secular constitutional amendments would not be accepted by the greater Afghan population. Its constitution authorizes three branches of government comprised of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Afghanistan's three branches of government hold control over the decision-making authority and the distribution of public services from the top down (Nijat et al., 2016). The Afghan constitution delegates very little authority down to the provinces, districts, municipalities, and village level

government entities. The Afghan government is a top-down driven system that denies empowerment to the people and government entities residing at the sub-national level. It is a government fraught with corruption, patronage, and an ineffective justice system (Shurkin, 2011). These nefarious activities of both the national and sub-national government entities have contributed to a majority of the populace viewing these entities as illegitimate (Shurkin, 2011).

a. Formal Government Structure

A good starting point for any discussion on the formal organization of the Afghan sub-national government must begin at the centralized government's interface with its sub-national entities. The Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) is the executive level government entity charged with serving as the interlocutor between provincial governors and the president (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). The IDLG is a non-elected organization that was created through presidential decree in 2007; therefore, it is not answerable to the elected members comprising both houses of the Afghan National Assembly (Nijat et al., 2016). The central government maintains its access to provincial and district governments through "administrative units" such as the IDLG and the president's roughly 25 ministries (Nijat et al., 2016, p. 5). There are no provincial or district budgets, and monies for sub-national governance are allotted through the ministries down to equivalent provincial ministries for distribution (Shurkin, 2011). The nation's 25 ministries are divisions dedicated to specific areas of national interest whose leaders are appointed by the president after confirmation from the national assembly. Ministers presiding over these ministries the IDLG is answerable to are presidentially appointed, where all ministers—except for the attorney general—are not subject to vetting and approval by the Afghan National Assembly.

There are four "key institutions" that are associated with sub-national governance from the provincial down to the village level (Nijat et al., 2016, p. 6). These institutions are comprised of governors, municipalities, line departments, and councils (Nijat et al., 2016). Provincial governors are appointed by the president and serve as his representatives to the provinces. They report directly to the IDLG, provide "oversight and coordination

through the provincial line departments, and maintain control over the police and district governors" (Shurkin, 2011, p. 6). District governors are appointed through a combination of the IDLG and the Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (Nijat et al., 2016). Their primary responsibilities are to "represent the provincial administration," to provide oversight of the district line departments, and to "maintain the registry of births, marriages, and deaths" (Shurkin, 2011, p. 6). Municipalities are the only entity with any measure of financial autonomy under which they are expected to raise their own revenue through the leveraging of taxes and fees for public services (Shurkin, 2011). The head executives for municipalities are elected mayors that appoint their own ministries. Line departments at the provincial and district level are appointed by the president, and these departments are responsible for reporting to their equivalent ministries within the central government (Shurkin, 2011). Departments are responsible for delivering funding and public services for their specific areas of national interest within the provinces and districts (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). Lastly there are elected councils at the provincial, district, municipal, and village level whose primary responsibility is to represent the people's interest, thereby establishing legitimacy through bottom-up representation in government (Shurkin, 2011).

b. Informal Government Structure

The sub-national governance in Afghanistan is nothing more than an extension of the centralized government (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). This fact contributes significantly to several common problems found throughout the sub-national governance of south and southeastern Afghanistan as detailed throughout much of the operator's narrative. Since there are no provincial or district level budgets and all decisions on the distribution of provincial and district level funding are made within the ministries creates a system where competition for national level services and resources moves outside of the formalized rules defined within the nation's constitution (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). Afghanistan's system of government is an ill-defined informal competitive environment with no ethical boundaries for the appointment of government positions or the delivery of goods or services. It creates an environment that lacks any accountability mechanisms

between sub-national and centralized government units for the distribution of services and resources.

The combination of these two factors, in conjunction with the establishment of ill-defined and informal rules for the distribution of public services, has contributed to an environment that is dependent on the use of power for the appointment of key staff and ministers at the sub-national level (i.e., province, district, and municipal) and is most often independent and ill-representative of the constituent population's choice for these positions. Lacking proper accountability mechanisms and no transparent sub-national level budget for the distribution of public services and resources also fosters environments ripe for corruption at the sub-national governance level (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). The fact that neither provincial or district level governors, nor their line departments, are held accountable through national level oversight for the provision of public services and resources contributes significantly to malfeasance, where presidentially appointed sub-national government officials skim money dedicated for public projects and services. The embezzlement of monies dedicated to these services and resources are used to either buy patronage within political networks or for their own personal use (Nijat et al., 2016; Shurkin, 2011). Many operators' narratives confirmed these corruptions as significant interactive sticking points during their efforts for transforming governance, development, and security in these informal governmental environments. Another main point of contention within the sub-national governance of Afghanistan is the completely dysfunctional justice system.

The administration of justice at the sub-national government level was non-existent throughout most operator narratives. The Afghan constitution mandates a judicial hierarchy that dictates at least one court at the district level with at least three judges for the administration of justice within Afghan law (Shurkin, 2011). Courts are supposed to work under the purview of a myriad of higher-level judicial institutions and administrators starting at provincial level ministries all the way to national level ministries such as the Ministry of the Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Afghan Supreme Court, and the attorney general. Due to reasons such as security, poor salaries, and lack of

government infrastructure, however, there are few—if any—functional district level courts (Shurkin, 2011). This leaves the population with very little recourse for reconciling actual and perceived injustices in accordance with Afghan laws, which few individuals within the rural village areas even know about or understand. For the operators, justice at the district and village level was administered as it had been for millennia—by way of village and district level *shuras*. This system incorporated the village elders, adult male population, and often the village religious leader (mullah), in which the elders determined penalties, fines, or judicial recompense. Elders only decided on the outcomes after careful consideration and consensus among the adult male population of the village, very much in the same egalitarian manner as their forefathers.

c. Problems

What are some of the problem's operators experienced because of the emergent informal government structure at the sub-national government level while conducting VSO? The answer to this question is described in the operators' narratives and corroborated in the studies of Shurkin (2011) and Nijat et al. (2016), who both experienced significant issues trying to change the local populations' perceptions about the legitimate government. It is understood by the international community that significant policy changes are necessary to give the people more say over government representation, the disbursement of resources, and the creation of a more effective sub-national government judicial system.

In order for Afghan policy to be more effective, it needs to create provincial and district level budgets which in turn will hold government officials managing these budgets accountable to local populations. Policies also need to be developed to allow the election of district and village level councils. At present, only provincial level councils are elected. In Shurkin's (2011) research on Afghan sub-national governance, the author established the statistical significance of this organization as being the most trusted by provincial populations. Considering the current study, giving the local population more say in government inherently creates more "buy in" or perceived legitimacy in the government. The present system is rife with corruption and patronage, which most operators cited as leading to perceptions of a government that was unrepresentative of district communities.

The circumstances arising from these conditions attributed to the population feeling trapped in the middle between a resurrected Taliban movement and a self-serving centralized government according to operators. Some operators described the local villagers as just wanting to be left alone, while others stated that it pushed the local populace to favor the Taliban. Either way, these conditions created poor public perceptions about a government that they often knew or cared little about. These conditions also contributed to the creation of a dysfunctional sub-national government that American teams had to overcome to not only alter local perceptions of local government, but to emplace long-term sustainable systems of governance.

Operators always led discussions about positive and negative interactions concerning their VSO missions by first establishing the need for security first. As previously stated, district level courts were virtually non-existent because of the security situation, particularly in the rural areas (Shurkin, 2011). The operators explained that without security, there could be no governance or development.

3. Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF)

Discussions on the legitimate security forces will be divided into those forces belonging to the Ministry of the Interior—namely, national level police, followed by the Ministry of Defense (MoD), which is comprised of Afghan National Army Forces. Operators never clarified a formalized precedence of which organization had authority over the other; however, in most instances, they described the MoI or police forces in the area as being subordinate to local army commanders. These relationships were never clear throughout the operators' narratives, and most operators described partnering with any number of mixed police, border patrol, or army commanders during their VSO missions.

4. Afghan National Police

The ANP's mission is to "maintain civil order, reduce corruption, and prevent the cultivation, production, and smuggling of illegal narcotics" (DoD, 2017). Their mission is also to "protect, secure, [and] preserve the legal rights and freedoms of communities" (DoD, 2017). The ANP is comprised of approximately 148,000 personnel nationwide, and it is broken down into four distinct subcategories Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP), the

Afghan Civil Order Police (ANCOP), the Afghan Border Police (ABP), and the Afghan Anti-Crime Police (AACP), all falling under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. The long-term goal of the GIRoA is to have the ANCOP and ABP fall under the direction of the Ministry of Defense (DoD, 2017). The current researcher will not go into a detailed description of all the sub-groups comprising the ANP, but only those groups discussed by operators for this thesis. ANP groups such as the AACP and Counter Narcotics Police (CNPA) will not be discussed in detail because the operators never discussed either of these group's presence in their area of operations or interactions with them in any capacity within their retrospective narratives.

a. Afghan Uniform Police

The AUP is the largest pillar within the ANP, containing approximately 86,000 personnel. The AUP officers are the most common type of police experienced by everyday Afghans. They are comparable to the American beat cop, and they serve at the lowest level of Afghan society in villages and communities across the country's 34 provinces (DoD, 2017). They are responsible for maintaining civil order, enforcing the laws, preventing the cultivation and smuggling of narcotics, securing roads and critical infrastructure, firefighting, and rescuing persons during emergencies or natural disasters (DoD, 2017).

b. Afghan National Civil Order Police

With an approximate authorized strength of around 14,000 personnel, the ANCOP is the offensive policing arm of the ANP in reaction to "civil unrest and insurgent activities in remote high threat areas of the country" (DoD, 2017, p. 79). The ANCOP is assigned the task of "responding to counterterrorist, controlling civil unrest, and handling publically violent incidents in metropolitan and urban areas" (DoD, 2017, p. 79). They are the most specialized and highly trained police officers within the pillars of the AUP. Just like the ANASOC forces, senior level leadership within the MoI stand accused of overusing and misusing these specialized police forces (DoD, 2017). This force is slated to fall under the direction of the MoD in 2018 (DoD, 2017).

c. Afghan Border Police

This paramilitary organization is comprised of approximately 21,000 personnel. They are responsible for securing Afghanistan's border areas and entry points such as airports against drug and weapons smugglers, insurgents, and other nefarious groups (DoD, 2017). This force is also responsible for providing nested security in conjunction with the ANA in areas within 30 miles of all Afghan border areas (DoD, 2017). The ABP is the most heavily armed faction of the ANP. They complete training on and carry heavy and light machine guns, rifles, and rocket propelled grenades (RPG; DoD, 2017). This force is slated to fall under the direction of the MoD in 2018 (DoD, 2017).

d. Competency and Corruption Problems

According to a RAND counterinsurgency study completed in 2008, ANP forces were deemed to be extremely incompetent with regards to basic police work (Jones, 2008). This sentiment matches most of the operators' assessments on this group. The RAND report further commented on senior level Afghan and U.S. leadership perceptions of the ANP as being the most susceptible group to corruption, a fact many operators spelled out explicitly in their retrospective narratives. Operators often described ANP corruption as a major obstacle to the team's ability to implement sustainable systems led by legitimate local government and police leaders. As explained by operators and corroborated by the RAND study, ANP forces at the district and provincial level are often viewed by the local populace skeptically, especially concerning whose interest the ANP served at local levels (Jones, 2008).

Loyalty was another significant issue within provincial and district level ANP forces identified by the RAND study (2008). This report, in conjunction with operators' narratives, elaborated on the ANP's propensity to not only skim money from local development projects, but to accept payments from local criminal organizations, warlords, and insurgency groups for "turning a blind eye" towards these groups nefarious activities. This phenomenon was explained within the RAND study as being due to the organization's weak connection and lack of training or direction from either coalition forces or the Afghan

central government, whose efforts were focused primarily on national level governance and security programs (Jones, 2008).

The RAND study was completed by Jones in 2008, nearly 2 years prior to the implementation of VSO missions in Afghanistan. The findings of this study, however, may be viewed as contributing directly towards the necessity of this mission. The study identified the initial police training program as deficient during the coalition's initial occupation of Afghanistan. It identified initial training as taking too long with too small of a population. Police training was also considered to be focused on national level police work, thereby ignoring provincial, district, and village level police forces, primarily in south and south eastern Afghanistan. The results of this study illuminated this short coming in training local police forces, particularly at the peripheries of the country, as contributing to the creation of sanctuaries for a resurgent Taliban (Jones, 2008).

One note about the ANP that was not mentioned in the RAND counterinsurgency study, but which was brought up often by numerous operators in the current study, is the organization's propensity for what is known as "bacha bazi," or the sexual abuse of young boys. The fact that this phenomenon occurs among the nation's security forces, especially the ANP, has been corroborated through numerous articles published in many reputable U.S. newspapers such as the *NY Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Business Insider* (Chopra, 2016, 2017; Goldstein, 2015). While only a few operators discussed being aware of this activity taking place among ANP partners, several mentioned it as being something neither they nor their teams were willing to accept, describing even the perception of this activity as a relationship-killer between their teams and any Afghan partners.

It is also important to elucidate and conclude with the fact that the RAND study used primarily qualitative factors for measuring the performance of ANP Forces throughout Afghanistan due a lack of any reliable or measurable statistics concerning law enforcement in the country. The report highlighted the lopsided differences in quality between the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police's security competency. Articulating a lack of consistent training standards across the board and the vacancy of committed long-term embedded training assistance forces. Programs for

training Afghan Police Personnel, unlike programs implemented within the ANA, contributed to the deficit in operational competency between army and police forces.

5. Afghan National Army

The Afghan National Army is comprised of "24 operational brigades, 3 air wings, and approximately 24 schools dedicated to training" comprised of approximately 174,000 personnel (DoD, 2017). Since the formation of the first ANA battalion's in 2002, after the U.S. invasion, the organization has continued to grow into an operationally competent force (Jones, 2008). The preponderance of training, manning, and equipping of the ANA was undertaken by the United States, unfortunately the focus of this resource intensive effort occurred to the detriment of the nation's police forces. The ANA has proven to be an effective force after participating in major combat operations alongside coalition forces between 2003 and 2006 (Jones, 2008). Jones (2008) summarized the "evidence supporting the ANA's" competence in these operations and concluded that ANA soldiers were viewed as "tenacious fighters, effective in gathering intelligence about insurgent networks, and lastly that U.S. and coalition training of the ANA has proven to be effective" (pp. 74–74).

As mentioned by operators working in partnership with ANA forces, they lacked the ability to conduct sustained unilateral operations due to deficiencies in material resources and support. Operators described having to provide night vision devices, fuel, air support, and artillery/mortar fire support to ANA forces participating in partnered or unilateral operations. The 2017 *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan* Report to Congress addressed coalition efforts and improvements in the provisioning of resources to the ANA (DoD, 2017). The congressional report went into greater detail on an improved Afghan Air Force (AAF), that provided medical evacuation, ground attack, and aerial movement for ANA ground forces (DoD, 2017). All these improvements occurred after the VSO mission had ended; however, feedback from the VSO teams surely contributed to increased efforts to improve the ANA's logistical, material, and support capabilities in the years after the last VSO teams departed.

The ANA was not immune to corruption and infighting between themselves and members of the ANP or provincial/district governments. The ANA shared the same issues

as the ANP with regards to its personal not being from the remote villages and districts in which they were operating. ANA personnel were often not even of the same ethnicity as the rural Pashtuns within their assigned areas. Operators discussed situations where their Afghan security partners were either Hazaras or Tajiks, who were viewed with just as much skepticism as their American partners by the local populace due to language, religious, and cultural differences. The result of these differences, as mentioned by several operators, generally led to situations where significant levels of cultural dissonance between these parties often led to violent or near-violent situations.

6. Afghan National Army Special Operations Command

The "ANASOC comprises approximately six percent" of the ANA's manpower, with a force totaling 11,700 personnel, which are organized into 10 battalions (DoD, 2017, p. 63). ANASOC forces were referred to informally as Afghan National Army Special Forces (ANASF) by operators during interview sessions. American teams used this informal acronym as a way of identifying these forces as the Afghan equivalents of their own organization. These forces are identified as the most effective counterterrorism forces in the ANDSF by official U.S. reports (DoD, 2017; Jones, 2008); however, the current study's operators described experiencing various levels of competence and motivation based solely on the leaders of these specialized Afghan teams. Operators rarely expressed negative sentiments towards their ANASF partners, but the few operators that did have problems with ANASF teams described problems as being motivational, where there was an apparent unwillingness to conduct either joint or unilateral combat operations.

These specialized small teams of Afghan Soldiers are formed into was is formally known as a Special Operations Kandak (SOK) at the team level to serve as the primary tactical elements of the ANASOC. Operators referred to the SOKs as "ANASF" Operational Detachment – Alphas (ODA) to equate these teams to their own organizations. SOKs were comprised of specially trained light infantry intended for elite missions such as direct action targeting and counterterrorism operations (DoD, 2017).

The 2017 Report to Congress on these forces stated these teams suffered from being overused or misused by higher level ANA leadership (DoD, 2017). Placing ANASOC

forces at static checkpoints, using them to conduct static site protection, or employing them as personnel security detachments for high ranking officials, as stated in the DoD report to congress, is what may have led to the motivational problems experienced by some operators participating in the current study (DoD, 2017). Either way, the size and capability of these forces has grown since the VSO mission ended in 2014. Most operators described ANASOC teams as professional, motivated, and capable of conducting unilateral operations.

7. Anti-Taliban Militia and Warlords

Two operators described working primarily with anti-Taliban militias (ATM). They attributed the necessity of working with this group because of corruption, competence, and unmotivated ANDSF forces in the district his team was operating. These operators took offense when those outside the situation, referred to the leaders of these groups as warlords. According to "Afghan National Security Council's Threat Assessment in 2005," unsanctioned militias and regional warlords posed the gravest of threats to the spreading of the legitimate rule of law as enforced by the central government (DoD, 2017). In rural areas located in south and southeastern Afghanistan where the central government's influence was either weak or absent, these unsanctioned militias and warlords, opposed to the Taliban, often filled the void in matters of justice among the local populace.

The U.S. government's empowerment of these warlords and militias is believed to have contributed to ineffective central government authority within provinces and districts controlled by them (Jones, 2008). The operators "turning of a blind eye" to the militia leaderships usurping of government authority can only be attributed to the combat effectiveness and willingness of these unsanctioned groups to oppose insurgent groups linked to the Taliban.

8. Adversarial Groups

When queried about the identities of local insurgent actors within their areas of operations, operators described their team's knowledge as uncertain. Most explained their team's knowledge was based on a general understanding about the mujahedeen, warlords, militia, and different insurgency movements in Afghanistan, such as the Taliban; however,

they often declined to name any specific insurgent group operating within their assigned districts.

Within the framework of the overall village stability mission, the strategy was to move away from the kill and capture mentality that had been failing the coalition's counterinsurgency campaigns prior to 2010. Moving away from a strategy based solely on targeting and eliminating insurgency organizations allowed the coalition to escape from unsuccessfully comparable strategies, like those implemented by the U.S. during the Vietnam War. Like the analogy and the premises behind Taber's (2002) book *War of the Flea: The Classic Study of Guerrilla Warfare,* insurgent take on a strategy of guerrilla warfare that causes the counterinsurgent forces to expend massive amounts of material, manpower, and resources during the elimination of small insurgent groups whose military impact is negligible. The analogy drawn from Taber's analysis compared the counterinsurgents to a dog and the insurgents to fleas, where the dog expends massive amounts of time and energy scratching irritations caused by thousands of fleas disturbing different portions of the dog's body.

Before a shift in the U.S.'s Afghanistan Strategy in 2010, coalition forces were fighting a "war of the flea" (Taber, 2002). Labeling all insurgent groups operating in Afghanistan as Taliban conveyed a lack of understanding or concern in early U.S. Strategy. The accounts used for this research support Glatzer's (2002) "segmentary solidarity" theory. Glatzer posited that competitive insurgent groups would band together to fight a common enemy, such as coalition and GIRoA security forces, but then would return to a state of conflict among one another immediately after the necessity of temporary alliances passes.

The population-centric nature of the new U.S. strategy, U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, and the village stability mission, small American teams comprised of Special Operations Forces did not concern themselves with the ideological premises behind insurgent's violent acts and goals. The goal of the mission was to sway the rural population's sentiment in favor of the Afghan government. Unlike the U.S. Afghan strategy prior to 2009, the goal was not to chase after small insurgent groups while expending large amounts of coalition resources and manpower, simultaneously risking the destruction of

private property, killing or wounding of innocent members of the indigenous population, or creating 10 new insurgents for every one they eliminate (Egnell, 2010; Glatzer, 2002; Johnson & Mason, 2008).

Regardless of how coalition forces or more specifically teams conducting VSO identified insurgent groups, American experiences and accredited literature on the subject defines insurgency groups within Afghanistan as fractionalized and ideologically misaligned (Thruelsen, 2010). Operators classified insurgents at the onset of their team's mission in Afghanistan as Taliban and explained how views of the enemy changed once more specific artefacts about these groups was discovered.

a. Defining the Insurgency

According to Bard's foreword in Taber's (2002) book *The War of the Flea*, an insurgency is an umbrella term under which guerrilla warfare and terrorism fall. In this book, the author defined an insurgency as:

> A general overarching concept that refers to a conflict between a government and an outgroup or opponent in which the latter uses both political resources and violence to change, reformulate, or uphold the legitimacy of one or more of four key aspects of politics. (Taber, 2002, p. viii)

The four key political aspects described by Bard as reasons for starting and sustaining an insurgency are centered on maintaining border integrity, changing the type of government in power or the individuals in power, or to reformulate the tenets determining the distribution of property, finances, services, or resources within a given society (Taber, 2002). Bard further defined the types of tactics that insurgents use as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, or conventional military actions. He described guerrilla warfare as the use of tactics in which a well dispersed small force with inferior military capabilities look to avoid strong government military strengths and exploit their weaknesses (Taber, 2002). Insurgents also implement guerrilla warfare tactics by luring government forces they are opposing into using disproportionate, often overwhelming force in relation to the threats posed, to inflict loss of civilian life or property (Taber, 2002). Government forces that use disproportionate amounts of conventional force often cause an

unnecessary loss of civilian life and catastrophic property damage that results in swaying the population's sentiments in favor of the insurgency (Taber, 2002).

Terrorism uses violence on the civilian populace for threatening or intimidating their support for an insurgency (Taber, 2002). These types of actions often take place in urban areas, often during events attracting large crowds of non-combatants and in locations where the availability of media covering terrorist events will be immediate and widespread. Afghanistan between 2010 and 2014 contained two of the political aspects highlighted by Taber (2002), an insurgency bent on changing the government and a redistribution of the nation's resources. The country also experienced all the insurgent tactics defined by Taber.

b. Taliban

Afghanistan's largest organized insurgency group opposed to the central government and coalition forces in Afghanistan, speculatively, is the Amiroti-i-Islami, which operators referred to as the Afghan Taliban. Distinctions need to be made, however, between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups. Nearly all the operators participating in this study neglected to specify a specific insurgent group opposing their activities while conducting VSO; they simply acknowledged the complexities associated with making such distinctions. They often dismissed labeling insurgent groups as irrelevant toward mission accomplishment. One operator, however, did express his beliefs about whom he though his adversaries were within a predominately Pashtun District. The district where this operator's team found themselves butted up against the Pakistani border, which led them to speculate that there was an apparent conflict between Pakistani Taliban crossing over the border and local Afghan Taliban native to the area. This section briefly addresses the distinction between these two groups, because this operator stated that it led his team to conclude that the distinction between the two groups contributed significantly for how they would interact with local Afghan groups.

c. Re-emergent Insurgencies

Barfield (2010) labeled non-Taliban groups such as the Hizb-i-Islami and Haqqani Network as "blowback insurgencies" in his 2010 book on the culture and political history of Afghanistan (p. 325). His reasoning for labeling these groups in such a manner focuses

on the histories of these organizations. Both organizations originated among the rural Pashtun populations to resist and repulse the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. These groups received significant funding from the U.S. and Pakistan during a time of strict global polarization between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They both shared common religious, cultural, and political ideologies; however, their primary motivation for organizing was in support of mujahedeen efforts to eject Soviet invaders from the country and toppling the Soviet-backed communist government in Kabul. After the Soviet withdrawal and the collapse of the Afghan communist government in the early 1990s, the polarizing leaders of these groups transitioned from a state of temporary alliance to one of violent competition for control over Afghanistan. This post-Soviet withdrawal stoked a violent civil war throughout the country that involved the different factions of the Afghan Mujahedeen, most of whom were organized around polarizing leaders such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Jalaluddin Haqqani (Barfield, 2010).

Both Pashtun Mujahedeen groups, along with their leaders, were summarily subordinated to the Taliban organization after it militarily seized power in 1996 (Barfield, 2010). When the Taliban went into exile following the U.S. invasion in 2001, these two organizations, with intact leadership and command structures, essentially revived their positions of control within the isolated Pashtun regions of south and southeastern Afghanistan. The conditions that enabled the resuscitation of these organizations can be attributed to Afghan government and coalition neglect, fractured tribal leadership structures, and the complete withdrawal of government influence from these areas (Barfield, 2010).

It is understood that these two groups are in violent competition with one another over control of the country, to include both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. As evidenced within the retrospective narrative of the operator whose team served within a district bordered by Pakistan, however, these groups are willing to temporarily ally themselves to oppose any coalition and/or Afghan government presence from areas where these differing groups share influence.

The Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-i-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) organization revived itself primarily in Kunar, Nangahar, and Nuristan Province following the U.S. invasion

(Barfield, 2010). The organization was able to consolidate its authority over these provinces and then expand its influence within the surrounding provinces based on a lack of Afghan government presence. This phenomenon is supported by the operator whose team conducted VSO in the Northern Region; he described a violent civil war between the Taliban and HIG to have taken place prior to his team's arrival. The conflict between these two Pashtun insurgent groups was fomented at the time by the Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS). The civil war between the two groups ended in a Taliban victory and HIG retreat into the Tajik-controlled urban areas of the district. Understanding of this history is what enabled the previous VSO team to easily recruit Afghan local police from among the refugee HIG population residing in the district's urban area and begin the process of wresting control of the Pashtun rural areas back from the Taliban.

It helped that during the period when operators were conducting VSO in this Northern Region district, members of Hekmatyar's organization crossed over to join the Afghan government (Barfield, 2010). It could be speculated that Hekmatyar's organization made peace with the Afghan government on favorable terms due to the lethal threat that a better organized, equipped, and manned Taliban organization posed to his organization.

The Haqqani network has very close affiliations with the Al-Qaeda, where its base of support primarily straddles the Afghan-Pakistani border areas near the FATA in Pakistan and Paktika, Khost, and Paktia Provinces in Afghanistan (Barfield, 2010). The group was founded by Jalaluddin Haqqani, a notable mujahedeen military commander during the Soviet invasion. This group is based on far extending Pashtun Tribal Networks where the organization was responsible for the execution of high-profile attacks within the heavily secured Kabul security zone (Barfield, 2010). The Haqqani network's influence was never mentioned by any of the operators during this study; this brief description of the organization was given for background on the complex and layered adversarial networks that American teams experienced while conducting VSO.

d. Criminal Organizations

Criminal organizations in Afghanistan, as they were discussed by the operators centered largely on the production, harvesting, and distribution of opium. As reported in

the CIA *World Factbook*, Afghanistan was the world's largest producer of opium in 2016 (CIA, 2016). This fact further complicated the human landscape experienced by VSO teams, since the bribery associated with this trade effected all levels of the Afghan government, security forces, and served as a major source of funding for insurgency activity (Barfield, 2010). Operators described the effects of the production and harvesting of opium poppy within their areas of operation dependent upon whether funding from it was being used to support local insurgency activities. Only if the harvesting of opium was used to fund insurgent activity did teams work to eradicate its growth and production. Opium crops not associated with funding insurgent activity were left alone because poppy growth was the main source of income for the local agrarian populations within the southern portions of the country. Opium poppy fetched a higher price, the product was in higher demand, and its production thrived better in the semi-arid soils of southern Afghanistan in comparison to other legitimate crops.

For operators, simply eradicating the production of opium within their districts was not a solution. It also presented dilemmas with their indigenous security partners as well, since these organizations were often in competition with the local insurgency over protection monies paid for turning a blind eye from the farmers growing it. Operators mentioned this trade and the delicate balance they had to keep concerning its effects on the team's ability to facilitate interaction with populations surviving from its growth.

E. INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT

This section defines the information environment and explains the differing information ecologies experienced by American teams. The information continuum experienced by operators was dependent upon factors such as religious austerity, proximity to urban areas, literacy rates, and information media infrastructure within the American teams' area of operations. These factors determined the ways in which small American teams were able to develop processes to seek, make sense of, and enact themselves with the local populace based on information retrieval. These teams found themselves in the predicament of needing to reduce uncertainties in relation to the environment's physical and human aspects.

Galbraith (1977) defines uncertainty as a deficit between the information an organization possesses and the information it needs to accomplish tasks and goals. For VSO teams to successfully interact with the rural Pashtun populations they need to gather, process, and then derive meaning about physical and human information. Information deficits vary greatly between American teams and are based on context and characteristics of the of the environment's physical and human layers.

1. Information

Howell (1982) defines information as "not only facts and figures, but all the relationships, vague ideas, hunches, feelings, in fact everything people have stored inside them or have picked up from the outside world" (p. 246). Complex cultural environments, such as Afghanistan, require adaptive and flexible organizations capable of competently acting on and learning from "vague ideas, hunches, and feelings" drawn from limited amounts of information to persuasively interact.

2. Radio, Broadcasting, and Television

Broadcast media is an important component of influencing public sentiment and countering the messages of environmentally competitive organizations. The environment experienced American teams remained mostly untouched by modern media infrastructure. One operator illustrates the technological backwardness of the environment by explaining that the village his team based out of had only one light bulb among the entire population, hooked to a rudimentary generator which was owned by the village elder. The remote, rural, and austere environments in which the operators' teams functioned were beyond the reach of Afghanistan's state owned and operated media broadcasts (CIA, 2016). Although Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) has over 150 radios and 50 television stations in both Kabul and throughout its 34 provinces, several factors affect the consumption of this media by the nation's more isolated populations. Factors such as a lack of electricity, the distance from media sources, the size and shape of the terrain, and a poor agrarian population without radios or televisions prevent access to sources of state-controlled information (CIA, 2016).

Falling into the categories of radios, but not broadcast media radio, were discussion from operators about the exploitation of insurgent group's hand-held radio systems. Most of the operators interviewed described their team's capabilities to exploit the handheld radio systems of adversaries. These exploitations were used to gather information about the intentions of local insurgent groups. One Operator whose team conducted VSO in a district located in the Central Region stated that his team had t-shirts made up with the name used by insurgent forces for referring to his team printed on it. The insurgent's expletive-laden nickname for the American team was acquired through the monitoring and exploitation of the insurgent's handheld radio network and conveys an image to locals that the team was a "force not to be reckoned with."

3. Internet Connectivity

According to the CIA's (2016) *World Factbook*, only 10% of the population of Afghanistan has access to the Internet. The country ranked 100th overall in number of Internet users, in comparison to the 217 other sovereignties ranked in the report (CIA, 2016). Afghanistan had an estimated total of 1.9 million Internet users in 2014; their ranking in comparison to other countries is based on total number of internet users, not the percentage of internet users for the total population (CIA, 2016). Nearly all the computer network infrastructure resides in the urban areas of the nation. Operators never spoke of the internet as being a factor during their VSO messaging campaigns. Most spoke about the internet as a source of information for solely American teams. The local populace that American teams were trying to influence simply had no concept of the internet, were too poor to afford this resource, and had no ability to access it.

4. Cellular Telephony Service

Cellular telephone service was a communication resource to which even rural Pashtuns had access. Operators discussed situations where environmental adversaries used cellular telephones for the command and control of their groups or intelligence gathering. Based on 2014 estimates, Afghanistan ranks 51st out 217 other nations for total number of cellular telephone users, with an estimated 23 million users (CIA, 2016). A total of 65 out of 100 inhabitants of the country possess a mobile telephone, and this number has probably

increased significantly since the 2014 CIA report (CIA, 2016). Up to 90% of the Afghan population live in areas covered by cellular telephone service according to the Afghan Ministry of Communications (CIA, 2016). Mobile telephone service is available in even the most remote areas within Afghanistan that includes the use of very small aperture terminals (VSAT) capable of providing voice and data services both domestically and internationally via cellular networks (CIA, 2016).

While cellular telephone technologies were used as a source of information in support of insurgent groups, the information conveyed across these networks also provided American teams with an opportunity to exploit it. Technologies for exploiting and monitoring these networks gave operator teams an enormous advantage during tactical situations by providing them with insights about insurgents' motivations, movements, identities, and positions.

5. Literacy

Afghanistan has an estimated literacy rate of 38.2%, according to the CIA (2016) *World Factbook*. The male population's literacy rate sits at 52%, in comparison to a female rate of 24.2% (CIA, 2016). The male literacy rate, at over double that of females, reflects a male dominated population that is opposed to the education of woman. These statistics support claims made by most operators, who cite that they were unable to influence the development of education programs for woman. Literacy rates, used the same way as it was in medieval Europe, enable local leaders supporting insurgent groups to control local messages because of the population's inability to write and understand written language.

F. VILLAGE STABILITY OPERATIONS/AFGHAN LOCAL POLICE

Prior to the inception of VSO/ALP program the U.S. Army found itself reflecting on successful counterinsurgency programs it used during the Vietnam War, namely the local defense initiative (LDI) (Robinson, 2013; Sorley, 1999). Under the direction of the U.S. Commander of forces in Afghanistan, General David Petraeus, the coalition secured Afghan President Hamid Karzai's approval for the creation of local defense forces under a program titled Afghan local police (Robinson, 2013). The program called for the establishment of no more than 30,000 Afghan Local Police officers to be spread across 100

of the 398 districts making up Afghanistan. Therefore, the program was capped at no more than 300 ALP per district. The incentive for rural Pashtuns to volunteer for the ALP were $120 per month paycheck, plus a $65 food voucher, funded by the U.S., until the program could be funded by the Afghan government (Robinson, 2013).

Afghan local police officers were considered the key to establishing sustainable security, stability and connections between the national and district level governance. ALP officers represent the populations they serve and need to be viewed as credible in the eyes of local populations (CJSOTF-A, 2011). Both LDI and VSO/ALP as counterinsurgency paradigms recognize that security forces recruited out of local populations are more capable of "identifying and separating" insurgents from local communities than non-native security forces (CJSOTF-A, 2011, p. 26). Therefore, creating locally recruited security forces is the surest way to develop sustainable security forces that serve in the best interest of their communities. U.S. Special Operations forces were the ideal force for recruiting, training, and equipping ALP through team immersion at the village level in districts heavily contested by insurgent.

1. U.S. Special Operations Forces

According to Joint Publication 3-05, "Special operations require unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques, procedures, and equipment" (DoD, 2014, p. ix). These missions are characterized as "time-sensitive, clandestine or covert in nature, low visibility," which requires forces to "work with and through indigenous forces" in "hostile, denied, or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments" (DoD, 2014, p. ix). Special Operations Forces are designed to expose themselves to higher degrees of risk then traditional military forces. They also possess a cultural knowledge and competency for specific regions that exceeds that of peers within conventional military units (DoD, 2014, p. ix). Although all service branches are responsible for providing Special Operations Forces to U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) a joint service command, traditionally the forces that conducted the VSO mission came from the combination of U.S. Army and Navy Special Operations.

Special Operations Forces provide combatant commanders (COCOMs), usually joint forces commanders (JFCs) with “discrete, precise, and scalable options” in the synchronization of operations with other U.S. Government (USG) agencies. Some of the “core activities” conducted by Special Operations Forces are listed in Table 2 (DoD, 2014, p. x). Special Operations missions may be comprised of more than one these core activities, as is the case with Special Operations forces conducting village stability operations (DoD, 2014, p. x).

Table 2. Special Operations core activities. Adapted from DoD (2014).

Mission	Definition
Direct Action	"Short-duration strikes, and other small-scale offensive actions conducted with specialized military capabilities to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets in hostile, denied, or diplomatically and/or politically sensitive environments.".
Special Reconnaissance	"Special reconnaissance entails reconnaissance and surveillance actions normally conducted in a clandestine or covert manner to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in convention forces."
Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction	"Special Operations Forces support USG efforts to curtail the development, possession, proliferation, use, and effects of weapons of mass destruction, related expertise, materials, technologies, and means of delivery by state and non-state actors."
Counterterrorism	"Counterterrorism is activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their networks to render them incapable of using unlawful violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals."
Unconventional Warfare	"Unconventional warfare consists of operations and activities that are conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area."
Foreign Internal Defense	"Foreign internal defense refers to U.S. activities that support a host nation's (HN) internal defense and development strategy and program designed to protect against subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their internal security and stability."
Security Force Assistance	"USG security sector reform (SSR) focuses on the way a HN provides safety, security, and justice with civilian government oversight. The DoD's primary role in SSR is to support the reform, restructure, or reestablishment of HN armed forces and the defense aspect of the security sector, which is accomplished through security."
Hostage Rescue and Recovery	"Hostage rescue and recovery operations are sensitive crisis response missions in response to terrorist threats and incidents. Offensive operations in support of

Mission	Definition
	hostage rescue and recovery can include the recapture of U.S. facilities, installations, and sensitive material overseas.”
Counterinsurgency	“Counterinsurgency is a comprehensive civilian and military effort designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”
Foreign Humanitarian Assistance	“Foreign humanitarian assistance is a range of DoD humanitarian activities conducted outside the U.S. and its territories to relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation.”
Military Information Operations	“Military information support operations are planned to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals in a manner favorable to the originator’s objectives.”
Civil Affairs Operations	“Civil affairs operations are actions planned, executed, and assessed by civil affairs that enhance the operational environment; identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society; or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of civil government.”

VSO involved the application of at least eight of these core activities, most of them occurring simultaneously and all of them falling under the auspices of a greater counterinsurgency mission. Operators discussed multiple contexts under which these core activities required the participation of either their entire team or a portion of their team, dependent upon specializations and situation. Activities characterized as direct action (DA), counterterrorism (CT), foreign internal defense (FID), security force assistance (SFA), military information (MIO), and civil affairs operations (CAO) took place during most VSO team missions. Operators discussed conducting humanitarian assistance missions. All these core activities supported the U.S.’s overall counterinsurgency mission. The premises for the mission was to recruit, train, and equip local police, while simultaneously creating sustainable government programs designed to legitimize the Afghan government.

Special Operations Forces such as U.S. Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) Teams' primary core activities are traditionally focused on direct action, special reconnaissance, counterterrorism, and hostage rescue and recovery (DoN, 2013). However, there were not enough U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alphas (ODAs) available to conduct the VSO missions within the 100 districts designated for VSO/ALP. The only viable alternative to make up the difference in VSO teams need to come from the Navy SEAL community. Even though the VSO mission fit the mold of a traditional Special Forces mission, the SEALs were the only other viable alternative. VSO teams also contained non-Special Operations support personnel from the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

a. U.S. Army Operational Detachments Alpha Teams

Operational Detachments Alphas (ODAs), also referred to as "A teams," are 12-man teams made up of soldiers within the U.S. Army's 18 series military occupation specialty. These teams are led by a captain (18A) who serves as the detachment commander, a master sergeant (18Z) in the role of operations sergeant, and a warrant officer (180A) serving as the assistant detachment commander (DoA, 2014). The backbone of the team is rounded out by four sergeants first class serving as the senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) providing oversight and specialization in operations/ intelligence (18F), weapons (18B), engineering (18C), communications (18E), and medicine (18D; DoA, 2014). The team is rounded out by another four staff sergeants, who serve as subordinate NCOs that provide specialization in the same (DoA, 2014).

12-man ODAs are designed to conduct split teams in half to expand operations (DoA, 2014). ODAs were organized for split team operations based on the redundancy of specializations it contained across the NCO ranks (DoA, 2014). Split ODA team operations were evidenced throughout the operators' narratives, particularly when describing situations where the team was ordered to expand VSO/ALP into other contested villages. Operators who found themselves in this predicament described splitting the team to accomplish expansion missions while simultaneously sustaining ALP in their original locations. Some reasons for splitting a team were recruiting the maximum number of ALP

for an area and having a differing interpretation than their higher headquarters about an ALP force's readiness to operate unilaterally.

Members of ODAs are cross-trained on all the specialty areas within the team—again, for the purposes of redundancy (DoA, 2014). These Special Forces teams are designed to operate in very remote or denied indigenous areas primarily to conduct unconventional warfare (UW) and foreign internal defense (FID) core activities (DoA, 2014). The intention of these teams is to operate autonomously for long periods of time within the broad guidelines directed by their higher headquarters (DoA, 2014). ODAs are the smallest component of the U.S. Army Special Forces and all activities within the organization are focused on controlling, maneuvering, and supporting these elements. ODA Teams are assigned to SF battalions and groups based on specific geographic regions of the world. All team members receive specialized language and cultural training for their group's assigned region. The 5th Special Force Group out of Fort Campbell, KY is responsible for the Central Command (CENTCOM) Region which covers Afghanistan; however due to a limited number of ODA teams from 5th SFG available for covering the 100 districts within Afghanistan selected for VSO support, the U.S. Army Special Forces Command (ARSOC) augmented the VSO mission with ODAs from the 7th SFG (South America), 10th SFG (Europe), 3rd SFG (Africa), and Army National Guard (ANG) ODAs (Robinson, 2013). Despite alignment and cultural training for a specific region SFGs were responsible, all ODAs received extensive language and cultural training for the areas where their teams would be conducting VSO prior to deploying.

b. Navy SEAL Platoons

U.S. Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) platoons are comprised of 21 men broken down into three-man squad elements, with each squad being able to break down further into three or four-man fire teams (DoN, 2014). Navy SEAL core activities are traditionally focused on direct action targeting, special reconnaissance, and hostage rescue and recovery (Briggs, 2014). They specialize in maritime operations such as ship boarding and gas and oil platform operations. Like their name, these specialized Sailors pride themselves in covert entry into hostile and denied areas submerged from the sea, via high altitude

parachute entry, or stealthily over land (DoN, 2014). SEAL platoons go through an 18-month training period prior to deployment. Operators from the SEAL community described their 18-month VSO pre-mission training as a period in which their platoons received extensive language and cultural training including pre-mission readiness with supporting units from other branches, such as U.S. Army civil affairs. All the operators from the SEAL community described having an Army Civil Affairs team attached to their platoons for VSO. The current study included interview narratives from two civil affairs officers whose teams were attached to SEAL platoons in support of VSO missions.

Enlisted members assigned to SEAL platoons are trained in one or more specialty areas (DoN, 2014). SEAL platoons have a more robust and focused set of specialty areas among platoon members in comparison to Army Special Forces. Specialty areas found within SEAL platoons are "intelligence, diving, communications, boat and vehicle operation and maintenance, ordnance, air operations, and medical" (DoN, 2014, p. 4-3). To build self-sufficiency, SEAL platoons contain additional specialties such as "snipers, breachers, stand-off weapons operators, advanced special operations technicians, unmanned aerial systems (UAS) operators, joint terminal attack controllers (JTACs), jump master, dive supervisors, ground mobility operators, and language and cultural experts" (DoN, 2014).

c. Support Personnel

Support personnel for VSO teams came from either the SOF or conventional forces (CF) communities. Those coming from the Special Operations community specialized in civil affairs, military information support operations (MISO), and explosive ordinance disposal (EOD). These groups provide specialized services that are not found within the organic makeup of either ODA or SEAL platoons. Given the relationship between these specialty services and Special Operations Forces core attributes, it is only fitting that these organizations—while not organic to Special Operations Forces basic elements (ODAs, SEAL Teams)—were organic within the larger Special Operations Command.

Civil affairs teams are the component of the U.S. Army tasked with supporting the civil affairs core activity (see Table 2). These four-man teams are composed of an Army

captain team leader, one sergeant first class team sergeant, one staff sergeant serving as the civil affairs NCO, and another staff sergeant in the role of medical sergeant. These four-man civil affairs teams are assigned the mission of providing SOF teams conducting VSO "the capability to engage the civil components of the operational environment" (DoA, 2011, p. 2-1). These specialized team are "trained and educated to shape foreign political-military environments by working through and with host nations, regional partners, and indigenous populations" (DoA, 2011, p. 1-1). Their primary functions include "conducting civil reconnaissance (CR) and civil assessments, management of development projects, and to facilitate cross-cultural communications capabilities" to SOF team leaders conducting VSO (DoA, 2011, p. 2-8). The presence of civil affairs teams' greatly enhanced VSO team interactions with remote populations civil affairs team leaders interviewed, described the civil affairs lines of effort (LOE) as primarily focused governance and development.

Other supporting personnel coming out of the SOF community in support of VSO were military information support operations (MISO) and explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) teams. These teams' specialized services were reserved at higher tactical levels within SOCOM and the presence of these types of forces was rarely discussed by operators.

Conventional forces supporting the VSO mission came from traditional U.S. Army Infantry Brigades. Both Army and Navy members interviewed discussed having conventional infantry attached to their teams to improve the team's security and strike capabilities. Attached Infantry were described as containing between two to three nine-man infantry squads. Attached infantry improved the team's ability to split teams, maintain forward operating base security, and supplement their ability to securely within hostile districts. Additional infantry units did not directly affect the process teams used to interact; however, their presence significantly helped facilitate the process. Other U.S. military support personnel briefly discussed by operators were military working dog teams and U.S. Air Force joint terminal air controllers (JTAC).

G. CONCLUSIONS

The chapter provided a detailed description of an environment composed of a physical, human, and information landscape whose complexity is formed by nearly 30

years of continuous conflict, strict adherence to religious practices, and unchanged tribal tenets. It is a landscape filled with arduous terrain features, including steep mountain ranges that isolate communities and vast deserts that shape the harsh temperament of its indigenous populations. It is a nation whose population has been cut off from the modern world in perpetuity.

Afghanistan is a nation state without an all-encompassing national identity. It is a country composed of heterogeneous tribal populations that are segmented by their competition with one another for scarce resources. Further complicating the competition between tribal groups are centuries of foreign interventions. Foreign military interventions contributed to the destruction of traditional tribal governance systems which are responsible for maintaining stability. It is a nation that has experienced rule by a radical theological autocracy, then witness its removal and re-emergence at most of the nation's periphery.

The Afghan environment experienced by American teams was complex because of its varying levels of civil strife. Dependent upon which portion of the country American teams were operating, the levels of warfare can be divided between relative peace and total war. Afghanistan is a nation affected by the national level actions of industrialized nations located half-way around the world. It is a place where the actions of nations half a world away cause profoundly different effects within different portions of the country at different times. It is a country where U.S. intervention seemed like the logical solution given the September 11, 2001, attack on the United States. However, the U.S. invasion has thus far resulted in non-obvious consequences throughout most of country. The setting is a complex environment under which American teams were responsible for facilitating interaction with rural populations whom practiced profoundly different cultural norms, religious beliefs, and social rules and is affected by varying levels of civil strife.

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V. EXPLORING SOCIAL IDENTITY TYPES AND ACTION STRATEGIES

A. MEANING-MAKING AND SOCIAL IDENTITY AS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS

The previous chapter provided descriptions to illustrate Afghanistan's segmented societies and conditions composing the physical, human, and information layers composing its different environments. This chapter will detail the emergent patterns of American team identity performance types (social identity) and action strategies (enactment of social identity) discovered during the analysis of critical incidents. Preliminary interpretations of American team meaning-making determined that environmental conditions contribute to multiple feedbacks that influence the construction and adaptation of team identity performances which teams enact through action strategies. Narrative evidence that supports these interpretations are provided in this chapter.

Meaning-making is reintroduced as a framework composed of sense-giving, sense-making, and information seeking. The higher-level cultural knowledge formed by American teams from the combination of pre-deployment training and previous deployment experiences were used to construct initial team social identities intended to facilitate interaction. American teams discovered themselves making varying attempts at connecting with a population that were stuck in between fractionalized insurgent groups, tribal rivals, and Afghan government security forces, all battling each other for control of sparse resources and the people's sentiments. These situations forced American teams to make sense of violent and non-violent obstructions hindering their development of meaningful relationships with local Afghans. American teams engaged in various efforts to make sense and employed action strategies involving the adaptation of social identities. Identity is at the core of sense-making and social identity refers to self-reference about who these teams thought they were within given situations.

American teams attended to equivocal cues and triggers from the environment to make sense of the challenges they faced. Groups simultaneously shaped and responded to the environments their teams faced. Based on their interpretations, they adopted various

roles, noticed how their enactments affected others, and adapted accordingly. Complexities existing in the Afghan environment forced American teams to adopt a collective version of the "provisional self," a kind of "as if" temporary stance that helped them to internalize values, beliefs, and behaviors appropriate to various professional roles (Ibarra, 1999, p. 765). American teams adopted new roles by experimenting with images that become trials for possible identity, but not fully elaborated social identities.

Being invited into an area by the local population is an important condition that shaped initial team activities. Once immersed these teams attempted to expand "white space," creating security zones within their assigned areas where the probability of being violently attacked by insurgents was deemed extremely low. While attempting to expand "white space," teams looked to shape the sensemaking processes of Afghan groups and to build rapport. American teams were discovered to have used various strategies for influencing Afghan groups. After defining emergent initial social identity types, the chapter explores the actions and behaviors teams used for presenting images from the perspective of "provisional" social identity types.

Over the course of their attempts to act and gain influence, American teams received confirming or disconfirming cues informing them as to whether their sense-giving efforts were successful. These confirming cues then triggered sense-making efforts as they learned how to identify with the local populace. They retrospectively made sense about local perceptions and then either formed new identity strategies or make adaptations to older versions. This was an ongoing meaning-making cycle in which teams found themselves continuously presenting identity performances while monitoring the social environment, receiving feedback in the form of cues, then adapting their identity performances based on their interpretations of these cues.

This chapter outlines the various sense-giving efforts and highlights the confirming or disconfirming cues used for reasoning and deducing interpretations. American team efforts to make sense of the Afghan population's responses after the enactment of their strategies (i.e., sense-giving) will also be discussed. The primary tenets of the VSO methodology dictate that teams need to create relationships, build rapport, and establish trust with local government groups and communities. In some instances, there were no

legitimate Afghan government representation; under these circumstances, teams were charged with co-opting the support of local village or tribal leadership. There were truly no ideal situations these American teams experienced during this mission.

Under the best of circumstances, American teams established themselves within districts that they were invited into by either local Afghan government leadership, including provincial or district governors, whose cooperation and support they could rely upon. Receiving an invitation into a tribal community or being sanctioned by local leaders signaled confirmation that the team's sense-giving strategies had been effective. Invitation also serves as a gateway for accessing prominent local leaders that teams referred to as "powerbrokers," whose influence was needed for the creation of ALP programs.

Afghan National Police and Army forces were often viewed as outsiders by these isolated communities. Corruption and graft often prevented these national level security agencies from ever obtaining legitimacy because they were rarely viewed as acting in the best interest of the population. The VSO team's primary mission was to recruit, train, and equip local security forces and create sustainable security solutions for these unstable districts. The reasoning supporting this mission was rural Afghan communities, considered to be the most vulnerable to insurgent groups, would be far more receptive of police forces comprised of local males and controlled by district leaders. Invitation into a district provided teams with easier access to local leaders from which to sell the merits of the ALP program.

Once American teams had created ALP forces capable of conducting unilateral operations, they planned to expand the program into other contested areas. This strategy follows the well-known inkblot strategy, a counterinsurgency technique explored by the British in Malaya in the 1950s and practiced by U.S. surge forces in Iraq. The concept behind the inkblot strategy is that counterinsurgents (i.e., VSO teams) create government support pockets within contested areas in comparison to an inkblot on a white canvass, where the ink will begin to eventually spread in an uncontrollable manner. Once successful in these efforts, teams looked to repeat the process in other contested areas. This chapter outlines the emergent identity performance types and action strategies discovered during

analysis of critical incidents about American team interactions while conducting the VSO mission.

B. IDENTITY PERFORMANCE TYPES

The environmental conditions described in the setting chapter influenced the construction and adaptation of social identity based on American team interactions. The combination of differing effects from conditions in the physical, human, and information layers of the environment contributed to these adaptations. In reaction to these circumstances, American teams were forced to construct adaptable team social identities, comparable to theatrical performances. These adaptable social identities were abstracted from successful group interactions then added to the team's identity "repertoire" (Berger, 1966). Each social identity was viewed as a template in the team's "repertoire," ready to be meta-cognitively selected by a team and adjusted based on the circumstances surrounding expected interactions. The emergence of differing identity performance patterns during analysis of narratives on team interactions contributed to the following identity performance typology: (a) militaristic, (b) isomorphic, (c) ambivalent or immutable, (d) mimicking, and (e) hybrid. Action strategies detailed later in the chapter support the emergence of these social identity types using narrative evidence extracted from operator accounts of their team's experiences interacting with Afghan groups.

American team use of the militaristic identity performances emerged in districts with high levels of contestability between Afghan government forces and insurgents. It was an identity type used predominately in areas with no Afghan government presence. These were also areas where American teams typically were not extended an invitation to conduct VSO from the local populace. Unsusceptible areas such as these, often forced American teams to conduct operations described as "forced entry VSO." In most incidents' teams were discovered as adopting a militaristic identity performance type during the creation and expansion of "white space."

As implied by the title chosen for this identity performance type, assuming a militaristic identity performance type entailed the projection of a team image that conveyed military superiority. It was created after recognizing that insurgent's contesting the control

of a team's assigned area posed a significant existential threat to all that opposed them. The use of a militaristic identity type was intended to alter the local populace's impressions of insurgents, most locals viewed insurgents in their area as being militarily invincible. This identity type required teams to take aggressive and violent military actions against local insurgents, often while being uncertain about whom that enemy was, what their motivations were, or where they could be found. It was a militarily reactive identity type that required American teams to aggressively and violently react when attacked by insurgents. Table 3 provides operator narratives supporting the emergence of the militaristic identity performance type.

Table 3. Data supporting interpretations of identity performance types

Type	Representative Quotations
Militaristic	*"I thought that in order for us to get momentum going, we were going to have to have a **couple of tactical victories** and it's difficult to force contact when you're the counterinsurgent. The insurgent kind of gets to choose when and where he fights. Um, So we had to be, ah, **pretty aggressive** in trying to **force the contact** and on June 8 of 2010 we were out driving around trying... "* *"At the time when we first got there I thought we're not going to have much focus on governance and development if we can't get out of the base and get some freedom of maneuver. The first three months was **pretty kinetic** towards the end of that three months. We had a **couple of engagements** that were pretty catastrophic for the Taliban and they had kind of put a message out to stop shooting at the guys with beards."* *"Then, you know, we saw that whole tide changing because we **took the fight to the enemy**. We supported the locals and you know, in every way we could. Then, you know, we **killed over 100 Taliban** in the time that we were there. Confirmed kills. I mean **we were aggressive** in **taking the fight** to the enemy to the point that they didn't want to come and fight us anymore"*
Isomorphic	*"The next day my team went out and whenever the Afghan National Army guys went out, **my guys did PT with them.** That was off of their base, you know, co-located with ours, but just out in front of the base. I went back and they still wouldn't let me on and then the next day, **again PT** with them, but more interaction like **sharing exercises** and everything, not just co-located with–more interactions and some laughs back and forth because like they can't do jumping jacks, but we can't do some of the stretches that they do–just because of coordination. So then that day I went over and they invited me to go sit with the colonel."* *"In order to–we generally didn't as a rule, pay for anything because that would kind of degrade our honor standing, if we did it. The way he threaded the needle was **he invoked the local version of a major Pashtunwali tenet called Nunawati** where it's like **an act of contrition** and in that act of contrition you admit that your clan or tribe, whatever subsection of the tribe you are, you admit that not that you were wrong, but that you do not possess the same amount of power and honor as the super tribe. So if you are an outside clan, it would bind you into that super tribe as a result. You gain like a non-blood line relationship. Almost like a marriage."* *"Try to **break down that barrier** instead of us knocking on the door all the time like "Hey, we are going to come in here, we want you to pick up a gun and fight for your country." But, like, "**Hey, how's it going? How's your marriage going, how's your kid**? We helped your kid? How are your crops?" Or, we would talk about **food** or—."*
Ambivalent or Immutable	*"He would. He would tell him things like, "**Hey you know you can't control your people - why do you let the younger people treat you like this if you really had any information then**." So he and I discussed that and I do understand that as a negotiating technique that can work in the right circumstances but it was always applied on the wrong circumstances. It wasn't something where - I **never assessed the guy as someone that would respond to that kind of thing anyway**. Most importantly it would be **done in front of other Elders** - so him **losing face** - like you – he would said or done anything - this Afghan guy just to retain his dignity. He wouldn't have told you he knew anybody."* *"We were supposed to be doing blocking positions and he was late and I don't know why he even bothered to show up. I had been giving him a lot of shit about leadership. I couldn't compromise on **my view of leadership** because it's something that I am **very passionate about**. I mean it's been ingrained in me since I was in high school. I was in the boy scouts. I mean captain of the wrestling team, the football team. I knew what leadership was, then I go to West Point and you go–you get all this training in the US Army and then of course then you go to Special Forces and it's just hey, this is leadership, this is leadership. We reward guys that are good leaders. So **it becomes your identity**. Hey, this is what a leader is because **I couldn't compromise with him** not being like I was taught ever since I was a kid, it ruined our relationship. "* *"Then **the delegation shows up** and – just to keep things short – as they pitch the reintegration program – well first they sort of **storm the room**. It reminded me a lot of Iraq where you – you **sit in dominant position** – you **maintain your full security uniform** – you maintain good communications if someone calls you over the radio in the middle of the discussion **you're like hold on**. So there was **very little reverence**. It was very **irreverent** sort of uncomfortable meeting. They **sat wherever they wanted to** – in some cases **ejecting Elders** from their seats. "*

Table 3. (con't) Data supporting interpretations of identity performance types

Mimicking	*"**I fasted for Ramadan** for those two reasons. It **was–put my foot in the door** on any relationship with every single Afghan that I would meet. It got to the point where, whether it be my interpreter or some of the Afghan soldiers or some of the security apparatus soldiers that were police or army guys that were in the district if we were all talking to a local in one meeting, they would **stop the meeting** and be like, '**you know this guy is fasting for Ramadan**, right?' It was a palpable shift in the meeting with whatever village elder we were dealing with. I **gained instant credibility**. "* *"So initially I felt like I am putting on a like - I am trying to put on a show or trying to like -I am not trying to hide anything at this point and **I felt weird wearing it at first** and it just seemed **very well received**. Sitting in that Shura, the dynamic from wearing multi cams and body armor and stacking rifles and stuff like that, it just seemed like **the dynamic was totally different**. I am not saying like there were two Shuras or that people weren't keeping their mouth shut while I was in there because they knew exactly who I was, but it just seemed **more relaxed**. It seemed like people were **more comfortable** around us"* *"I made sure **everybody learned basic greetings** and **could understand certain things**. We would use it in the meetings and **they would understand** that I couldn't speak it, but they **respected the fact that it did help break down some initial barriers** that just even the greetings ... Trying to learn new words. Walking through their orchards **holding their hands.** You know, while they are picking an apple for you and you are eating it while you are **walking around holding their hand** and talking to them. Of course all my guys thought it was just hilarious. They are always taking pictures of me holding hands. But, it was important to develop those kind of relationships. I mean you could call it a sacrifice because it's not my culture, but it wasn't. "*
Hybrid	*"So the team stuck with our standard uniforms. Like a multi-cam uniform and our regular battle gear, but you know helmets, weapons. But, we made every attempt—and then [redacted Afghan partner's] guys would wear their police uniforms. Usually they wouldn't wear plate carriers, any kind of body armor. So we tried to dress down as close as we could to fit in with [redacted Afghan Partner's] men. So when we would go on patrol up until we would make contact with someone, we would generally take our helmets off. We would leave our body armor on, usually sometimes under our uniforms"* *"Sometimes I would go to certain meetings wearing it. But we started patrolling with our Afghan local police in a lot of the villages, for a couple of different reasons. One was like the Afghan local police loved it when we did. Two, from a distance, at a certain point in the deployment, I mean you could barely tell—from a distance—you could barely tell that it was SF guys patrolling with the local police."* *"On occasion, there were some sites that we wore ALP uniforms to kind of try to embed with them."*

Isomorphic identity performance types were deployed by VSO teams as a method to find common bonds with Afghan groups. The strategy type was discovered in the narratives for team's either lacking localized sociocultural knowledge and teams needed to overcome divisions between indigenous leaders and groups to promote solidarity. This identity performance type required teams to play on the universal characteristics all humans have in common, such as children, wives, sickness, and other non-sociocultural characteristics. Isomorphic identity types were found to have trumped cultural norms used to regulate social and cultural behaviors among Afghan populations.

Ambivalent or immutable identity performance strategies were employed either subconsciously out of ignorance or consciously out of abhorrence for Afghan cultural norms. Subconsciously, this identity performance type was unknowingly used by team's that were oblivious to sacredly held Afghan cultural traditions. Examples of ambivalent or immutable identity were not waiting to be seated by hosts, remaining armed and in body armor on while under the protection of Afghan hosts and failing to acknowledge local grievances. Other ambivalent or immutable actions and behaviors associated with this identity type were deliberately challenging the manhood of local elders, talking down to the male members of Afghan communities, and refusing to participate in cultural practices considered taboo in western culture, such as hand-holding between men.

Mimicking identity performance types were used by teams as a method for establishing credibility with Afghan populations. It was an identity performance type that involved engaging in cultural practices and customs during interactions. Examples of actions and behaviors associated with this type were participating in religious practices, dressing in local garb, leveraging knowledge about cultural norms, and speaking the host population's language. American teams implemented this strategy type to gain credibility, trust, and sometimes even mend deteriorating relations between their team and the local community. In the psychological sciences, mimicry research findings using human subjects discovered that imitation is a prosocial aspect used by sojourners during interactions with indigenous populations (van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, & Van Knippenberg, 2004).

Hybrid identity performance types were used by teams to create solidarity with Afghan security partners. Use of these identity types projected a team image that conveyed unity, joint commitment, and solidarity to local Afghan communities. Examples illustrating the use of this identity type were broadcasting the same messages as Afghan security partners during interactions with local communities, wearing the same uniforms as security partners, and demonstrating a willingness to fight alongside Afghan security partners. Hybrid identity types were also discovered to have promoted the creation of common operating procedures and coordination mechanisms which helped legitimize American teams in the eyes of the populace.

C. ACTION STRATEGIES

Emergent patterns of American team actions and behaviors were discovered as facilitating or hindering their interactions with Afghan groups. Similar patterns of actions and behaviors used by teams fit within action strategies that contributed to the construction of team social identities types. Social identity types are synonymous with identity performances types. Action strategies are actions and behaviors teams used to enact their identity performances strategies composed of the team action strategy and identity performance types. These action strategies were discovered through the analysis of critical incidents. This section presents 14 action strategies and the critical incidents supporting their categorization within this framework. It also aims to make a compelling and sensitizing argument supporting interpretations of these strategies.

D. DEMONSTRATIONS OF FORCE TO ENHANCE TEAM INFLUENCE

Teams immersing themselves in districts where Afghan government security forces were militarily dominated by insurgent groups caused American teams to adopt action strategies involving the demonstration of military force. Action strategies using demonstrations of force were intended to eliminate or degrade the abilities of insurgent groups to influence, intimidate, or threaten local populations. The actions and behaviors used in these strategies contributed to the construction of team identity performance types considered militaristic. Demonstrations of force were intended to alter the local population's impressions about insurgent invincibility formed in their collective minds

prior to the American team's arrival. It was a strategy that was not without risks for hindering interactions dependent upon the appropriate use of violent force. Incidental civilian deaths and the wanton destruction of property that could result from this strategy risked permanently swaying local sentiments in favor of insurgents. However, teams assuming militaristic social identities and using the appropriate amounts of force to defeat insurgents in combat were discovered as significantly enhancing their teams influence within Afghan communities. The critical incidents presented in this section confirm Glatzer's (2002) proposition that displays of military gallantry are essential for gaining influence and power within Pashtun dominated tribal communities.

1. The White Whale

The American team was invited into a district with a strong government presence and was under the control of a dominant Pashtun tribe. Local insurgent groups vigorously contested the government's control over the district. It was also a district in which the local population viewed local insurgent groups as invincible:

> They thought this guy had 200 fighters, all of them 8 feet tall and carrying flamethrowers and they might have dragons (anti-tank missiles). Who knows? So, there is this perception of invincibility for the Taliban there and there was 11 of us, if you count my air controller, 11 Americans and about 35 Afghans that we are partnered with. Umm, very experienced Afghans but still for an area that big was a pretty, pretty light footprint.

Once the team framed the situation in this way, they decided to "take the fight to the enemy," as a demonstration of their military strength. The American team's leader decided to publicly challenge the district's Taliban commander by issuing a public challenge within a *shura* composed of local elders. During his very public pronouncement, the team leader promised that his team would not employ air power or artillery if insurgents did not use IEDs. He also announced where his team would be waiting to meet and engage the Taliban in battle. Soon after this *shura*, the district center where the gathering took place was attacked by mortars. In response to this attack, the team decided to patrol out to a local village within the vicinity of where the mortar fire originated. While assembling the patrol with their Afghan security partners, the team leader was told that his Afghan partner, the commander of the Afghan local security forces, would not be accompanying the hybrid

Afghan-American team on the patrol. Instead, the Afghan commander's incompetent deputy was charged with guiding them. After the incompetent deputy unintentionally leads the patrol down the wrong route, the American team was forced to take over navigating the group. Course corrections demanded the patrol use an unorthodox route over a desolate mountain range leads the patrol right into the middle of the local Taliban's base camp. When the team realizes they are in a Taliban base camp they instinctually kill the Taliban commander and all his surprised fighters.

The American team in this incident developed an aggressive strategy and enacted the strategy in a public forum. The team understood that the local leaders "hedged their bets" in favor of coming out on the side they perceived was going to win the conflict. "Hedging their bets" meant local elders sent one of their sons to join the Afghan National Army and another son to join the local Taliban. By issuing this public challenge, the operator knew the challenge would travel be received by the local Taliban via the father-son social network created by local elder's "hedging their bets."

The American team also understood that their public pronouncement played on the Taliban commander's honor by specifying the American team not only wanted to fight them, but also that they would not use air power or artillery if the Taliban did not use IEDs. Any infringement of the public challenges would cause the Taliban commander to lose face within the local community. The American team consciously leveraged cultural knowledge about the significance Pashtun populations placed on the importance "of saving face." The leveraging of this knowledge placed the team in a militarily advantageous position for demonstrating the effectiveness of force they were able to inflict on the Taliban. Leveraging the "honor and shame culture" against the Taliban for military advantageous reasons was explained as:

> When the insurgent gets to pick the time and place, if he picks the time and place where it's in a crowded urban environment, the counterinsurgent is almost never going to win, even if he kills all of them, because in the processes he has destroyed a bunch of stuff and killed a bunch people who probably didn't need to die, just in the course defending himself. So, you're, you're set up to lose. So, our way around that was, we would use the honor and shame culture against them and we would basically, we try to pick a fight.

This action strategy gave the American team a tactical advantage and enabled them team to pick the time and the place of future military engagements by making public challenges that the Taliban could not refuse without "losing face." Even though the American destroyed the local Taliban commander and his fighters by chance. The team's public pronouncements enhanced the erosion of the Taliban's influence in the district. Given the rarity of American teams ever killing or capturing a local Taliban commander, the team's labeling for this commander after initialing entering the district supported the Afghan public's perceptions. The American team labeled the local Taliban commander the "white whale" after Captain Ahab's illusive nemesis in the book *Moby Dick*. As a consequence of the American team's militant social identity enacted by pushing contact with the Taliban, the team was able to alter local impressions about the team's competency and the Taliban's invincibility.

2. Spread the Word

The American team discussed in this incident had the unique circumstances of providing VSO for two rural districts described as "no man's land." The first of the two districts the team started out in had a government presence and harbored feelings of abandonment. The team considered the district to be lightly contested and primarily composed of Pashtun tribes that collaborated with one another. It was never specified whether the team was invited into the area. However, since the team shared a base with an Afghan National Army company it is assumed that they were invited. Prior American VSO efforts in the district ended 3 years prior to the team's arrival in which no replacements for the VSO mission were sent. The 3-year absence of American forces in the district resulted in the assassination of its governor and many prominent elders. It is asserted that these assassinations, coupled with other insurgent retributions caused the locals to harbor feeling of being abandoned.

The team had been operating in the district for fewer than 90 days when this incident occurred. They had already actively conducted presence patrols out to other villages where the villages' elders were found to be non-committal but receptive of the team's messages. The team was still uncertain about the contestability of the district when

they came upon a village that displayed clear indicators of not wanting to interact. The team's interpretations of cues suggested the villagers were mostly ambivalent about their presence. The team noticed there were no fires lit for them, as is customary during winter months. The also noticed that the local children being ordered into their homes as the team entered the village. Finally, the village elders provided short and curt responses to the team leader's questions.

After attempting to exchange pleasantries, the team exited the village using a different route. Almost immediately upon exiting the village, the team was ambushed by insurgents. The team responded by violently attacking into the ambush and capturing all the insurgents. The team made a show out of parading the captured insurgents back through the inhospitable village while on their way to a designated helicopter landing zone. While parading the captured insurgents through the village, the team leader told the village's elder that if his team received any more attacks within proximity of the village that he would hold the elder personally accountable. After this incident, the team received increasingly friendlier receptions during subsequent visits to the village. These friendlier receptions included the serving of chai and food. The children remained at play, an indication that the elders had less to hide from the team. They attributed these friendlier receptions to a combination of the team's military prowess and the mercy they showed on detainees. The elders expected the American team would kill the captured insurgents. "When we caught them, it was really interesting because this is right after this really chilling reception from this village" was used as the team's reasoning for linking the insurgents to the village.

The American team's militant response led to future successful interactions in the village because it altered the tribal population's perceptions of the team. The shift in local perceptions about the team after the ambush were described as "they viewed us as an authority figure at that point." The team was never shot at again in the district. At one point, the village elders traveled to the district center to plead for the release of the captured insurgents. During the team's initial entry into the village, they monitored the village activity, quickly made sense of the confirming or disconfirming cues, amended the perceived intentions and expectations of the indigenous population, and adjusted by experimenting by using a militant action strategy.

3. We Did Some Operations Ourselves

During this incident, the American team replaced the first VSO team conducting the mission in the district. The team being relieved only spent 4 months in the district which was not long enough for them to establish a secure base camp or recruit anything more than a handful of untrained ALP. There was a government presence in the district and there did not appear to be any feelings of abandonment. There were, however, competitive rivalries between two different insurgent groups the team determined were Afghan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban. In another incident, shortly after the team's arrival, they drove up a valley and into the middle of a firefight between the two Taliban groups, only to have both groups stop firing at each other and direct their deadly fires at the team. The actions of these rival Taliban groups support Glatzer's (2002) explanations for the existence of "segmentary solidarity" within Pashtun tribes. Since the district was close to the Pakistan border there were Pashtun refugee groups residing in the district that were viewed as unwanted outsiders by the district's native Pashtun population. The districts ethnic disparity proved to be a major obstacle for establishing security because of the violent rivalries that existed between groups that only banded together during their opposition to the Afghan government. These hostilities contributed to the daily mortaring of the American's base and the emplacement of improvised explosive devices which restricted the American team's movements. Despite having an already recruited ALP force from a segment of the district's total population, the overall environment was simply too dangerous to train the newly recruited ALP force because of the mortar attacks. The team decide they needed to act unilaterally to stop the mortar attacks. A task that needed to be completed prior to recruiting, training, and operating with the district's nascent ALP force.

The insurgent groups mortaring the American base camp "would come down the *wadis* [dried up river beds] when they would attack just about every day" from the direction of the Pakistani border. Despite being uncertain about the exact locations of these mortar positions, the team was able to estimate the approximate location. The team decided to "take the fight to the enemy" because "it was pretty clear that they would just go hide in the *wadis*" after firing their mortars. The team could not understand, "how we got so close? If just the acoustics were not just carrying." The enemy force was "laying down, weapons

like propped up against them" when the team surprised the insurgents by raining down overwhelming bursts of fire on the group. The team killed several insurgents and the rest retreated across the Pakistani border. The team searched the bodies of those killed, looking for cues about their intentions and identity. They discovered items such as:

> ID cards from Pakistani Madrassas … really interesting little assault kits if you will. A tube sock, a little—two tube socks tied to each other in a big loop with like a small bag of rice, small bag of beans, hair comb, half a bar of soap, almost like something you could throw together and be out on the mountains for a couple days.

The team concluded the group they encountered were Pakistani Taliban. Their overwhelming victory over the Taliban group had great effects. According to the operator, the team's military victory resulted in decreased levels of contestability (i.e., less mortar attacks) and increased ALP recruitment. It also "set a precedent" that the team held the advantage over all groups when it came to the "balance of power" in the district. The operator explained, "Everybody [in the district] was talking about it" and referenced the team's overwhelming defeat of insurgent forces in the *wadi*. The school children and travelers utilizing the main thoroughfare either witnessed the event or saw the outcome of the battle. It was now more difficult for the Taliban to travel across the border to retrieve the bodies, which exposed the carnage the team inflicted on the insurgents to the local populace; such local exposure caused the word to spread throughout the district's population.

E. CREATING TRUST THROUGH COMMONALITIES

American teams developed action strategies for the creation of trusting relationships with Afghan partners that were based on shared universal human values, such as marriage, family, death, spirituality, etc. Teams that used strategy premised on commonalities were found to have created more intimate relations with Afghan groups. In some cases, intimacy enabled teams to overcome knowledge deficits about how to properly interact. Bochner (1982) defined intimacy as one of three major contact variables contributing to "mutual understanding" between culturally different groups (p. 3). American teams using action strategies designed to create trust through commonalities constructed isomorphic social identity types. The following critical incidents explore

spirituality and family attributes as universal characteristics that bound societal and cultural boundaries between American teams and Afghan sub-groups.

1. Avoid Religion to Not Offend

In pre-deployment preparation, teams are advised not to talk about religion or politics with Afghan populations. However, the following incident does not support this practice. The team conducted VSO in a Pashtun village in which the village's elder afforded them all the protections accorded under the tenets of Pashtunwali; therefore, the research assumed three initial environmental conditions existed: the team was invited into the village, the village was homogenous, and the village was not being heavily contested by insurgent groups.

The team's pre-deployment training advised the team to "avoid religion or avoid these things to not offend Afghans." It was an environment where the team sought to find common ground with the village as a method for establishing closer relations. The team dressed in local garb and helped farmers work their fields. The operator explained that the team was constantly monitoring for cues that would enable them to adapt the mainly Christian image they projected. According to the operator, the team focused on keeping the God-fearing characteristics of the team's identity which are valued by rural Pashtuns. Simultaneously, the team played on the common religious characteristics shared by both cultures. Because of the trust created between the team and the village, the village elder told the team prior to their departure from the village:

> There is no Taliban activity in this village … you are welcome every time. When you guys come here, you are safe…This is a peaceful village, but anyone comes here to threaten you guys…they will awaken the sleeping lion.

The village elder's statement meant the team would be extended the protection of guests under the *Pashtunwali* tenant of *malmestya* [sic], meaning the entire village would lay down their lives to protect the team as guests. *Malmestya* is not necessarily extended to all guests as supported in the chapter's critical incidents. The extension of this tenet was based on the mutual trust the team created through their willingness to discuss religious values practiced in both Christianity and Islam. Afghan populations were found to have a

general curiosity about their American guests' religious beliefs. Therefore, the topic of religion should not be avoided in the enactment of team action strategies. As supported by this incident, the topic of religion should be used as a trust developing method in American team action strategies in which shared cross-cultural religious values are emphasized. The consequences for the team's use of religion during this incident was the extension of *Malmestya* from the village elder which insured the team would be welcomed as guests and protected while in or around this village.

2. A Guy That Sleeps Next to Me

The American team was invited into the district in which this incident occurred. There was no Afghan government presence. Homogeneity and feelings of abandonment were never mentioned during the operator's account. The incident happened after the team had a well-established presence in the district. The team successfully recruited, trained, and resided on a base they shared with an ALP force they helped create. As a matter of routine within the compound the team shared dinner every night with their ALP counterparts described as:

> Every night I do dinner with the locals. Once we had ALP in there—I suddenly had this cross-section of the whole River Valley in my camp and I was eating with them—establishing rapport—so stories would start to flow.

The team began to form some benevolent bonds by exchanging stories about marriage, children, and family. This situation became more complex when the operator recalled an ALP member telling a story about how his brother-in-law was killed by Americans. It was only after interpretation from Pashtu to English that the operator realized that his VSO team was responsible for the killing during their initial reconnaissance into the area. As the ALP member discussed the story's specifics and the translator relayed these specifics to the operator in English, the operator realized he had been the one responsible. The operator expressed the guilt he had for orphaned the ALP member's niece and widowed his sister. The fact that the operator slept next to this ALP member every night only added to the operator's dilemma.

The operator discussed how this put the war on a far more personal level then it had before while living with the ALP. The operator felt torn; however, he knew Afghans could quickly change sides in the conflict, given their proclivities and the nature of Afghan warfare.

> He knows who he's having dinner with. It's not a question—the dynamic of having a brother against brother—it's not that they would necessarily fight against each other—but it's just that they just as easily change sides.

The team understood that family loyalty was highly valued in Afghan culture. They also understood the paradoxes associated with the *Pashtunwali* tenet called *badal,* which requires family members to exact vengeance for the murder or killing of family members (Ibrahimov, 2011). For this reason, the operator decided not to share this discovery. He knew that admitting the truth about the situation to the ALP member, could break the mutual trust established between the differing groups and jeopardize the fragile stability the team had helped establish in the district.

3. We Do Not Know This Guy

During this incident the American team conducted VSO in a district with a government presence and the team was assumed to have been invited. The team lived on a base they shared with their Afghan Army counterparts. Therefore, invitation and presence were implied. Relations between the American and Afghans sharing the base were described as:

> It's just hey, you know, it's like hey we only work with you when we need to work with you type deal. You know? To me that would send a message like hey, I am here because I have to be here, and I am going to work with you because someone is telling me to work with you, type of message.
>
> A major artefact symbolizing the team's sentiments was described as the wall the team constructed to separate them from their Afghan partners. The wall was influential in shaping the sense-making processes of the Afghan team. The American team established a "professional" barrier in which interactions only occurred between the two groups during formal meetings or while conducting operations.

Serving tea in this culture represented a more personal level interaction when it was served by hosts. The two groups rarely shared chai. "Professional" only interactions created

a distrust between the two teams. It was observed that "trust only goes so far if you have a wall between you." The two teams never shared dinner, competed in games, or exchanged personal stories about family and children.

It was within this framework that the following "tragic" incident occurred. When an Afghan soldier took leave, he was temporarily replaced an Afghan soldier whose behaviors were described as "just being weird…very isolated, segregated and all of that" by Afghan leadership. The Afghans went to the American team with information about the replacements soldier's strange behavior, further explaining to their American counterpart's that they "don't know this guy, he came from somewhere else, none of us did any training or schooling with him."

The American team was observed to have "just blew that [information] off." The outcome of this stranger's presence, the ignoring of information passed to them by Afghan partners culminated in the murder of an American Soldier. The consequences of these outcomes were, "One of the guys on the ODA got killed from this individual" in an avoidable "blue-on-green" attack within the joint compound: "the guy—you know, turned on the ODA and shot and killed a guy."

In retrospect, the outcome of "not knowing your partner force. The culture thing" and the team's failure to process vital information being communicated to them by Afghan partners, led not only to the death of an American Soldier but also to the complete deterioration of the team's professional relationship with Afghan Army partners. The incident supports the necessity of establishing intimate bonds and trust based on the sharing of universal values that goes beyond simply establishing working relationships. This incident resulted in the entire Afghan Army unit working with the team being withdrawn and Afghan government legitimacy undermined in the district.

F. DEMONSTRATING INTENTION TO BE OF SERVICE

Demonstrating intention to be of service was an action strategy used by American teams to give local Afghans a sense the team was sincere and empathetic. These often-unintentional displays of very human intentions influenced the local population and Afghan security partner's sense-making in ways that greatly enhanced the team's ability to create

reciprocal relationships. These unintentional and humanly implemented strategies were unsolicited gestures made with no expectation of reciprocation from Afghan groups. Teams using action strategies demonstrating intentions to be of service constructed variations of isomorphic, hybrid, and mimicking social identities. The following three critical incidents explore American teams' interactions that enacted such strategies.

1. Would You Invite Them In?

This incident occurred in a district that had a government presence and no apparent feelings of abandonment. There were disparities between district's native sub-groups and Pashtun refugees fleeing violence from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. The team had managed to synchronize the efforts for the various Afghan government and security organizations operating within the district. As a result, the team lowered the levels of contestability in the district. This helped the team to recruit ALP but also triggered their higher headquarters to order an expansion of the ALP program. The team's assessment differed from their superiors. They felt that they needed to keep a presence in their original location because its ALP program was still immature. As a compromise, the team agreed to conduct split team operations by keeping a portion of their team in its original location.

The team's expansion of the ALP program into newer portions of the district presented them with the problem of where to expand. Split team operations meant the team needed to be in locations capable of mutually supporting one another. The struggling team recalled an event which took place shortly after the team's arrival. During this event an Afghan border police commander brought one of his wounded officers to the front gate of the team's base. The wounded officer suffered grenade fragmentations to his face. The operator recalled his incredulous response to the commander by asking, "Where did you guys come from?" In response, the police commander simply replied, "we need your help." After the team's medical specialist examined the wounded officer, the operator noted that "this guy needs to go to like a hospital immediately."

The American hospital located far away in the provincial capital refused to evacuate the wounded police officer via helicopter. However, the hospital agreed to care for him if

the team transported him. The team transported the wounded officer without reservation. Upon the team's arrival, the operator "thought for sure he was dead," only to be surprised 30 minutes later when the officer was sitting up in bed and answering questions. The border police commander expressed his gratitude by stating, "I don't know how I am ever going to repay you." At the time, the team's efforts to save the wounded officer were made without the expectation of receiving anything in return from the border police.

However, the passage of time and the changing of circumstances left the team in a position where it needed to fulfill the requirements for expanding the ALP program. Recalling their earlier selfless efforts, the team decided the unit with the border police officer the team rescued was based in the optimum location for expansion. The team's willingness to selflessly care for the injured border police officer established a benevolent bond between them and an Afghan organization they knew little about. The American team discussed in this incident demonstrated an isomorphic identity type by selfishly treating an injured Afghan police officer from a human perspective that rose above solely serving societies based on their ethnicity, ideology, or tribal relations.

2. It Made Us Feel Good about Being There

This incident focused on the team's sentiments following the use of a humanitarian action strategy for overcoming the accidental damage the team caused to property in a remote village. The incident occurred while the team was in the process of redeploying their equipment following what the operator considered to be a successful VSO mission. The team had successfully created and expanded a sustainable ALP program throughout the district. Moving the team's equipment out of the district required the movement of large trucks that were driven by Soldiers unfamiliar with the district's limited and unimproved road network. The combination of the large vehicles and the driver's unfamiliarity with the remote environment caused the convoy to become disoriented. At the advisement of the operator, the convoy was instructed to turn around in a village which the team had no relations. In the process of executing the delicate maneuver of turning the trucks around in the village, one truck accidentally crushed *qalat* (building) used for conducting *shuras*. The

operator knew the consequences that would result from the damage caused by the convoy and waited at the front gate of the team's base for the arrival of the village's elder.

However, the team viewed this unfortunate predicament not from a negative perspective, but as an opportunity for a "good news story." The village elder showed up as expected on a bicycle. The team offered him two drums of gasoline as compensation for the damage the convoy had caused. The elder was "ecstatic" and the team agreed to deliver the fuel to the village. According to the operator, the team made a show out of delivering the drums in front of the entire village's population. Subsequently, the team distributed winter clothing they had collected through donations from Americans donors to the impoverished village's children. The team's humanitarian gesture was a reciprocal process because it helped increase the empowerment of the elder in front of his people and provided the team with sentiments that "made us feel good about being there in general," according to the operator. This final humanitarian act by the team continued the projection of a team image conveying intentions for being of service that proceeded throughout the team's entire stay in the district. The operator described how the team's image evolved:

> We had built such a strong rapport by the end with all those villages that you know, I bet if I go back there today with a beard, because I don't think they would recognize me without it, but I think I would still—if I walked right back in there I think I would still have immediate rapport built.

The team initially entered a district highly contested by insurgents in which they held the sentiments of the people. After demonstrating the team's ability to defeat these insurgent, the team adapted their team identity that projected a more caring image based on universal human values.

3. I Wish I Would Have Thought of That Sooner

This incident explores an American team strategy for demonstrating intentions to be of service based on a strategy involving their repeated attempts at dislodging insurgents from a remote village. Insurgent's that captured this village also created a humanitarian crisis in the district by displacing all the village's inhabitants. The village was located high in the mountains and separated from the rest of the district by a river. The terrain to the village area was impossible for vehicles to access without a ferry. A road running parallel

on the opposite bank of the river was the only way to transport soldiers and equipment over to the village. The district contained a strong government presence but was still highly contested by insurgent groups. The coalition of security forces arrayed throughout the district were comprised of American, French, Dutch, and Afghan security forces.

These forces had to make three attempts before successfully retaking the village from insurgents. French and Dutch forces failed in the first attempt to retake the village and suffered heavy casualties. A second effort led by the American team was also beaten back after a combination of terrain and insurgent's manmade effects forced the team to withdrawal. The operator described the reasons for the team's premature withdrawal as:

> We did [return to retake the village] and they were ready. I mean they knew how we were coming. There was only one road up there, and they ambushed us from the other side of the river and we took five casualties in the first 30 seconds.

The team's failure to retake the village during their second attempt altered the team's image of invincibility among the local populace. It also emboldened insurgents holding the village and placed local elder's supporting the team in a bad position with the populace. All of these altered perceptions were expressed during a *shura* held immediately after the second attempt to retake the village. The local elders' responses to these sentiments were described as:

> That following *shura*, I know that local leaders told everybody how well we took care of their people and took care of the Taliban. That was probably the most appreciative they had been because they were feeling like they were getting squeezed.

Based on the team's interpretations of local sentiments expressed during the *shura*, they planned a third attempt to retake the village that would occur only after the entire civilian population of the village had been dislodged. The team understood their plan could not focus solely on military strategies—it also needed to compensate for the humanitarian aspects of the mission. The new plan used a strategy requiring the construction of a displacement camp to house displaced villagers. Local leaders were "very appreciative" the team's willingness to wait until the entire village had been evacuated before attacking. The outcomes of this incident conveyed to the village population that the team was

genuinely concerned for their welfare. The civil affairs section attached to the team were directed to construct a displacement camp for displaced individuals described as:

> We wanted to go back there … without the risk of civilian casualties, because we knew it was going to be really kinetic. So, our civil affairs team set up a few kilometers south, like a displaced person camp. You know, with the tents, food, water, facilitated them having a safe place to stay. The Afghans provided security for them.

This caring gesture altered the team's image in the eyes of the village population. The team adapted their social identity based on a combination of military and human characteristics. This combination enabled them to restore the image of invincibility the population held while creating additional images that conveyed the team's intentions to be of service.

G. EFFORTS TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES FACILITATING TRUST AMONG SUB-GROUPS

Patterns of efforts to overcome obstacles facilitating trust among sub-groups was discovered within multiple operator narratives. Many of the critical incidents analyzed for this research demonstrated that teams experienced high levels of ethnic, tribal, and organizational disparity. To the untrained eye, the differences between these Afghan tribal, ethnic, and organizational groups often seemed impalpable. The often subtle and nearly indistinguishable sub-tribal, ethnic, and organizational differences between these groups could not be learned from sources outside the societies in which they existed. The only way for these nuances could be discovered was through patient coexistence with the populations residing in these fractionalized communities. Some teams were never able to learn and therefore, recognize the cues that are indicative of the subtle conflicts existing within these remote societies. Teams that failed to discover the existence of conflict between these disparate groups were typically forced to withdrawal from their assigned areas early. Teams that recognized cues signaling conflict between sub-groups and implemented strategies for overcoming these obstacles constructed variations of isomorphic, hybrid, and mimicking social identity types. Conversely, teams failing to recognize conflict between sub-groups created ambivalent or immutable social identities. This section explores three critical incidents where American teams were able to recognize the subtle and nuanced

rivalries between Afghan sub-groups and develop action strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

1. Focusing on Repairing Those Relationships

In this incident, the team learned about a fist fight between the district's army and police commanders. They also discovered that the district's governor refused to speak with either of the commanders. The Taliban took advantage of these divisions by successfully conducting several suicide bomber attacks in the district's bazaar. The attacks left the local population "really disgruntled with the level of security that was not being provided." The population had lost faith in all of the district's security forces as a result of the Taliban's devastating suicide attacks.

Upon arrival, the American team occupied a camp that was divided between them and an Afghan Army brigade by a "12-foot Hescoes [barrier]" wall. Relationships between the newly arrived American team and the Afghan army commander were strained from the outset. The Afghan commander felt previous American teams had slighted him by backing out of planned security operations which caused the local community to view his team an illegitimate security force. The illegitimate view held by the population conversely caused the Afghan commander to resent the local population. The commander's growing resentment was also based on being separated from his wife and children for unappreciative local community. The vortex of anger and resentment held by the Afghan commander began when previous American teams neglected their relationships with the Afghan Army Brigade stationed in the district.

In the team's first actions they attempted to indirectly interact with the Afghan commander by participating in his subordinate soldier's morning exercise routines. After exercising for two mornings with the Afghan soldiers, things began to lighten up. Indicators of the thaw between the groups were described as "laughs back [and] forth" about each group's inability to perform the other's stretches or calisthenics. Immediately after the second session, the American team leader was granted access to the Afghan commander. During the first meeting between the two, the team leader noticed that his presence was not welcomed by the commander:

> You know you are used to being offered tea and food. Sometimes that's very humbling because they don't have much, but they would give you whatever they have if they respect you. He offered nothing.

The Afghan commander "just wanted the people to respect him and respect his men." Therefore, the team's activities were shaped in a way that would earn the commander and his men the respect of the local community. The team's strategy was described as:

> When we did it [planned and conducted operations], we would take the Afghan National Army colonel, the police chief, and the district chief with us. Before we would go, we would plan the mission, the three of them, and then I would plan the mission and then my team and I would plan it before.

Indicators the action strategy enacted by the team had repaired the relationships between the Afghan leadership and adapted the local population's image of the district's security forces were illustrated when all the district's security forces acted collaboratively in the public capture of insurgents attempting to blow up the district's bazaar using suicide vests. The team's action strategy legitimized not only the Afghan Army commander but the entire Afghan security apparatus for the district by projecting a unified public image. The thwarting and capture of insurgents attempting to blow themselves up in the district's bazaar by the district's security forces cooperating with one another helped re-instill the populaces faith, confidence, and trust in these organizations.

2. The Hazara Checkpoint

The following incident explores a VSO team that established a Hazara-manned check point as a method for enticing the district's Pashtun population into participating in the ALP program. The team was invited into the district by an elder within the Hazara minority community. The Hazara community existed in the middle of a district in which it was surrounded by Pashtun tribal groups that exerted privilege over the minority population. The district's Pashtun population also held a deep distrust for outsiders. There was no Afghan government presence within the district, yet the team did not sense any feelings of abandonment coming from groups in the divided community. The operator attributed the high level of contestability in the eastern portion of the district to the cultivation of opium used to finance criminal and terrorist operations throughout Afghanistan. As explained by the operator:

> There were drugs out there, fields of opium, and fields of marijuana. It was more of like the hinter lands, which again I think is why terrain is so important. They go to the areas where there's least resistance. It's out there in the middle of nowhere. These people have no trust in their government at all.

The team created obstacles for establishing a district wide ALP program by establishing it within the Hazara community first. The operator explained that the team's base camp was originally setup in the Hazara community and then moved into the Pashtun community at the direction of their higher headquarters. The benefits of moving the base camp into the Pashtun dominated areas was that it helped facilitate cooperation between the team and a highly distrustful Pashtun community. The Pashtun's distrust was even greater while the American team was based among the Hazara community.

Even though the team moved their base camp into the Pashtun community, they continued to display their strong sense of trust in Hazara ALP partners. This could be evidenced by the Hazara ALP protecting the team's new base camp within the Pashtun community.

> We had some of our Hazaras stay on our base with us. They were kind of like internal ring of security. We had two separate sides of the base. They were on their side; we were on our side.

The use of Hazara ALP at the team's base camp and the various checkpoints throughout the district fostered a team strategy that incentivized a distrusting Pashtun population into participating in the district's ALP program. The strategy played the distrust of one ethnic group off the other as an instrument for gaining Pashtun support and recruits for the ALP. When initially asked about the ethnic composition of the ALP checkpoint situated in the area's bazaar, the operator explained that it was manned by Pashtuns. Immediately after giving this reply, the operator explained, "It started as Hazaran [sic] and they [Pashtuns] were up in arms about it." He described his response to the Pashtun's protest over having a Hazara manned checkpoint within the bazaar by stating, "Look, give me ten guys and we will train them," implying that the Hazara manned checkpoint became a forcing mechanism for Pashtun tribal groups living near the bazaar to start participating in the ALP program.

By using such a strategy, the team was able to leverage the Pashtun's prejudice toward the Hazara community and distrust of Americans into an advantage. The message this strategy conveyed to the Pashtun community signaled that ALP presence and security was going to be felt throughout the district, regardless of which members of the community were conducting the policing. The operator emphasized this message about having sub-groups securing areas where their rivals lived by explaining:

> We know it's not good to have people from other areas secure your area. But, we all have to have security, so we need you to be responsible for the security of your own area. At this point, that's when they were like we will secure our own areas.

This incident exemplifies an interactive strategy used by an American team for overcoming hostilities, prejudices, and distrust existing between Afghan sub-groups. The team was able to create the mechanisms for this strategy only after achieving a micro level understanding about the conflicts that existed between ethnic and tribal sub-groups. The consequences presented to unwilling Pashtun sub-groups was they would have to live with rivals securing their villages and common areas if they failed to volunteer recruits for the ALP program. This strategy enabled the VSO team to recruit and train a successful ALP force that was representative of the entire ethnic and tribal makeup of the district.

3. Would You Invite Them In?

In the following incident, a VSO team used a strategy which threatened the balance of power between rival Pashtun families for gaining area wide participation in the district's ALP program. Immediately after the VSO team moved into a base camp they shared with Afghan border police, they realized "all of the relationship was with the border police commander." For the team to successfully create an ALP program in the area, they needed to establish relationships with the community, but "unfortunately, the border police commander didn't have much of a relationship with the locals." With great uncertainty, the operator asked the border police commander to invite the local elders in for a *shura* to evangelize the benefits of participation in the district's ALP program. As a result of the *shura*, the team recognized that the area was divided between two rival Pashtun families. The identified the village's divide when only two elders showed up for the *shura*, each representing one of the rival families.

During the meeting, one of the elders stated, “Oh, I heard what was going on down there [ALP program] … [team’s original location]. I want to get that started. How many could I bring? When does training start?” The other elder’s response was, “No, we don’t want anything to do with it [ALP]. We are good.” Because of the team’s fast approaching date for withdrawal from Afghanistan, the team highlighted to the non-participating elder that training needed to begin the next day. The elder’s reply was “No, we are fine.” Subsequently, the team started training the next day with only members from the one of the two rival families. Problems began for the non-committal elder on the first day of training when the team issued uniforms, equipment, and paychecks to members of the rival family. The team understood that empowering one of the rival families would incentivize the other into participating. After the first day of training, everyone in the village saw the new ALP members walking around with new equipment and discussing the greatness of the program.

The team reasoned that the non-committal elder was reluctant to volunteer his family for the program out of fear from “Taliban repercussions.” However, the elder had an immediate change of heart the following day because “all of his family were complaining.” The non-participating elder returned to ask why his family was not able to participate. The team interpreted the elders misunderstanding as a face-saving measure. Understanding that the ALP program needed to account for the balance of power within the village, the American team called a new meeting that included the elders from both families to renegotiate a “50/50 split of ALP between the families.”

Maintaining the role of elder within egalitarian societies is a difficult and fragile task. The American team used this knowledge to their advantage. The elder’s change of heart was described as “he needs to stay in good standing with all of these people.” The consequences for the elder opposing the greater will of his family could end with him being replaced as the family elder. According to Glatzer (2002), the position of elder in Pashtun societies requires the individual to “channel resources from the outside world to one’s followers” (p. 274). The team understood that the non-participating elder’s family sensed they were losing out on resources and would therefore, pressure him into volunteering for the program.

The team confirmed their assumption about the elder's change of heart by monitoring cues and making sense based on information acquired from the environment. Out of this sense-making, the team was able to adapt their performative identities in subsequent meetings with the elders. Because of the team's action strategy, they were able to not only maintain the balance of power within the village but also produce a sustainable ALP program after their withdrawal.

H. BARGAINING AND GESTURES OF ACQUIESCENCE

Action strategies demonstrating patterns of bargaining and gestures of acquiescence emerged from narratives where American efforts were focused on accommodation and the non-violent use of resources to gain influence. This strategy emerged as a response in districts possessing high degrees of contestability, particularly in village areas affected by the violent and intimidating acts of insurgent groups. It was a strategy that used American resources as incentives encouraging Afghan interaction and cooperation. Teams using action strategies involving bargaining and acquiescence constructed mimicking social identity types. Three critical incidents demonstrating action strategies where American teams bargained and acquiesced are explored in this section.

1. Dropping Bottles of Sand

In this incident the American team occupied a district in relief of the original VSO team during the cold winter months. There was a government presence in the district and no local feelings of abandonment were mentioned by the operator. The district was predominately Pashtun and no problems affecting interaction resulted from sub-group rivalries. How strongly insurgent groups contested the government's control over the district was dependent upon the "fighting season." The "fighting season" in Afghanistan occurred during the warmer spring and summer months. The American team involved in this incident entered the district during the later parts of the "non-fighting season." Attendance of the team's weekly *shura* was high among the district's elders during the "non-fighting season." This attendance trend quickly reversed as warmer weather approached the region and insurgent activity increased.

The American team surmised that insurgent threats and intimidation tactics created a drop in the elders' cooperation. All attempts made by the team to collect information about insurgent's threatening the district's elders failed because they were unable to counter insurgent threats and intimidation tactics within local villages. The team had no strategy for altering local perceptions about the insurgent's abilities to reach members of the community viewed as cooperating with the Afghan government. All the courses of action developed by the team risked exposing the local population to violent insurgent retribution. The situation forced the team to adapt their aggressive "support garnering" identity to a more passive "covert alliance" identity type.

Insurgent reactions in response to the team's presence in the district came in the form of improvised explosive devices which they planted indiscriminately throughout the district's road network. These manmade effects presented a danger to both the team and the local population alike. The identification and destruction of these devices became the team's primary focus. Their "covert alliance" strategy paid off when the owner of a shop just outside the gates of the team's base decided to privately provide the team with information on where insurgents planted roadside bombs. The shop provided:

> Clothing, food, fuel, you know, car parts. Motorcycles—he was like jack of all trades. Like he's the guy that provided–and people from other villages would come to him to get stuff.

The shop owner's reasoning for wanting to interact with the team was described as:

> He owned the shop, so he understood like the need for–that was his livelihood. He wasn't a dirt farmer. He sold goods, for him to be able to get those goods, he had to be able to travel back and forth.

As a gesture for receiving American expertise at bomb removal, the shop owner offered up his son, whom the he described as "very successful in identifying IEDs." The shop owner's son placed himself at great risk to mark the locations of both old and new IEDs along the district's routes. A steganographic-like system was devised by the shop owner's son to mark the locations of roadside bombs. The system involved the use of plastic water bottles littering the district's soiled landscape. The effectiveness of the

marking system and the team's ability to safely remove these devices resulted in the removal of "10 or 15 of them [IEDs]" which the team measure as "pretty good success."

The bargaining in this incident was illustrated in the removal of IEDs from the district's roads—routes that the shop owner desperately needed clear for the movement of resources supporting his business. In exchange for clearing these routes, the team received information about the emplacement of this destructive devices. The shop owner's expectations of the team were not difficult to figure out, the shop owner was described as a smart businessman that was willing to "hedge his bets" to assure the success of his business.

During this incident, the team acquiesced influence and control over the local population's perceptions of the team and government to local insurgents. The population's reluctance to work with the team to forced them to adapt from an aggressive social identity to a more passive one. The adapted team social identity enabled the team to covertly bargain with a local shop owner that had something to gain from the private relationship.

2. All Roads Lead to Tabin

This incident occurred within a village in which the American team was not invited and there was no government presence. Insurgents contested control over the village so violently that it forced the last American unit occupying it to withdrawal, with the severed leg of a soldier hung from a tree in the village center as a symbol of the insurgent's willingness to oppose all attempting to wrest its control. After receiving fire from the village during their assessment, the team decided they needed to establish a presence in the village they described as, "We established a new ANCOP checkpoint right dab in the middle of the bazaar, right next to where the leg was hanging in the tree. That really pissed them off." The creation of this Afghan police manned checkpoint required heavy fighting over a 3-day period the operator described as, "3 days of just on and off firefights."

For the first two-months of the checkpoint's existence in the village, it was attacked mercilessly by insurgents. It took two-months before insurgents realized that neither the checkpoint nor the team's presence in the village were going away. The situation had become futile for insurgents. Once the insurgent's attacks subsided, the American team

empowered the Afghan police manning the checkpoint with the unsavory task of identifying the legitimate elders of the village. Prior to empowering the team, they knew they had not been negotiating with the village's legitimate elders. The team understood that it was more effective to use Afghan's for making this connection then Americans.

This incident begins after the Afghan police force was able to successfully set up a *shura* with the legitimate village elder. The meeting required that the American team adapt the team's image from that of an unwavering military presence to a more comprising force capable of winning the elder's support. The team's strategy for "coaxing" the elder out of the provincial capital and into a *shura* used the promise of local employment as an incentive. The team viewed the local employment incentive as a "bargaining chip" from which to identify and lure the villages elder into attending the team's *shura*.

This bargaining chip worked because the elder showed up at the meeting; the operator explained that his team made the mistake of having around 50 elders that showed up sit uncomfortably on green army cots, a mistake that the operator corrected after sensing the meeting was not going so well. The team corrected the situation by providing "Lots of cashews and we had boxes of cigarettes because from experience, that is the universal ice breaker" for Afghan elders. The American team leader hosting the *shura* made a point to appear passionate during the team's interaction with the village elders. He expressed that meetings such as these could not be "winged," they needed to be rehearsed and practiced to be effective. The team's action and behaviors resulted in a successful outcome for the *shura* based on a combination of the team's demonstrated passion and humbleness toward the elders. The outcomes from the *shura* were described as:

> They saw how humble I [the American team leader] was coming to them. They had been used to … the arrogant Americans that come in, yell at us for not helping ourselves, and just talking down to us and promising us a whole bunch of stuff that they never follow through on.

The team's ability to acquiesce to local ways for conducting interactions helped them turn the corner on governance in the hostile village. In this incident, the team transitioned from using a hybrid-militant identity type to one that mimicked local actions and behaviors. The team initially acted militantly in response to insurgent violence.

However, once the team was able to quell the violence directed toward them, they adapted an action strategy that acquiesced to local methods for interacting. The outcomes of this strategy resulted in identifying the village elder and securing an agreement to hold regular *shuras* on governance. These regularly held *shuras* led to development of a long-term security program in the village. An example of the effectiveness of the team's action strategy is illustrated near the end of the team's mission in the village, when they escorted the U.S. Secretary of Defense through the village's previously violent bazaar (Gates, 2014). The secretary inspected the once hostile village's bazaar unencumbered by body armor.

3. I Had to Do Things That Were Gray

This incident explores an action strategy one VSO team used to stave off large-scale desertions within the district's ALP forces. The American team represented a renewed VSO effort in the area following the premature withdrawal of the previous VSO team, 3 years prior. The operator implied the withdrawal created feelings of being abandonment among the local population. There was an Afghan government and military presence in the district. However, the district was vast and remote, and the American team described it as a "no man's land." Contestability in the district was determined as light by the team; however, during the absence of Afghan security forces, insurgents were able to assassinate the district governor and all the prominent elders. These assassinations took place the year prior to the team's arrival which fueled feelings of abandonment among the population. Immediately after entering the district, the team was ambushed while patrolling outside a village in a remote area of the district. The team successfully defeated the ambush and was able to capture members of a local insurgent group. The event served as a catalyst for gaining buy-in from the district's local elders and enabling them to recruit and train a large ALP force.

The team noticed desertion problems within the ALP forces as the cold winter months approached. It was a situation the operator defined as "we grew ALP, we started getting the numbers right away. Pay was never an issue. Uniforms, it was winter, building material, that became an issue." The official process for provisioning the newly recruited

ALP forces was the responsibility of the team's higher headquarters, they were supposed to deliver a "magical ALP in a box."

The team quickly sought answers from other VSO teams operating within the province, only to discover that none of these teams received their "ALP in a box" packages. Solutions offered by other teams for resolving the problem were considered "questionable" by the operator. However, realizing that the "magical ALP in a box" was never going to materialize in time to salvage the district's quickly atrophying ALP force, the team resolved to doing "things that were gray." To preserve what was left of the district's ALP force, the team gave barrels of American fuel to the ALP commander to sell on the black market. The profits made from the sale of this fuel was used by the ALP to purchase equipment, building material, and clothing. The operator described his conversations with the source of this solution as:

So, at the end of the day I started talking to my guys at the other sites and they were like; you are not getting gas dumped to you? Flown out to you? I am like no. He was like yes, that's the only way we were able to keep our guys afloat. I was like are you serious? That's what we ended up doing. We ended up getting barrels flown out to us, parachuted to us.

The operator justified the team's use of "questionable" practices by stating that he did not believe in "stealing for personal gain." He stipulated that if his team were required to something that was "questionable," then it needed to contribute to the greater good for the mission. Next, he emphasized, "the ends justify the means." When questioned about his chain of command's knowledge about the "questionable" practice, the operator stated, "they knew exactly what was going on at the end of the day." Through conversations with other VSO teams, the operator reasoned that the provisioning of ALP forces was a problem across Afghanistan.

Procedures for informally supplying the ALP accounted for every dollar made from the sale of American fuel. The team's system for accountability consisted of a series of lists and verification procedures that were balanced against the black-market rates for fuel.

The junior enlisted member of the team responsible for the distribution of fuel was known as the "accountant." According to the operator, the team's accountant:

> Dispersed money, pay and all that stuff, but he also went around and made sure we had the numbers that we put through training…. We would basically go okay, there is this much money in the form of oil. You can go sell it on the market for this much and this should get you this amount that's on the list.

Using an action strategy that was "questionable" and required the team to do "things that were gray," conveyed intentions of commitment to Afghan security partners. It also presented the team with a moral dilemma that still pesters the operator today; however, it enabled the team to salvage an ALP force that the team sacrificed greatly to create. This example substituted barrels of fuel for a broken formalized ALP supply system as an alternative way to bargain with the ALP commander for the provisioning of his force.

I. INDIRECT DEMONSTRATIONS OF FORCE TO GAIN RESPECT

Action strategies using indirect demonstrations of force to gain respect were based on non-violent action, influence, and information to coerce local leaders into support for the Afghan government. The strategy was designed to diminish the influence of insurgent groups and corrupt government officials. Teams using this strategy were found to be operating in highly contested districts. Teams exercising this action strategy had acquired an advanced understanding about the relationships between environmental actors and the local population that could only be developed over time and with patience. The strategy was employed against insurgent groups in situations where the team understood direct demonstrations of force could turn public sentiment against them. The strategy also required cunning and intellect for the diminishing of influence that both insurgents and corrupt politicians held over the local population. Teams using this strategy constructed variations of military, hybrid, and mimicking social identities. This section explores three critical incidents where American teams used action strategies involving the indirect demonstration of force to gain respect.

1. Still Most Likely the Shadow Governor

In this incident the American team conducted VSO in a district they were invited into by the Afghan government and the local population did not feel abandoned. There was a strong rivalry between two of the district's Pashtun tribal groups that affected the team's interactions. Insurgents highly contested government control in the district using improvised explosive device attacks. The American team needed the cooperation of local powerbrokers from each of the warring tribes for their stability efforts to be successful. The incident begins when the team attempted to co-opt one such powerbroker the operator described as "a very important Mujahedeen commander [during the Soviet invasion] and had joined the Taliban and kind of he was now retired, but still most likely the shadow governor" for the district. It was a situation where most of the population favored his adjudication of matters over that of the legitimate district governor. Despite the Mujahedeen commander's assumed Taliban loyalties, he was endeared by much of the district's population.

The team needed his support for their efforts to succeed. As an incentive for garnering the powerbroker's support the team had a member of his tribe appointed as the district's chief of police. The strategy appeared to work. In private the powerbroker agreed to pledge his support for the government and even agreed to pronounce this publicly. Believing they had scored a great political victory for the Afghan government; the team arranged a *shura* for the powerbroker's pronouncement that would be attended by high ranking American and Afghan officials. However, when it came time for the powerbroker's proclamation, he stood up and declared "I will never join the GIRoA [Afghan government]." This deflating event forced the team to shift their strategy from trying to co-opt the powerbrokers support to one that "diminishes his influence." The powerbroker's prominence in the local community meant the team could not simply arrest or kill him without turning the populace against the government. The operator described the teams shift in strategy as "we need to isolate and really get his influence within the district diminished so that he becomes a nonfactor."

According to the operator, the team's new approach to the powerbroker was premised on a strategy to run the powerbroker "out the district or took away all of his

cronies, those are methods, but he needed to be isolated." The team understood that they could never violently attack or arrest the powerbroker and even when the team exchanged bullets with his men, the relationship remained cordial on the surface. According to the operator, the powerbroker was "too powerful to arrest…or really even kill. Killing him probably would have made him a martyr and not advanced the GIRoA or the U.S. interests in the area." The team remained patient and determined not to attack the powerbroker directly. Instead, they devised a two-fold strategy for empowering the powerbroker's political rival while attacking his close network of supporters to isolate him.

The powerbroker and his political rival were members of the same tribe. Conflict between the two originated with three of the rival's sons' involvement in the Taliban. One son had been killed and one was in prison. The source of the rival's disenfranchisement stemmed from the powerbroker's refusal to petition the Afghan government for the son's release. The team played on this division by empowering the rival while looking for ways to attack the powerbroker's support network. The opportunity arose when an attack on coalition forces occurred near the village of the powerbroker's "right-hand man," it was an attack responsible for killing a beloved member of the Afghan security forces. This gave the team an excuse to search and arrest the "right-hand man" who was the village's elder. The operator described the outcomes of the search as:

> It just so happened unfortunately we found in his house lots of weapons, lots of bombs, lots of black tar heroin, and like 500,000 pounds of processed hashish.

The outcomes of this search resulted in the team capturing the powerbroker's right-hand man on video admitting that the black tar heroin and hashish were his property. Arresting individuals for "weapons, that's a slap on the wrist and zero jail time" in Afghanistan, however, drugs and bombs were another matter altogether. The team's novel strategy took advantage of the fact that "nobody had ever been arrested for poppy production in [redacted district]. He was the first." The powerbroker's right-hand man right hand was place on a helicopter and was taken away. The right-hand man was never heard from for the duration of the team's mission to the district. The American team in this incident non-violently attacked the powerbroker's network and forced him to depart the district in shame the day after his right-hand man was arrested for drugs. During this

incident the team adapted their social identity from a willing ally to covert adversary while indirectly demonstrating force to gain respect.

2. If You Do Not Work with Us, We Do Not Work with You

The American team in this incident were invited to conduct VSO in a district with an Afghan government presence. Feelings of abandonment and sub-group conflicts were not reported as being problems affecting the team's interactions. Despite a robust American and Afghan security force presence in the district, insurgents highly contested the government's control of the district. Insurgent attacks were primarily perpetrated using roadside bombs and suicide vest attacks. The incident begins after an Afghan Army truck is blown up outside of a remote district village. An Afghan soldier was killed in the attack and the deceased soldier's unit believes the village's complacency contributed to the death. The village was uncooperative in supplying information on local insurgents. The operator validated the Afghan Army's sentiments by stating "Yes, because there was an IED there. People know" when asked if he thought the village was culpable.

The village had been the recipient of previous humanitarian aid deliveries prior to the Afghan soldier's death and their unwillingness to cooperate was viewed as ingratitude by the American team. During humanitarian missions the American team usually does not speak publicly to the villagers in an effort to put an Afghan face on the mission. However, during the next Afghan-American humanitarian mission to the village, the villager's impatient reactions to the Afghan leader's long speeches as "they know–they are starting to get a little restless. Like oh, I need to get to the front of the line because they know this stuff is getting ready to be handed out." It was at this point that the operator stood in front of the village population and made the following proclamation:

> I am Captain [redacted], I am the American that's working with these people… That truck of stuff is here to help the good Afghan people of this country that want to work with the security forces. You just showed us that you are not those people. We are not giving you shit. Get the truck out of here.

This strategy was a deliberate plan the Afghan-American team used as a method for sending a message to the villagers. The message being sent by the team was, "If you don't work with us, we don't work with you." The team left the humanitarian items at a

police checkpoint that was an approximately 2-hour walk from the uncooperative village. The team told the villagers if they wanted the items, then they could pick them up from Afghan soldiers at the checkpoint.

The strategy worked and future ventures to the village resulted in increased cooperation from the villagers. What appeared to be a cruel interaction with the villagers was really a staged event. Unified messaging and communication strategies were "all rehearsed before and discussed" beforehand with the team's Afghan partners. The team's reasoning for using this approach was explained by the operator as "we didn't go in and shake down every house, we didn't go in and abuse anybody, do a big clearing operation." The team understood they needed the village's cooperation in the future and indirectly incentivized the village's cooperation through non-violent methods. It was a strategy in which the team created a hybrid social identity in solidarity with Afghan partners.

3. You Are the One Skimming Money

The American team in this incident were invited to conduct VSO in a district with an Afghan government presence. Local feelings of abandonment were not mentioned by the operator. Sub-group conflict existed between rival Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups operating in the district. Prior to this incident the American team was successful in creating and expanding an ALP program throughout the district. Because of their success, the team shifted the focus of their efforts from security to development of the district's infrastructure. A major development project in the district was the "building of a road to the district's center that was supposed to go through one of the local markets." The road was supposed to be a wide two-lane thoroughfare that was asphalted; however, upon the team's inspection of the project it was discovered that despite ample funding, the road was only one-lane and far behind on its scheduled completion. According to the road's project manager the road "wasn't being done to code, but he didn't have the money to build it as it should be. It was supposed to be a two-lane road and it was probably 12 feet wide."

After investigating where all the project's money was being consumed, the team discovered that the district's chief of police was embezzling large portions of it. According to the operator things just did not add. In the team's meetings with the district chief of

police, “He’s asking for more money to make the road bigger and I’m like it’s just not adding up.” The team confronted the district chief of police, telling him “the perception in this village right is that you are the one skimming money off the top of this and you are the reason that some of these projects aren’t going well.” The confrontation took place in front of the chief’s deputy and the ALP commander.

The team understood the cultural implications of calling out Afghan officials publicly; however, the corruption “had to be addressed.” The district chief of police’s reaction to the accusation came in the form of an “almost smirk.” The team interpreted the chief of police’s reactive smirk and the fact that he was not native to the district as symbols for his willingness to steal from the district for his own personal benefit. In response to their interpretations, the team threatened to bring the matter to the provincial chief of police, a man for whom the team had a great relationship. The threat changed the crooked chief’s demeanor from one that was less confident and more amenable. However, the chief’s new response was only displayed on the surface of his interactions with the team.

The chief became less cooperative with the team after being threatened. The situation got to the point where the operator “started bringing that stuff up [grift] to the provincial level and told them this guy had to go. It’s just isn’t working. I don’t know if it was his term or if he got fired, but it seemed like he got moved along.” Although uncertain about the exact outcome, the operator believes the chief was fired. The American team in this incident had to adapt their social identity from militaristic when they first entered the district to a more hybrid identity after security was achieved; however, in certain instances, such as flagrant corruption, the team had to use an immutably American identity. This is an incident where immutable identity benefited future interactions.

J. ENGAGING IN AFGHAN CULTURAL PRACTICES

Strategies where American teams engaged in Afghan cultural practices were comprised of actions and behaviors that mimicked those of local Afghan groups. Teams using this strategy demonstrated mutual respect and developed trust that were based on adhering to the tenets of Pashtunwali. Teams that mimicked Afghan cultural practices adapted their manners of dress by wearing different variation of local garb that was

dependent upon the local audience and occasion. The wearing of local male clothing, such as pakol headdresses, keht upper garments, partug lower garments, and hybrid variations of Afghan security uniforms was common for teams enacting this action strategy. Teams that engaged in Afghan cultural practices did so for the following reasons: demonstrate commitment; demonstrate respect; and to build strong rapport. American teams using this action strategy constructed various combinations of hybrid and mimicking social identity types. This section explores three critical incidents in which American teams used action strategies where they engaged in Afghan cultural practices.

1. When I Fasted for Ramadan

In this incident the American team leader used a strategy where he shared the hardships of the Ramadan fast. The American team was invited into the district to conduct VSO and there was an Afghan government presence. The operator did not state whether the local population harbored any feelings of being abandoned by the Afghan government. Insurgent groups highly contested the government's control over the tribally factionalized district. As explained by the operator, he chose to fast for Ramadan for two reasons. The first of these two reasons were the previous VSO team leader for the district, a gentleman the Afghans referred to as "Mullah Mike." The operator felt he was in a position where needed to be "able to build relationships where I was replacing a pretty dynamic guy" because he could not speak "Arabic" nor could he "quote freely the Koran" unlike his predecessor.

The second reason fasting were premised on his leadership of Afghan soldiers. The American team leader was "leading a joint organization of both Afghans and Americans and I did not want my Afghans to shut down for an entire month." He clarified this statement by claiming that it was a matter of expectations. He emphasized that participation in the Ramadan fast enabled him to more effectively lead his joint Afghan-American team.

The process of fasting for Ramadan not only affected the operator's newly developing relationships with Afghans, but also the times of day in which the team conducted operations. The Ramadan fast started taking place only 3 weeks after the team's arrival, so all prior meetings he had with Afghan leaders were purely introductory. He

compared the team's patrolling schedule before and during Ramadan. Instead of being out at 2:00 in the afternoon visiting with local elders, as the team did prior to Ramadan, they were "getting up before the sun was rising," completing their routine of patrolling to beat the fatiguing effects of the fast.

The development of trust between the American team and their Afghan hosts was described as, "I lived with Afghans that they could confirm, no he's not just saying that he is fasting. He is not eating during the day. He is doing what we are doing." Other indicators the American team leader's observation of the Ramadan fast was helping him put his "foot in the door on any relationship with every single Afghan" were described by him as:

> It got to the point where, whether it be my interpreter or some of the Afghan soldiers or some of the security apparatus soldiers that were police or army guys that were in the district if we were all talking to a local in one meeting, they would stop the meeting and be like, you know this guy is fasting for Ramadan, right? It was a palpable shift in the meeting with whatever village elder we were dealing with. I gained instant credibility.

Despite losing 30 pounds during this period, the operator claimed the credibility his team gained because of his strict adherence to the fast greatly enhanced their coalition-building efforts. In this incident, the team knew they lacked the ability to facilitate interaction using the same cultural knowledge as their predecessors. They maintained the previous team's mimicking identity type, not by speaking Arabic or quoting the Quran, but through the use of a far more difficult strategy. The team leader as representative of the organization, developed a strategy for overcoming the team's lack of cultural knowledge, by mimicking by the strict religious practices universally adhered to by Muslims throughout the world.

2. Wearing Afghan Garb

This incident illustrates a strategy where an American team used the wearing of Afghan garb to enhance interaction with Afghans. The team was invited to conduct VSO in a district with an Afghan government presence. Afghan sub-group rivalries existed primarily between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups in which they not only battled each other but also highly contested the Afghan government's control over the district.

The operator "was a little skeptical … to start wearing Afghan clothing" prior to his team's arrival in the district. He stated that he clearly understood the necessity for wearing a beard, calling it "the right thing to do." But according to his senior non-commissioned officer's experience, wearing local garb was necessary in certain situations. His skepticism for wearing local clothing remained, however, until the first time his team showed up at a local *shura* wearing it. The team's decision to wear traditional Afghan clothing seemed to be "very well received" by the district's elders. The operator felt like he was "trying to put on a show" and to him the experience just "felt weird."

However, the operator's feelings for the practice changed after witnessing the excitement of the local had for the team's appearance. It was an instant rapport builder according to the operator. The team found themselves answering questions from members of the local community that had previously ignored their attempts at interacting. His thoughts on the local elder's excitement were, "Wow, maybe it's not as cheesy as I originally thought."

By wearing local garb, the team presented a less militant and a more comfortable identity to their Afghan hosts. The locally garbed image the team projected gave local elders and security partners the sense that they were willing to invest the time in their culture, even if there was not an immediate payoff. Wearing local garb enabled the team to present a more relatable image that contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere. The experience also taught the American team how to view the world through the eyes of the local populations.

3. I Mean, They Were Good People

This incident explores a VSO team leader's experiences interacting with indigenous leaders in ways that most Americans would find culturally embarrassing. The team was invited into the district to conduct VSO by the local elders of an ethnically divided district. There was no government presence in a district that was predominately Pashtun but contained a minority Hazara population. The operator never describes the local populace from either community as harboring feelings of being abandoned by the government. Insurgent groups in the district mainly contest government control in the more remote

eastern portion of the district. The operator speculated that insurgent groups contested that portion of the district to control the cultivation of opium.

In this incident, the operator discussed his team's experiences engaging in Afghan cultural practices with Afghan partners he classified as "good people." Individual on the team were characterized as extremely open-minded when it came to engage in Afghan cultural practices. It was explained that the team wore Afghan garb and grew facial hair; the outcomes of the team participation in in the wearing of Afghan fashions were described as, "I think when they saw us dressing like them, I think it helped." There were also team members' that spoke Pashto fluently which was extremely helpful for facilitating team interactions with Afghans. The team's willingness to engage in Afghan cultural practices was described as:

> Everybody learned basic greetings and could understand certain things. We would use it in the meetings and they would understand that I couldn't speak it, but they respected the fact that it did help break down some initial barriers.

The operator spoke about participating in practices that would make most American males not only uncomfortable but embarrassed. He explained the importance of dedicating time for getting to know Afghan counterparts better, regardless of immediate payoff. He described the importance of "dedicating 1 hour of just talking about life in Afghanistan" after meetings or learning new words from these partners. Finally, the operator expressed the importance of "Walking through their orchards holding their hands. You know, while they are picking an apple for you and you are eating it while you are walking around holding their hand and talking to them."

Subordinate team members' thought his participation in the local custom were "just hilarious. They are always taking pictures of me holding hands." The operator expressed absolutely no embarrassment about participating in a practice viewed as extremely non-masculine by most American males. When asked what he thought the symbolism was behind having his hand held by his Afghan counterpart, the operator stated, "It signifies a level of mutual trust and respect. I think it is that you know, you are my friend. It is their culture. I mean it's not uncommon. A lot of man hugs, a lot of hand holding. You know, it's just their culture." Unashamedly engaging in the Afghan cultural practice of hand

holding with Afghan partners is a proven strategy for facilitating interactions with Afghan sub-groups that required teams to shed their immutable American social identities in favor of a more mimicking construct.

K. PERSONAL RISK-TAKING TO BUILD TRUST

Personal risk-taking was an action strategy used by American teams to demonstrate trust between themselves and their indigenous hosts. This strategy required teams to make themselves vulnerable to their Afghan hosts as a measure for conveying trust. It also required teams to mitigate risks associated with exposing vulnerabilities often through deceptive actions and behaviors. Some of the ways teams used to mitigate risks were by using military technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), snipers, long range camera systems, and concealed weapon carrying techniques. Even the ruse of presenting a faux vulnerability, however, exposed these operators to increased levels of physical danger. Teams enacted strategies involving risk exposure to develop greater levels of intrinsic and benevolent trust with Afghan sub-groups. American teams used this action strategy by constructing military, hybrid, or mimicking social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore actions strategies where individual team members exposed themselves to personal risk to build trust with Afghans.

1. He Walks Freely throughout the District Center

During this incident the American team was invited to conduct VSO in a district in which government control was highly contested by insurgents. The district had a weak government presence consisting of a governor closely connected to the Taliban and small national police force whose security compound was virtually surrounded by insurgent groups. The heterogeneity of the predominately Pashtun population was never discussed as an issue affecting the team's interactions. This incident illustrates the personal risk-taking American teams and their Afghan counterparts were will to take for establishing legitimacy in the eyes of the local populace. The strategy taken by the American team in this incident aimed to replicate a dangerous practice of walking between compounds used by the leader of their Afghan counterpart group.

The local geography of the district, especially the mountains, enabled insurgent groups to easily infiltrate and operate along a route with unfettered access to the provincial capital. The operator observed that the layout between the American and Afghan security compounds, and his counterpart's affinity for walking the distance between the two was extremely risky. The layout of the compounds and the area in between those compounds were separated by a treacherous 100-meter distance. It was an area the operator further described as "there were no walls between the two but just open country and all low-ground, so you can be shot at and we often were between the two compounds." The leader of the team's Afghan security force had a habit of walking between the two compounds without a security detail, body armor, or a weapon. The team's movement between the two compounds after first arriving was described as "We would often drive our vehicle from our compound to [redacted] and meet with him a half-dozen times a day." The operator thought his counterpart's action were "foolish" and "careless." The operator recalled asking his counterpart:

> Look, you're just walking over here. Don't you think it's pretty dangerous? You'd get kidnapped, they get to shoot you while you're walking, heck my worst shooters could shoot you and we know that the Taliban were watching. The Taliban in some cases in buildings immediately next to yours and to mine. Doesn't that concern you?

According to the operator, his counterpart's reply was "No, it's a demonstration that this is, 'I am the legitimate Security Force here and I'm willing to put my life out there [on the line]." He also recalled the local elder's perceptions about the practice as:

The Elders would bring it up, they were like, "Yeah we understand that [redacted] is a true Pashtun warrior," which has a very specific meaning in the Pashtun culture.

> …They say, "Yeah he walks freely throughout the District Center." Nobody else does it, the Governor doesn't even do that even though he's in bed with a lot of the TB [Taliban] connections. He would stay in a vehicle always with a security escort.

For the sake of building rapport and facilitating interaction the team felt it was necessary to mimic the practice of moving between compounds with no security, body armor, or weapon. By enacting these mimicking actions, the team hoped to demonstrate that they trusted their Afghan security partner's ability to secure the area. They also hope

to influence local images of the Afghan-American security team as groups working in solidarity with one another. The team was looking to project an image "defined as a construction of public impressions to appeal to an audience (and not necessarily the attempt to represent some ostensible reality)" (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000, p. 66).

The team's deceptive risk mitigation philosophy was described as:

> Now in true American form we would take significant measures to mitigate that. It looks as though I'm just walking over to a random compound without my kit or without a weapon. But I would always bring a weapon, a side arm if nothing else.

The team's efforts projected an image that would "manage the perception of our team, by replacing visions of 'foreign invader, seeking violence' with 'village guest that wants to help.'" He emphasized the importance of the team's reputation and how they were viewed by their hosts. After walking freely to his counterpart's compound for the first time, the operator described his counterpart's reaction as both "surprised" and "elated." His counterpart stated that "he was honored that I trusted him to protect my team, and that his men also recognized the gesture as a vote of confidence." The operator referenced the Pashtunwali tenet of *malmestya*, a protective obligation that required Pashtun hosts to sacrifice their lives for the protection of guests as part of the teams reasoning for replicating this dangerous practice (Ibrahimov, 2009).

The formation of this strategy for constructing a mimicking social identity was learned by emulating his Afghan counterpart's behavior as validated in the operator's statement, "I began to mimic [redacted]'s posture." This strategy gave the local populace the sense that security in the market area improved. The operator recalled the local's reactions to him walking freely through the market as, "Even the Americans believe it's safer, because they walk around the city center unafraid."

2. You Have Been Shot

In this incident the American team was invited to conduct VSO in a district in which government control was highly contested by insurgents. The district had a weak government presence consisting of a governor closely connected to the Taliban and a police force that lacked the manpower or resources for beating back emboldened insurgent

groups. The district was predominately Pashtun and sub-group conflicts were never raised as a concern by the operator. Prior to the team's arrival, the only government or coalition presence in the district came from Polish forces based out of the provincial capital just to the north of the district. The district received monthly visits from the Poles. These visits were always short, took place in the Afghan governor's secured compound, and violently attacked by local insurgents. Insurgent attackers were never pressed, defeated, or pursued by the Poles. The operator assumed the Polish force was limited by what they could do in reaction to insurgent attacks; however, prior to the team's arrival the coalitions minimal presence in the district, equaled no presence at all in the operator's opinion. It was reasoned by the American team leader, "How much can you partner with somebody if you only see them once a month?"

The coalition's poor presence and lack of determination toward defeating insurgents in combat gave the team's Afghan counterpart a poor outlook for the district. The team presented an honest assessment for what the team could do to support security in the district. According to the operator he told his counterpart that "all we promise is that my guys will fight alongside your guys. We will help you think about problems and advise you. After 6 months there is no promise that anyone replaces us." The team's Afghan partner heartily accepted their support and responded in kind; however, the team was initially skeptical about the Afghan leader's pledges of commitment.

To create a unified Afghan-American image, the team wore the same uniforms as their Afghan partners, even removing their helmets when not directly engaged in combat, just like their Afghan partners. The Afghan-American hybrid identity was not only designed to present a unified image, but also to place an Afghan face on the security force which was necessary for sustaining the force after the team's departure. In an effort to appear less militant, the team wore civilian clothing during prominent meetings with local elders and always removed helmets and body armor while sitting *shuras* in remote villages.

This incident builds on the American team's first patrol with their Afghan security partners in the district. It was a motorized patrol intended to familiarize the newly arrived team with the layout of the village areas within the district. Almost immediately, the patrol was ambushed on a canalizing road between two of its remote villages. The operator

described his team, apart from drivers and turret gunners, as walking alongside the vehicles because "we just leave the vehicles because some of the roads, you just couldn't drive down with our bigger vehicles." He further explained that his Afghan counterpart chose to ride inside of his vehicle. After being ambushed the patrol found themselves "under very heavy fire" when they noticed the lead Afghan vehicle was stopped. The operator described his thoughts at the time as, "I couldn't really understand why, we needed to be moving still because we were in a pretty canalized poor spot." He explained that the patrol was trapped behind his counterpart's vehicle "where there were walls on either sides and none of the vehicles could veer off to either side." The team was unable to turn their vehicles off onto any of the dirt trails available for escaping the ambush's kill zone for fear that those roads may lead to where the enemy was trying to push the patrol. The operator's team intended to just push through the unblocked ambush and overwhelm their attackers.

In a mad effort to determine what was going on, the operator raced on foot over to his counterpart's vehicle to find out why his vehicle was not moving. Leaving his interpreter in the dust, the operator arrived at his counterpart's truck; in a loud voice using his broken Pashto, he recalled asking his counterpart, "What's the deal man? Why are you stopping your vehicles? We need to keep moving!" In response, his counterpart jumped out of his vehicle agitated about the entire situation and speaking too fast to understand. Finally, the operator understood what his counterpart was trying to tell him—that he had been shot, to which the operator responded, "You haven't been shot, you're standing here talking to me, you're fine." It was only after his counterpart turned and pulled up his body army that the operator understood and stated, "Holy shit [redacted]! You have been shot, let me get the medic."

The operator's Afghan counterpart waved off any medical attention by stating "No, no, no we got to move." Describing him as remaining tactically focused on the ambush the joint patrol was receiving, the operator stated that his counterpart got back in his vehicle and ordered his driver to resume movement. Once his counterpart ordered his men to commence movement, the patrol pushed through and overwhelmed the insurgent ambush.

The team's level of personal risk they were willing to take during the ambush did not go unnoticed by their Afghan counterpart. According to the operator "from his

perspective, we were committed and more committed than in Pashto he would always refer to as the 'others' or the 'other Americans,' which was kind of a euphemism for coalition because generally it wasn't even Americans coming into the District, it was Polish." The team constructed an adaptable variation of hybrid, military, and mimicking social identities using an overall strategy that mimicked the personal risk taking of their Afghan security partners.

3. The First Time I Was Actually Taken Inside to Eat

During this incident the operator reminisced about being lured by an unfamiliar village elder into an unexpected meeting deep within the labyrinth of a strange village. The team was invited into to conduct VSO by the district's government. The operator never mentioned any local feelings of having been abandoned by the government. Despite the district's robust security forces, insurgent groups still highly contested government control. The incident starts when one of the elders from a village next to the team's base was visiting the district center. The elder was described as "influential, he was educated, and he was a teacher locally. So, by their standards, he was rich, he had a real nice compound." After encountering the elder in the district center, the process for co-opting the elder's support was explained as, "I want to go and visit you sometime," to which the elder replied, "Yes, come tomorrow." The team headed out to the elder's village the very next day. The team arrived in the village at midday and after meeting with the elder, he invited the team leader to dinner; however, prior to attending dinner, the elder stated, "We have a problem."

After asking what the problem was, the team was pointed in the direction of a distant village near the base of a nearby mountain chain. There was a road from the elder's village that connected it to the distant village. The team recalled being able to make out the distant village's lights in the darkening hue of the rapidly approaching night. The elder explained the problem as, "They are Taliban and there is an IED that they don't want us to go over there, but we have family, familial ties, and we need to be able to walk back and forth." The elder was assured by the team that they would take care of the IED, and a short while later, there was a loud explosion, marking the team's destruction of the roadside bomb.

Immediately after the team destroyed the improvised bomb, the team leader was asked by the elder to follow him from his compound, separated from the main village, down into the heart of the village using a labyrinth of alleyways described as "a little back alley way and it was just my team was back at the vehicles." The team leader admitted, "I probably took a little risk here in doing this, but that's just the way that I kind of went along," where he blindly followed the elder. The interpreter was the only other member of the team accompanying the team leader on the journey into the unknown. While venturing out with the elder and his interpreter, the team leader recalled, "It was completely dark out and I am like where is this guy taking me and I am talking to my TERP [interpreter]." The team leader asked his interpreter to find out where the elder was taking them. The interpreted admitted, "I don't know. Do you want to turn back?"

To mitigate the risk of being essentially by himself in the middle of the village, the operator maintained continuous radio communications with his team, informing the team about his and the interpreter's approximate location in case something should happen. The elder took them "deep into this little village into a room and the whole room was lined with all the elders." He further stated that they were "set for dinner and they were waiting to eat." The event was described by the team leader as, "the first time I was actually taken inside to eat and actually served a meal." The elders had pre-arranged the dinner as a method for "sniffing" out the team leader's intentions. Upon entering the room, the operator remembered taking off his kit and placing his weapon alongside his grounded equipment. He further clarified, "I would keep it near me… I would still have a sidearm," meaning that he would take his rifle and set it inside of his body armor and load bearing equipment while keeping a sidearm on his person. In a seemingly uncertain statement, the operator expanded on how he came about learning to remove his kit and rifle by stating, "That's something I kind of picked up from Iraq I think when I was in Iraq."

The elder's behaviors during the dinner were described as "very hospitable." The elders' arranged where their guests would sit in a process described as, "They usually told me where they wanted me to sit." The elder's directed the operator to sit in a specific spot containing a bunch of pillows. The elders' willingness to trump their own cultural values to ensure the team leader was comfortable. They told him, "Don't worry about offending

us with your feet, just stretch it out." In Pashtun culture, showing the bottom of one's feet is considered a sign of offense, a derogatory and insulting symbol of contempt. The elders, however, understood that he was not only a guest, but an "other," meaning not a Pashtun.

The overall scene projected at the dinner was described as, "there were no tables, but the middle was obviously for all of the food that was already laid out and waiting." No one had begun eating yet; all the elders were waiting for the American team leader to get comfortable. The operator recalled telling his Afghan hosts that he was only going to eat a small amount of food because the rest of his team, still back at the vehicles, had not eaten yet.

The team leader described the situation as "weird." He explained that he gave his "elevator speech" about the merits of ALP to the elders which took approximately 2 minutes. They responded by "just nod[ing]" and were non-committal towards the program. In addition to meeting all the elders, the team leader learned who he believed were the real influencers in the village area and the educated gentlemen that had invited his team was not included in this group.

The operator also used the dinner to identify the elders whom he suspected were the paramount elders of the village area. Because of the team not only removing the road side bomb, but the risks taken by the operator to present himself in front of a covert audience of elders, the team was able to influence the establishment of an ALP program and checkpoint in the village. The American team "ended up putting—there was a piece of high ground running through their village and that's exactly where we ended up putting the first ALP checkpoint."

L. MENDING DAMAGED RELATIONSHIPS

Action strategies for mending damaged relationships were used by American teams with an extensive knowledge about local socio-cultural practices and norms. These action strategies were used to build or restore poor relations with Afghan sub-groups. Actions and behaviors taken by teams enacting this strategy were adhering to Pashtunwali, listening to local grievances, and allowing Afghan leaders to resolve matters using local customs. Teams used this strategy as a method for salvaging bad or souring relations by constructing

either mimicking or isomorphic social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore action strategies used by American teams for mending damaged relationships.

1. An Act of Contrition

In this incident the American team implemented a strategy for mending damaged relations with local Afghan leaders using the tenets of *Pashtunwali*. The team's introduction of this *Pashtunwali* tenet during a very public *shura* not only changed the way they were perceived by the indigenous population but assisted in quickly repairing a deteriorating relationship between the team and the elders of the district's superordinate tribe. The team entered the district at a time when the government's control was being heavily contested by insurgent groups. There was a strong Afghan government presence in the district; however, the populace viewed local insurgents as being "invincible." Ethnic or tribal disparity according to the operator since the district was controlled by a Pashtun super tribe. The team was quickly able to turn the security situation around in the district by eradicating the local Taliban commander and his entire group. Within the team's first 12 months in the district, they were able to facilitate the paving of a road from the Pakistani border through the district's capital. It was a period in which the district's bazaar went from a mostly unused space grew into "about 1,500 shops. There were five car dealerships, three gas stations, hotels." With the team's assistance the district became the provinces "new economic hub." The team's focus in the district shifted from one where, "the problems we would deal with, were things along the lines of insurgent groups roaming the countryside, people getting kidnapped and executed" to "we don't have enough parking and there is no sewage in [redacted], it's just not sanitary."

The team's security, governance, and development lines of effort exceeded expectations when this incident occurred. The deterioration of relations between the team and the leadership of the district's super tribe began after a joint Afghan-American Special Operations team from outside the district conducted a raid in the bazaar. The raid caused excessive and unnecessary damage to many of the bazaar's shops. The team specified to the outside force that the district's bazaar was off limits during their operation. The outside force however, chose to ignore the team's request. The operator awoke the morning after

the raid to find an angry mob protesting outside of the front gate of the team's base camp. The local community was enraged by the damage the outside force caused in the bazaar. The team discovered that the outside force had trouble finding what they were looking for in the bazaar and decided to expand their search. The consequences of the outside forces operations resulted in "all this damage to the bazaar, particularly the Internet café had just been trashed." The outside force refused to make reparations for the damage they caused in the bazaar. The situation left the American team responsible for salvaging the team's quickly deteriorating local relations.

The team elected to rectify the situation using solely members from the team. Explaining that he had his civil affairs team and intelligence sergeant get "in their Afghan dress that morning" before they were to meet with the governor in the district center. It was at the district center that the operator's subordinates first discovered all of the damage done to the bazaar. It was also there where his team discovered all the upset elders that were in the presence of the governor.

The operator described the way his intelligence sergeant diffused the situation as "just genius." The team's intelligence sergeant understood Pashtunwali intimately. The operator explained that his intelligence sergeant leveraged his micro level understanding on the application of *Pashtunwali* in lieu of the normal coalition practices for simply bargaining and making reparation payments. The sergeant understood that even if the team tried to make things right by paying reparations, it would still "degrade" the team's "honor standing" amongst the community. "The way he threaded the needle" to mend the damaged relations between the American team and the local elders was to invoke the "local version of a major *Pashtunwali* tenet." The team invoked the Pashto tenet of *Nunawati* which he compared to "an act of contrition" in the Catholic Church. The process was explained as:

> Your clan or tribe, whatever subsection of the tribe you are, you admit that, not that you were wrong, but that you do not possess the same amount of power and honor as the super tribe.

The invocation of *Nunawati* bonded the American team to the district's super tribe in a process comparable to "like a non-blood line relationship" or "almost like a marriage." By invoking this tenet, the team identified themselves as a sub-tribe and they invoked it in

front of the district governor and his audience of upset elders. He explained that it would be in "bad taste" for the governor decline the team's invocation. However, the way the team really made things right was by building a short take-off and landing (STOL) airfield near the district center. These portable airfields came in kits and were distributed by the operator's higher headquarters. The airfields were used to support the landing and take-off of aircraft in remote areas which lacked the space required for landing conventional aircraft. The team "built the runway, we got it certified and the Afghans got to see the first plane they had ever seen land there since—some of them remembered seeing a plane land during the Soviet times."

The team made a big production during the landing of the first aircraft. He explained having "the biggest, gaudiest things from Kabul" flown in and presented to the local powerbrokers in a very public and ceremonial manner. The people's reaction to the production was described as:

> They were the most honored people in the world. They had literally delivered something from the sky down unto the people, even if they were the ones who were taking the goods.

The projected image of the landing made it look like the elder's ordered the American team to "build a runway, bring in the plane, and then congratulate them for being great elders." The consequences resulting from the team's invocation of *Nunawati* was interpreted as, "We weren't supposed to know about all that stuff." The American team's strategy enabled them to adapt their social identity in a way that mimicked local actions and behaviors. It was a strategy that allowed the team to salvage their quickly deteriorating local relations with their honor still intact.

2. Debating the Taliban Mullah

This incident explored the action strategy an American team used to mend relations with a village under the influence of a pro-Taliban mullah. The team entered the district in relief of a team that started the VSO program. The previous team had a short presence in the area and had not assessed many of the district's remote villages, leaving the task for the relieving American team. The team partnered with Afghan security partners and a small

group of the district's newly recruited ALP. During one of the team's first assessment missions in the heavily contested district, the team had to be delivered into a remote village by helicopter. The area was isolated by a wide river and there was no infrastructure that could support the team's movement into the village by ground.

Immediately after air assaulting into the village area, the team confined the entire village population within one of the village's larger compounds. The village was controlled by a "Taliban influenced mullah," according to the operator. His reasoning was described as:

> I say he ran the village because over any of the other elders when we gathered everyone to speak, the Elders were suppressed and every time they wanted to speak they'd glanced at him in confirmation before they were, almost like they weren't allowed to speak.

Secular matters were generally administered by village elders in these remote villages; however, in this village the mullah had oversight of all matters according to the operator. The operator expressed his discomfort during his first contact with the mullah but recalled understanding the mullah needed "to maintain his ground as the Taliban guy in front of this whole village." An argument ensued between the two that materialized into a debate in front of the entire village's male population, the operator described as "the American way of being versus the Taliban way of being."

During the debate, the mullah raised every infraction Americans had committed against the Afghan people over the course of the previous 10 years. One incident that was hard for the operator to defend against had been the "Sergeant Bale's Massacre" which involved an American Soldier that slaughtered innocent woman and children outside of his unit's base camp. The Afghan government did not escape the mullah's criticisms either. The whole event was described by the operator as a "spectator sport" in the middle of the enclosed compound. The operator understood that every word he used was "going to be twisted by them and manipulated and his interpreter's translations needed to be "ultra-precise." It was a battle to win the sentiments of the people.

The debate format used throughout the team's daylong experience in the village consisted of 45-minute sessions followed by short breaks. The team used the short

intermissions between debate to gather water, food, and firewood for their guests as a reconciliatory gesture. The Afghan special forces commander used on short break to distribute mats and pray with village members. According to the operator, the technique paid off in continued debate with the mullah, as he recalled:

> It was especially good if I could do that after they accused us of being harsh and not taking care of the people, it's like oh yeah well so and so is already out there getting you guy's firewood and food … we're compensating for the inconvenience.

The operator understood that providing provisions to the sequestered villagers appealed to the "chivalric" sense possessed by most Pashtuns. It conveyed to the villagers that the team still valued them as humans, despite having to confine them for security reasons. Another technique used by the team during short intermissions were to have the Afghan special forces soldiers act as "sensors" for seeking information and monitoring the conversations of between the confined populace. He commented on the effectiveness of his Afghan partner's serving as sensors by stating:

> They could kind of give me a read on hey you said this and that's really working or that's not really working. So, the next time we reconvene I've got a little bit of insight into what the last conversation sparked with these guys.

As the debate raged on and the breaks between sessions continued to mount, the operator began to feel as though his rhetoric was overpowering the mullah's accusations.

The operator used the mullah's growing anger as an indicator that he was winning the debate and swaying the villager's sentiments in favor of the Afghan government. One local sentiment that affected the team's success was described by a local village elder as "when the Taliban comes in and they tell us how it's going to be, and they don't care what our grievances are, and they take what they need and then they move on." Afghan security partners told the American team, "The fact that you listened to us, that was really starting to kind of win the people over." The team's security partner's statement was based on the team's willingness to accept their advisement on how to interact with the village's community.

By lunch time, the debate had ended with the mullah departing the compound extremely frustrated. The mullah's entourage was observed as significantly smaller than

the group of followers at his arrival. The differences in the size of the mullah's entourage between arrival and departure was used to confirm the success for the team's action strategy. The team leveraged the collective knowledge of the entire Afghan-American team which enabled them to sway the populace's sentiments during the debate. As a consequence, the number of males supporting the mullah shrunk after the debate.

3. An Interesting Thing Happens

The district in this incident was highly contested between insurgents and the Afghan government. The insurgents were defined as Taliban and they had an actively violent presence in the district. The team entered the district in relief of another VSO team. The previous team turned over information about designated "no-go" areas they marked out in the district. They also enacted action strategies that were more passive than the team detailed in this incident. These "no-go areas" were defined as under Taliban control and the previous team had elected not to travel these designated areas. This philosophy was not shared by the American team detailed in this account.

Two types of Afghan security forces operated in the district, legitimate Afghan Army and illegitimate Anti-Taliban Militia (ATM). Afghan security forces identified as illegitimate, such as anti-Taliban militias (ATM), were identified as such because they were not sanctioned and resourced by the Afghan government. Illegitimate Afghan militia groups were opposed to and in conflict with local insurgent groups. The American team enlisted the support of ATMs based on their effectiveness in battling insurgent aggression. The team also enlisted them because legitimate Afghan security forces assigned to the district were unmotivated and unwilling to conduct combat operations against local insurgents.

The district's population was described as harboring feelings in which "they didn't trust their own government." In fact, the local population were more trusting of Americans. The ATMs were the only force "keeping that place stable" by taking the fight to the Taliban in the opinion of the team. They were also the only force the American team was working by, with, and through as security partners in the district. The American team considered the local government and ALP forces as "just for show" in the district. The team viewed

these organizations as more of a hindrance towards the mission. The team spent their tour "pretending" like the government was accomplishing security, governance, and develop when it was the Americans "holding everything" together. The team was "just trying to get the government strong enough and bridge those gaps" that existed between them and the local community.

The Afghan Special Forces team assigned to the district was described as largely "ineffective" and unconcerned about the situation since "they weren't from that area, so they didn't care about it." The incident begins with the American team deciding to build a checkpoint in an area of the district considered to be under Taliban control. It was a strategy described as just part of "this game that we were playing where they thought they controlled this area, we would go up, set up a checkpoint, and then they would bring it on us." It was an area the Taliban thought they controlled which was comprised of "three different compounds," where a "Taliban flag" could be seen flying over prior to the team's checkpoint operation. It took the team two days to clear all the booby-trapped mines planted by the Taliban around the location for the checkpoint. It was a period in which the team engaged the enemy in 30-minute intervals continuously for 48-hours.

The joint American-Afghan security team earned their reputation during this engagement. The team intercepted Taliban radio traffic supporting their "reputation" and "identity" among the enemy. The team's primary ATM security counterparts consisted of two local warlords described as "peers." Neither warlord subordinate to the other. While the team worked with both counterparts, the team maintained a closer relationship with one of them. The warlord for whom the team shared a closer relationship served as the primary source for mending the damage created between the ATM and the American team's relationship described in the proceeding incident.

During the team's fight to secure the area for the checkpoint, "an interesting thing happened;" sensitive equipment the team was responsible for was stolen by an ATM member or members. The equipment was taken from a team member's bag while he was pre-occupied with combat. The circumstances surrounding the theft were described as:

> I am on the rooftop; my stuff was right here. There were a couple of these ATM guys were in here and then one of them, then one of them, I came down, my bag is open, my [redacted] are gone.

Four different ATM commanders were present during the fight, yet the team chose to take the matter up with the warlord with whom they were closest. The warlord's reaction to finding out that someone from the ATM had taken the equipment was described as "you could see that he is like deeply offended that this happened."

Working with untrusted Afghan security partners, such as ATMs, presented the potential for this situation into what "could have had a green on blue really easily," which is a term for describing violence between partnered American and Afghan forces. The team was always mindful about the possibilities of their ATM partners turning on them. The situation with the stolen equipment was non-negotiable, either the team got the equipment back immediately or they were going to discontinue any further operations with the ATM.

The warlord's reaction to the team's ultimatum was described as, "He was screaming in Pashtu at people. He was pissed." The team's uncompromising action strategy for discontinuing operations with the ATMs was effective and the stolen equipment was returned to the team 3 hours after it went missing. The team interpreted this response to their ultimatum as a sign the ATM "obviously respected us." The American could not believe the ATM warlord showed back up with the team's sensitive equipment. The explained why the warlord went to so much effort to salvage a rapidly deteriorating relationship with the American team as, "He understood we were going way out of our way to build this checkpoint, kind of putting ourselves in danger." The team adapted from hybrid-militant to an immutable identity type in response to the theft of sensitive equipment. This uncompromising action strategy was affected based on the team's selfless commitment to the mission.

M. FAILING TO ADAPT TO AFGHAN CULTURAL NORMS

Action strategies in which American teams were identified as failing to adapt to Afghan cultural norms were based on ignorance or practices Americans found abhorrent. Actions and behaviors displayed while enacting this strategy were uncomfortableness,

repugnance, and rejection of Afghan cultural practices that Americans found offensive. The most severe consequence stemming from the enactment of this strategy was violence between the offending and offended groups. American teams using this action strategy constructed ambivalent or immutable social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore American team actions strategies in which they failed to adapt to Afghan cultural norms.

1. You Know We Are Pushing Culture

This incident explores a situation in which members of the American team refused to hold hands with their Afghan counterparts. Hand holding between men is a common practice in Middle East and Central Asian cultures, where it symbolizes "respect and affection" between men (Holguin, 2005; Rosenbloom, 2006). It is assumed the VSO team was invited into a district with a government presence, since they shared a compound with their Afghan security partners. Key leaders of the American team refused to grow facial hair which indicate a level of immutability existed across the team. The leadership's refusal to grow facial hair or adapt their grooming standards to support future rapport with their Afghan hosts was interpreted as abhorrence by other members of the American team.

This incident begins when the American team's sergeant major refused to hold his Afghan counterpart's hand and his offensive reaction to the proposition was described as "he almost flipped out over it." The sergeant major's verbal reactions were described as, "Nope. Nope. I am not doing it." Even though the team's higher headquarters were pushing Afghan culture, the team's leadership conveyed a message to their subordinates that the leadership's actions did not match their policies. The Afghan's reactions to the sergeant major's response was described as regretful yet understanding and reflected a "maturity and realization" about American comfort levels with Afghan cultural practices that should be given "credit."

When approached about his abhorrent behavior toward his Afghan counterpart, the sergeant major was described as just "laughing it off." The outcomes of this incident were less pronounced than during descriptions of other team action strategies which could be attributed to Afghan partners not wanting to cause American partners to "lose face."

However, this incident supports that deep-seated resentments are developed after seemingly innocuous cultural infractions. This incident also supports that continued American reactions, such as the one detailed in this incident, motivate "green-on-blue" attacks.

2. The Guy Is Just Lying to Me

This incident explores action strategies enacted by an American team when their team leader felt his Afghan Special Forces counterpart was lying to him. The team leader made the mistake of calling out his counterpart in front of Afghan subordinates. The team leader's breach of Afghan cultural norms nearly caused a "green-on-blue" incident and subsequently ended all future relations between the two teams. Government presence in the district was described as ineffective based on corrupt practices and their ambivalence about securing the district's population. The Afghan security forces assigned to the district were particularly unmotivated and unresponsive to the American team's requests for joint combat patrols. Therefore, the team used unsanctioned Afghan militias', known as anti-Taliban militia (ATM), as their primary security partners. The team's relations with the warlords running these illegitimate militias was described as:

> I could have a real relationship with somebody like [redacted warlord name]. The problem was to go on to the next point, the green on blue, I could not do that with the ANASF. So, I probably was a little slow to figure that out or too arrogant to turn it on and turn it off, but I could kind of be man to man with [redacted warlord name] and I wasn't too worried about somebody–or him being too offended. I mean he would kind of say something if he didn't agree with me, but it was almost like we were having a real relationship because we were doing real things and getting into real firefights.

The American team leader felt more than comfortable calling out the leaders of the ATM organizations; unfortunately, he could not take this same approach with his security counterparts in the legitimate Afghan security forces.

Immediately after the team was informed by their ANA SF security partners that they did not have authorization to patrol with the Americans, the team leader called there to verify his counterpart's story. The Afghan ANA SF battalion commander stated, "I approved their mission. They are allowed to go." The commander's reply angered the

American team leader and caused him to emotionally state, “The guy was just lying to me.” The American team leader took his Afghan partner’s false narrative personally. The team leader immediately confronted his Afghan counterpart from the perspectives of an American.

The team leader demanded that his hesitant interpreter “tell them [ANA SF commander] that I know they are lying.” He recalled his interpreter’s reply to his request as, “I can’t tell them I know they are lying.” The team’s interpreter was trying to “warn” him that there would be cultural ramifications for calling out his security partner’s indiscretions. Despite his interpreters tepid “warnings,” the operator insisted that he translate his exact words to his Afghan security partners. He explained that the ANA SF commander could tell that he was “pretty pissed” about being lied to. The team leader followed up his accusations by walking out on the team’s Afghan security counterparts, an act he interpreted as “probably a slight to him.” The team’s interpreter remained in the room with the Afghan group and overheard one of the Afghan leader’s subordinates asking him, “Do you want me to go and kill that guy for disrespecting you?” After being informed about the proposed death threat, the American team did not feel “comfortable” living on the same compound with the Afghans. The American team leader contacted his higher headquarters and reported, “I do not feel comfortable. I think they need to get off this base immediately.”

To mitigate the risk associated with the potential “green-on-blue” incident, the team locked down their perimeter inside the compound, allowing no Americans out and no Afghans into the team’s area. The team also started to carry their rifles at the ready which signaled their concern about the how “the situation had deteriorated.”

The American team’s commander shared their concerns about the potential for “blue-on-green.” There was a pattern of “green on blue” events that had occurred in the district at the time of this incident, the most notable resulting in the murder of an American two-star general. “Green on blue” incidents illustrated the dangers of working with scorned Afghan security partners. If a two-star American general could be killed in a “blue-on-green” attack, then no American force was impervious to these sorts of attacks, regardless of rank. The team was cognizant that their relationship with the Afghans for whom they

shared a base was rapidly deteriorating and that members of the Afghan group would not hesitate to murder Americans for insulting them. The American team's sentiments about the potential for a "blue-on-green" attack was described as, "I don't think anyone felt comfortable with looking past that [the death of the American general]."

The Afghan team was ordered to leave the compound in light of their threats. Unfortunately, the Afghan team would not be departing until the following morning and the team "had to kind of live with it that night." The team had no further interactions with the ANA SF team or its leader. The Afghan's reactions to the American team's heightened security posture was described as, "They were probably smart enough to figure it out." The team's senior NCO understood the severity of the situation and was wise enough to overcome the American team leader's irrationality over the situation. To smooth over the fractured relations between the American and Afghan teams and to parts ways with the scorned Afghan team amicably, the senior enlisted man shook the Afghan team's hands on the way out and gave them team patches and a barrel of diesel fuel. The American team leader was angry at the way his senior enlisted advisor said goodbye to the Afghans. The senior NCO's reasoning for his actions during the Afghan's departure were described as:

> Hey man I want to make sure these guys leave without any incident. I am going to go give them a barrel of diesel. I am going to go like shake their hand and tell them—like give them a patch and act like they are leaving honorably.

In retrospect, the team was "frustrated" about the whole situation. The incident taught the team a lesson about interacting within Afghan culture described as, "They don't have the same values necessarily as we do. So, something that offends us is not the same as them." The team's leader approached being lied to from an American perspective in an environment where Americans were the subordinate culture. By publicly confronting the Afghan team leader about his lies, it caused him to lose face. The team learned that they needed to have "less emotional" and "less confrontational" responses to Afghan violations of American culture in the future.

3. I Hated Him

This incident explores an action strategy where an American team leader refused to compromise his American leadership principles while assessing and advising his Afghan security counterpart. The team leader discovered himself working with an Afghan security partner, whose leadership style he found repulsive. It was a situation the team leader learned from and applied these lessons during the team's future interactions. The team entered a district with no government presence. Insurgent groups had no reservations about violently opposing any American or Afghan security forces attempting to control the district. This incident focuses on the deteriorating relationship between the American team leader and his Afghan security counterpart. Nepotism commonly practiced within Afghan organizations shaped the young American team leader's view of his Afghan security partner from the onset of them working together.

The relationship the Afghan team leader had with his personal security detachment was described as, "the core part of his personal security detachment was like his boy, like his close, close family." It was a nepotistic situation whose visible artefacts were reflected in the condition of the uniforms worn by soldiers in the Afghan unit. Members not related directly to the team leader wore "the worst uniforms ever." In comparison to members of the Afghan leader's personal security detail, some of them close family members whose uniforms were described as containing "all of the tricked-out kit and everything with full up bandoliers and everything," unrelated soldiers' wore rags. The team also identified one close family member of the Afghan team leader as his "chai boy," explaining that the team leader was a "pedophile" based on rumors spread by members of the unit not in its inner-circle. Rumors identifying the Afghan leader as a pedophile came from the Central Asian practice of "Bacha bazi," where it is believed that Afghan men have sexual relations with young effeminate males. The American team defined the practice as "disgusting." The "Bacha Bazi" rumors were unsubstantiated; however, they also influenced the American team leader's opinions of his counterpart. The rumors only added to the American leader's contempt for his Afghan counterpart, where he described his opinion of the Afghan leader as "the worst typical Afghan like, I hated him."

The team leader gave his Afghan counterpart a hard time over his preferential treatment for certain members of the unit. He described the treatment he gave his counterpart as:

> I was trying to lecture him on what leadership was because I knew everything, and you know, I mean I went to West Point, fucking infantry, Special Forces, Army—very arrogant … I tried to tell him you need to get your PSD, you need to rotate them out. Rotate them out with the guys in the outstations because it's not equitable. It's not fair. That's not leadership, these guys aren't going to follow you.

The American leader's badgering had no effect on his Afghan counterpart, except to make things harder for his men:

> You can have your convictions, you can identify everything that's wrong with another foreign country, but it's their goddamn country and if that's how he wants to run his unit, it's his unit. At the end of the day, it's his unit, it's not my unit. That's just how they roll over there.

In hindsight, the actions and behaviors the team leader directed toward his Afghan counterpart taught him:

> It was well over by that point. It burned me to my core, but I mean if I could go back and talk to Captain [redacted] and say, "Hey man, get over yourself." Like that's a culture, you are not going to change that.

The American team leader recalled learning from his interpreters, who sat and ate with the Afghans every day, that the Afghan team leader had made statements to the effect of, "Who the fuck is this young kid captain telling me?" It was only at that moment when the American team leader realized his approach was all wrong toward his Afghan counterpart. He described the realization as, "I think that's when it really hit me that I really missed the boat on hey man, different culture, get over your arrogance and everything."

This realization came too late for the American team leader to fix his relationship with his Afghan counterpart, but the lessons he learned by projecting an image that hindered their relationship enabled him to establish strong rapport and facilitate successful interactions with Afghan security partners in the future. It was a learning situation The American team leader described as:

> So, there was a lot of growing, despite all the training I had been through, that cultural awareness, checking my arrogance and my ego, it took that incident and many like it to really learn it.

N. VIOLATING SACREDLY HELD CULTURAL PRACTICES

It is important to distinguish between this action strategy and the previous one by stating that Americans were the offended party in the former strategy. In instances where American teams broke sacredly held cultural norms it was the Afghans that were offended. Actions and behaviors occurring during the enactment of this strategy were challenging the manhood of Afghan hosts, violating seating rules during *shuras*, and American displays of distrust. American teams enacting this strategy constructed ambivalent or immutable social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore action strategies where American teams broke sacredly held cultural norms.

1. Challenging Manhood

This incident explores an American team action strategy in which the team's leader had a perpetual habit of challenging the manhood of the district's leaders. The team was invited to conduct VSO in a district with no Afghan government presence. The operator never discussed any local feelings of being abandoned by the government or sub-group conflicts in the district. Local insurgents operating in the district highly contested any government attempts at asserting their authority over the population.

The team's interaction strategy originated from the team leader's attitude towards the VSO mission in general. The team leader was representative of the organization and his attitude significantly contributed to the team's immutable identity prior to them ever deploying. The team leader's actions and behaviors which made up a series of incidents that culminated in what was defined as an unsuccessful mission are summed up in his following statement:

> One of the reasons that I bring it up because the nature of that relationship I think had a strong influence and bearing on the level of success where we were at and so SOTF Southeast is one I would characterize generally as unsuccessful.

A civil affairs section was assigned to this VSO team as a balancing mechanism for the team's negative attitudes about the mission. The team's leader and some of its member

were “a little bit unstable” and a better fit for “direct action missions.” The team believed their traditional role was supporting direct action missions, not VSO. The team leader’s negative attitude about having his team assigned to conduct a VSO mission permeated throughout his team in which it was described as, “When it came to deal with the civilian populous, there wasn’t a lot of buy in” from team members.

The relationship between the civil affairs section and the rest of the team was described as, “I’d say interpersonally [we] could get along but when it came to the mission [we] just never really saw eye to eye.” These different perceptions towards the conduct of the mission placed the civil affairs section in a role where they were “probably a wasted asset.” The civil affairs sections thought “At that time … we might be able to eventually show them other ways of conducting business with Afghans and that just never really worked.”

The relationships the American team had formed in the Afghan community were described as never being “firm,” based on the exchanging of insults. These insults caused local elders to lose face. Losing face is defined as “the positive social value” village elders’ held in front of their people (Goffman, 1955, p. 213). Interactions with one village elder enabled the civil affairs section to understand the elder “was tied in well with the Taliban.” The civil affairs section had a good rapport with this elder, especially during interactions where the American team leader was not present. The reciprocal exchange of information was “a little bit freer” when conversation was just between the civil affairs section and the elder. An example of the American team leader insulting this particular elder was recalled as, “Hey you know—you can’t control your people—why do you let the younger people treat you like this?” These actions and behaviors were described as a “negotiating technique” that was effective in the right situations; however, the team leader always applied the technique under the wrong circumstances. It was also noted that this village elder was not “someone that would respond to that kind of thing anyway.” This elder would have “said or done anything” in light of the team leader’s insults “just to retain his dignity.” The team leader’s irreverent attitude and behavior toward the local leader permeated throughout the rest of his team. This influence contributed to the construction of a team social identity type that was interpreted as both ambivalent and culturally immutable,

despite the numerous attempts by the civil affairs officer to revise it. The American team's immutable identity type resulted in the early withdraw of the team from this district. Immutability and violating sacredly held norms, such as "saving face," also risked the potential for "green on blue" violence.

2. Haji John's Defection

This incident illustrates a VSO team's action strategy for mitigating risks associated with the nomination of an ALP commander that had violated the sacredly held tribal norms of his community. The team was invited into the unstable district by the governor and chief of police, both had different motives for accepting the team's assistance. The team discovered through monitoring of the governor's connections, that he actively communicated with known members of the local insurgency. According to the operator, the district governor "largely had ties to Taliban and anti-Afghan government forces." The chief of police's motives for requesting the team's assistance were far more selfless. It was explained to the chief of police that the team only had so many resources and so much time to help improve security in the district. Working with the American team came at great risk for the chief of police, despite the dangers such an arrangement posed to his life, he chose to work with the team.

The district's location between the province's mountainous southern border and its capital made it a perfect infiltration route for insurgents and as such, a highly contested area. The mountains provided both a haven and secure infiltration for insurgents. Security in the district was described as ending outside the walls of the police chief's compound. Despite these challenges, the team was able to sell the police chief on the merits of creating an ALP program. The chief of police was "familiar" with the program because it was "relatively successful" in other districts throughout the province. With the chief of police's approval for the creation of an ALP program, the team "supported" his efforts at building such a force.

The nomination process for ALP members was purely Afghan controlled and driven, where the "[redacted chief of police], Afghan intelligence chief, and the district governor nominated the soldiers that were to make up the ALP." However, conflict

emerged between these local Afghan leaders during the selection and nomination of the ALP's commander. Appointment of the ALP commander position came from the provincial governor, usually after receiving endorsement from the district level leadership. The provincial government in this instance, elected to appoint Haji John, a former mid-level Taliban commander that had been captured on the battlefield. The provincial government viewed Haji John's appointment as a propaganda victory over the Taliban. After being captured, Haji John was coerced into the newly developed Afghan reconciliation program. It was a program designed to repatriate former Taliban members back into their native communities.

"The districts governor nominated the commander, so, initially when his name first came up Haji John it came from the district governor." When the American team initially investigate Haji John, "No flags initially—nobody recognized the name – mostly because from our analysis—it's just a field name." After a period of 1 month, the team discovered "several aliases and past names" that Haji John had used which identified him as "a low to mid-level Taliban commander in the district." Armed with this knowledge, neither the team, Afghan intelligence chief, nor the chief of police would endorse Haji John for the ALP commander position. In their minds Haji John was going to use the position to "regain power and influence which may give him access back into the Taliban." Despite this knowledge "the district governor did endorse him and then lobbied the correct signatures at the provincial level to ensure that he still got signed."

In the assessment of the American team, it was the governor's intent to keep the district destabilized based on his connections with local insurgent groups. Haji John's nomination helped serve the district governor's cause. The VSO team sent "flags as high as" they could up U.S. channels but since the focus was on supporting Afghan decisions, the team had no choice but to involuntarily support Haji John's nomination. They understood the significance Haji John's nomination held among the district's population. Haji John's father "was ashamed of his son" and "refused to accept that his son existed because he had turned against—in his father's eyes—turned against his tribe by fighting for the Taliban." For Haji John, "there's no route to bring him back into that tribe or

village" because he had abandoned his sacredly held "cultural identity" in lieu of a Taliban persona.

The VSO team and their Afghan security partners conveyed a unified image conveying support for Haji John's nomination in front of the local community. However, the team understood they would find themselves fighting the very ALP force they were required to train. Therefore, they took precautions to mitigate the risks posed by this Haji John led force. The 13 ALP soldiers, including Haji John, were trained outside the district so the team could control movement and the flow of information to the district's insurgency. They also trained the ALP using a lower set of standards then would normally be provided for such a force. Based on Haji John's nomination to the ALP commander position, the team "honestly didn't train them [ALP] to a very high level because we kind of saw" they would "have to fight the force in 6 weeks."

Haji John defected from the side of the Afghan government, as predicted by the American team. He took with him two thirds of the ALP force and most of their equipment, including heavy machine guns and vehicles. The team spent the rest of their tour fighting the former ALP and attempting to once again legitimize the Afghan government in the eyes of the local population. The operator explained that the district governor was viewed with a great deal of skepticism because of Haji John's nomination, an individual that broke the sacredly held cultural norms for a society where perceived acts of abandonment get individuals sanctioned from the network.

3. The Delegation Shows Up

This incident occurred as a conclusion to the proceeding example. After Haji John's defection with most of the equipment and men from the district's ALP program, the district was scheduled for a meeting with an American delegation intent on pitching the merits of the reconciliation program. Despite numerous attempts made by the operator to dissuade the delegation from traveling out to the austere location, they chose to ignore the operator's warnings and meet with the district's elders regardless. The operator emphasized that he failed in his attempt to at least get the American delegation to "tailor" their message about the reconciliation program, despite explaining to the senior officer in charge about the

context under which his team was looking to pitch the reconciliation program. According to the operator, his pleas about Haji John's defection and the poor timing for the program pitch fell on deaf ears. According to the operator, the leader of the delegation team simply viewed the whole situation from a different perspective. The operator expressed his regret that he had not "flown that night to go and meet with the [reconciliation program] delegation. I didn't recognize the potential for how that meeting could have gone" with regards to getting the delegation to either cancel their trip or at a minimum tailor the message to be "mature and match what the elders needed to hear at the time."

After assuming fault for the delegation arriving with a poorly timed and poorly targeted message, the operator began to discuss meeting with the elders and district governor, hours prior to the delegation's arrival. It was a pre-delegation meeting in which the operator described as something only an insider, a native, would be a party to concerning the nature of acceptance he felt from the village's elders and the district's governor. During the meeting the operator was dressed in civilian clothing, with simply an ear bud in his ear, while appearing to be unarmed. The village elders' arrival at the meeting was described as:

> The elders show up—we talk about almost nothing for an hour or so, which is okay. It was about—how was your family and how are—do you have any tribal issues but nothing of real substance but myself and [redacted] being included in that which is indicative of the acceptance of the Tribal Leaders.

It would have been rare for the elders to address the American team leader directly unless there were some sort of relationship already established between each other. At the time of this meeting, they all knew each other by name. It also became clear to the operator that the village elders understood that he spoke Pashtun. He stated that "they began asking me questions directly in Pashtun."

When the delegation arrived, they "sort of stormed the room;" they sat in the "dominant positions" without direction from the governor and maintained their full "security uniform." The delegation team comprised primarily of Americans, interrupted dialogue with the governor and elders to answer calls from the radio, telling the governor to "hold on" during these interruptions. The delegation's behaviors in the meeting broke

multiple sacredly held cultural norms, the most notable of which was assertively sitting in the dominant positions and interrupting a meeting being hosted by an Afghan.

The delegation's attention turned in the American team leader's direction by a presumed member of the delegation's security detail, in which they inquired, "Are you an American? What are you doing here?" Even though the operator began speaking only English after the arrival of the delegation, accordingly, his "civilian clothes and beard" were enough to cause confusion for the delegation's security team. It was explained to the delegation's security detail that he wore this attire "to try to not appear aggressive and militarized towards the governor, specifically." He explained that his attire was in sharp contrast to the posture the delegation maintained while at the meeting. He described his manner of dress in relation to the delegations as:

> What I wasn't wearing was a radio or a helmet or my rifle slung in front of me. That was the opposite for the delegation, so they are all wearing conventional uniforms, their fully body armor, their helmets—most of them didn't even take their helmets off, with their rifles slung in front of them. Some of them, unwilling even to let their hand off their weapon because they are kind of nervous about being in a close room with so many Afghans.

The delegation's reconciliation pitch on the merits of its program used "empirical evidence" that was not understood by the mostly illiterate Afghan audience; however, the presentation was not going to be well received by the Afghan elders because they had just witnessed and still felt the effects from the failed program. The appointment to the position of ALP commander of an individual considered to have shamed the indigenous population was enough to delegitimize the program from the perspective of the village elders. This reconciliation was not only responsible for embarrassing the community through Haji John's appointment, but it enabled him to dangerously defect back over to the Taliban along with the program's men and equipment. Immediately after the delegation ended their reconciliation pitch, one could "see the negative response in the elders. Like they are just insulted." The elders "erupted in argument and the interpreters couldn't keep up with what was being said."

The elder's concerns were the delegation did not understand the effect placing Haji John back into the community culturally held for them, he was an embarrassment to the

community. The elders' reactions to the delegation's pitch were described as "uncharacteristic" for "tribal elders to be so assertive." The outbursts from the elders sent a message interpreted to be "very explicit, that what you [the delegation] are doing is violating our cultural norms here." The elders just wanted the delegation to understand that:

> The tribe of Haji John's tribe and our villages have been shamed within the last 2 weeks. We are embarrassed to be part of the province. We are embarrassed for our villages….

The elders understood the causal relationship between the reconciliation program and their shame far better than the delegation or the Afghan government. The delegation continued to try and sell the program to the elders by explaining, "I understand there is difficulties in your district. I am sure things are complex, listen, let me show you these three districts that this has been successful."

In the end, the village elders of the district lost all confidence in both the Afghan government and more specifically the district governor. The outcome of Haji John's defection and the delegation's visit "created a divide between the villages and the province that I never saw [redacted district] overcome while we were there." The team was withdrawn shortly after the delegations visit, and a short while after the team's withdrawal, it was reported that the chief of police and his deputy were murdered.

> I assume that his death or his assassination was sort of a climax point of that separation where the Taliban was gaining more control over [redacted district]'s security at least—whether it was cohesive or wittingly—and legitimate security was gaining less control.

O. DE-ESCALATION OF CONFLICT

Action strategies for the de-escalation of conflict were used by American teams in situations where misperceived intentions increased the risk for violence between American and Afghan security forces. These near violent conflicts resulted because of immature relations, unfulfilled expectations, or the presentation of distrustful team images. Actions and behaviors enacted by American teams in response to escalating intergroup conflicts were separation, demonstrations of force, and the eventual withdrawal of one or more groups. This strategy was a method for preventing the escalation of violence and to mend relationships with Afghan groups working with American teams. Teams enacting this

strategy constructed military and hybrid social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore action strategies in which American teams developed novel methods for de-escalating conflict between disparate groups.

1. You Hit an IED and We Will Clear Up to It

This incident explores the action strategy used by an American team when Afghan security partners misinterpret the team's intentions based on unsynchronized coordination mechanisms. The team was invited to conduct VSO in a district with a government presence. However, the district governor was not present during the duration of the team's mission in the area. Neither local feelings of abandonment nor heterogeneity-based problems were mentioned during the recounting of the incident. It was a district in which insurgent groups violently opposed both the Afghan government and the coalition's presence. The weapon of choice for insurgents in the district was the improvised explosive device (IED). This man-made effect was the catalyst for the proceeding incident.

The primary event leading into this critical incident involved the replacement of the Afghan Army Special Forces [ANA SF] Unit with whom the American team was partnered. The two Afghan Special Forces Teams switched out right before the Ramadan Fast. The new Afghan team was not as motivated as the previous and "displayed just an unwillingness" to conduct operations with their American partners. The American team tried to work with their new Afghan partners, but they lacked the "motivation" to do anything operationally. The new Afghan team "seemed like they were there to try to just relax. You know, at least through the end of Ramadan." He further lamented that the relationship between the two teams did not "get off to a good start" because new Afghan team leader only spoke Dari. The new Afghan team leader's language barrier meant "he could not even interact with the locals" since they only spoke Pashto.

The team worked predominately with the district's ALP forces, who were more "amenable" to working on an abbreviated schedule during Ramadan's brutal fasting period. During this training period the team offered a class on "how to defeat IEDs." As explained by the operator, the new Afghan team "just didn't show real willingness to work" and elected not to participate in the training. The new Afghan team's unwillingness to

participate in the training meant they had no understanding about how the American team would respond during an IED strike.

While "on a combined operation with the ANA SF team" somewhere within the district, one of the Afghan vehicles "hit an IED." The team acted according their unit's standard operating procedures in response to the struck vehicle. The team "started clearing" the area around the vehicle to "make sure there aren't any secondary IEDs." However, members from the Afghan Special Forces team "ran right up and tried to help the guys [wounded trapped in the vehicle]." The IED strike on the Afghan vehicle killed two of the occupants and wounded another.

The Afghan's expected American team members to rush to the aid of the dead and wounded trapped inside of the vehicle. The Afghans, "immediately rushed to the truck as our dog was out starting to clear." It was not wise to just rush up to the damaged vehicle since it is widely known that insurgents would often plant secondary explosive devices in anticipation of causing even more casualties. The ANA SF's reactions to the IED strike were described as:

> I understand their reasoning for that, but I don't think they understood our reasoning for why we didn't rush out and send our medics out there to help too right away and why we wanted to clear up to it first before we got out and helped.

The misinterpreted expectations and intentions between the two teams were only exacerbated after the American team "called the MEDEVAC [medical evacuation] in to take their injured guy and then two KIAs [killed in action] out." According to the operator, the MEDEVAC crew "insisted on searching the KIAs when they were already loaded up for transport." He explained that "the MEDEVAC crew was worried about explosives or something getting on the bird." The MEDEVAC helicopter arrived several hours after the incident occurred when the bodies of the Afghan dead were "bundled up with Afghan flags." The MEDEVAC crew's insistence on searching the bodies was "real insensitive to their [Afghan's] feelings." The physical act of searching the bodies and the team's response to the IED strike were defined as "real detrimental" toward future interactions with their new Afghan partners.

The team argued and pleaded with the MEDEVAC crew not to search the bodies, that it was detrimental to the team's mission. Their pleas however, fell on deaf ears and were described as, "We could not talk the MEDEVAC crew out of doing it because they didn't really want to take ANA SF KIA [killed in action] anyway." The new U.S. policy at the time of this incident was to start transitioning the Afghan Army over to being responsible for collecting their own wounded and dead from the battlefield. The U.S. timeline for ending combat operations in the country was rapidly approaching at the time of this incident. To mitigate the effects of the MEDEVAC crew searching the ANA SF bodies prior to loading them onto the helicopter, the American team "managed to move most of the ANASF team back inside the base so they couldn't see it happen." Even though most of the Afghans went back into the compound, many among them became visibly angry about the day's events. After the departure of the MEDEVAC helicopter the operator stated that the ANA SF team started giving the American team "the cold shoulder."

As a point of clarification, the ANA SF team leader was the only non-Pashto speaking member of his team. The Afghan team leader had to speak with his own men through an interpreter. The consequences stemming from the IED strike, the misinterpreted American team's reaction to the IED strike, and the searching of the Afghan dead by the MEDEVAC crew resulted in the ANA SF team being withdrawn from the district without replacement. During this incident the team used an action strategy for the construction of a hybrid social identity that was rejected by their Afghan counterparts. The effects of the Ramadan holiday, Afghan team motivations, and language barriers created breakdowns in coordination the American team's action strategy. Some of the potential consequences stemming from this incident could have been worse than premature withdrawal by the Afghan team, it could have led to a "green on blue" attack.

2. The Well Was Poisoned

This incident explores the action strategy employed by an American team after they blindly assembled a group of unfamiliar Afghan security partners together for a clearance operation that quickly goes awry. The American team were at a point in their mission where they expanded operations into the second of two districts for which they had responsibility.

The district they were expanding into was separated from the team's original location by a large mountain range. The team operated out of a major FOB in the highly contested district. The level of contestability into the district in which they were expanding was greater than the previous district where they operated. At the time of the expansion the time the team had left in country was quickly running out and they were looking to set the stage for their replacement team to smoothly fall in on an existing ALP program.

The triggering event for this incident was a mortar attack which struck the FOB a month prior to his team's expansion into the district. Technological equipment in the form of radar and advanced optical systems provided evidence that the mortar attack originated from within a "very big village" just five kilometers away from the FOB. The team's assessment of the village was described as, "We knew that the village was complicit in letting them do that. So, we planned an op there."

The team only had a few months left in theater and suffered, under constraints which required them to have a 7:1 Afghan-to-American force ratio on all operations. In an operation involving so many unfamiliar Afghan security forces, the team only felt comfortable if all 20 American's comprising the VSO team were present. It was highlighted that in addition to the ANA SF group the team was partnered with, four different groups of Afghan security forces were to be used in the operation. These diverse groups served as a catalyst for the escalated conflict that was to ensue. The different ethnic groups comprising the sets of Afghan security forces that had never worked together prior to this mission was described as "their leader was [Hazara]–sorry–some of the other guys were Hazara, but then there were some other–I think some of them were Turkoman… there was a couple of Pashtuns there." Language problems between the ethnically diverse Afghan groups were enough of "a problem in and of itself there because you know, they spoke a different language, they didn't speak Pashtun well."

The second catalyst for escalated conflict between the Americans and Afghans resulted from the way the team chose to keep the populace secure while searching the village. It was the team's fifth major village clearance operation. The team had developed a "routine" for conducting these operations based on successes they had in their previous four clearance missions. What differed on this clearance mission, besides the motley mix

of Afghan security forces, was the way the team secured the populace in comparison to previous missions. In the past, the team would secure the males inside walled compounds found in villages and the females inside a separate walled compound; however, on this clearance operation the American team mistakenly listened to their Afghan Army counterpart's advice when informed that village elders "would be very offended if you go into one of their compounds." The decision to secure the village's male population out in the open turned out to be a significant mistake. Problems began when the team noticed the ALP were "starting to have a conversation and pulling aside–pulling people aside and having little side conversations." The village's male population reacted to the ALP's conversations by resorting to "open dissent."

The behaviors of the village's males were "they are getting up, they are getting restless, they are yelling at the ANA, yelling at the ANP. Pulling–having side bar conversations." The American team leader recalled getting an intuition that the situation was escalating into becoming hostile quickly—his 7 months of experience in the district had taught him to recognize characteristics of a hostile crowd.

The team's loss of control over the situation was subsided when an American sniper began firing warning shots at the feet of an instigator, describing that "everyone just stopped" in reaction to the snipers warning shots. Everyone stopped except the ANA soldier manning one of the heavy machine guns on a nearby Afghan Army HMMWV, who had the weapon aimed directly at the American team leader's face. The event unfolding was described as, "I turn around and I see an ANA vehicle with its turret and right when I turned around just finishing turning, right at my face. It's you know, 20 feet from me."

American team responses to the quickly deteriorating situation were described as going into "crisis management," something Special Forces soldiers are trained to handle. Reactions to the ANA soldier's training the heavy machine gun at the American team leader's face, the were described as, "I see their company commander and I go right over to him and I grab him by the arm and I bring him right next to me." The American team leader addressed the ANA company commander in a face-to-face manner, ordering him to have the soldier manning the heavy weapon to stand down. The message to the ANA company commander may seem like it did not come from a level-headed person, but

according to the team leader's recollections of the event, he was "pretty calm," through the whole ordeal. It was at this point that the American team's vehicles were called in to the village, with one of the American vehicles placing the barrel of a heavy machine gun "three feet away from that [ANA] turret gunner's face."

The combination of the American team leader's personal weapon trained directly at the ANA company commander and the barrel of a heavy machine gun pointed directly at the ANA soldier manning the HMMWV mounted heavy machine gun were enough to deescalate the situation. The ANA company commander ordered his men to stand down and return to the FOB and the American team survived the situation without further provocation. The American team apologized to the villagers prior to leaving the village. The relationship between the American team and the village was described as, "the well was poisoned," meaning the American team thought there was little possibility of facilitating interactions with the village during the remainder of their time in the district. The American team had aircraft fly over the village to deter the villagers from attempting any violent reprisals during the teams withdraw. The American team used a hybrid social identity while enacting their action strategy. The strategy was based on past successes at these types of operations. However, the team lost focus on the importance of working with Afghan security forces with whom they had developed mutual trust. This loss of focus during the planning of this operation was affected by the amount of time the team had left in the district and overconfidence.

3. We Need to Diffuse the Situation

This incident explores the action strategy used by a VSO team for responding to hostilities between Afghan sub-groups that were becoming more openly violent. Hostilities that were being triggered by insurgents whom are armed with detailed knowledge about the tensions between these fractured communities. A national decree was drafted by the president of Afghanistan at the time of this incident that required all U.S. Special Operations forces were to withdrawal from the province where the incident took place. The team's invitation into the province was described as an "on again" then "off again" series of proclamations by the Afghan government due to what the VSO team perceived to be a

“Taliban propaganda campaign” that included even their anti-government rivals the “Hezbi Islami insurgent group.”

The solidarity shown between the Taliban and Hezbi Islami Group (HIG) was representative of Glatzer’s (2002) “segmentary solidarity” theory in which “It was something that the Taliban and Hezbi Islami who were actually fighting each other and killing each other daily kind of worked together when it was convenient.” These two different Afghan insurgent groups, whom were violently opposed to one another, were willing to work together to defeat a common enemy. Ethnic disparity was a significant problem, perhaps the catalysts resulting in the escalation of tensions between two Afghan security groups during in this incident. There were historic ethnic tensions that existed between Tajik’s dominating the province’s Afghan Army units and Pashtun’s dominating the ALP forces for whom the team was partnered. The province was heavily contested by insurgent groups and the team was “getting report after report that pretty well-organized Taliban and Haqqani elements were coming into these deeper valleys and pre-positioning” in the province’s rural areas.

The incident began with an insider attack that occurred at a VSO base camp in the team’s neighboring district. Part of the team’s mission related to the neighboring VSO team was “to QRF [quick reaction force] these guys if they needed it.” Despite the province’s tensions and the operational restraints placed on American Forces there, when the American team received reports that “U.S. special forces just fired on the district police chief” in the neighboring district, they did not hesitate to immediately get in their vehicles and head out to the district.

The initial report “just didn’t sound right” to the American team, “why would they? They had this great relationship with the district police chief.” The team was suspicious of the initial reports. During the team’s transit down to the neighboring district, the team received a totally different and urgent report “saying they’re [the neighboring VSO team] about to get overrun.” The team’s partnered Afghan police force arrived at the neighboring district’s base camp 5 to 10 minutes ahead of the American team. The scene the team arrived at was described as gruesome, replete with the carnage typically associated with an “insider attack,” or “green on blue” incident. The attack was described as:

> Basically what had happened was there was a meeting going on, there was like a pre-mission briefing and this guy who turned out to be a Taliban plant or mole, got on a PKM [heavy machine gun] and shot into this pre-mission briefing so he kills, in like a 30-second continuous burst of the machine gun, so he kills the U.S. team leader, the Afghan team leader, a U.S. infantry sergeant that was augmenting the U.S. team and then wounds, within 30 seconds, half this ODA is killed or wounded. Then right after he does that, they start receiving small arms fire from the exterior of the outstation.

The attack was pre-planned and coordinated by local insurgents and enlisted the help of a "plant" or a "mole" that operated in the guise of an Afghan police officer. The small arms fire coming from outside the neighboring team's base camp only ended when team's Afghan partnered force arrived and set up a perimeter around the base camp.

The insider attack on the camp only added to the tensions within the district, particularly with the Tajik-dominated Afghan army group who had just lost their team leader. The Tajik unit held a "significant amount of hostility toward the local population." The coalition's response to the insider attack only added to the escalating tensions in the area when they decided to conduct a clearing operation into local village just outside the base camp. Immediately after the team arrived at the base camp, "Helicopters arrive … so, at this point you have nearly an SF company worth of forces at this out-station. We do a sweep of the valley below where the insurgents egressed" and in the process of breaching one of the houses a local girl is killed.

The heightened tension within the district stemmed from the natural dislike between the Tajik Afghan army unit stationed in the district and the local Pashtun population and police force. The resulting death of the local girl—a Pashtun who happened to be "the niece of a police officer"—quickly caused the situation to start spiraling out of control.

After the attack, the team remained on the ground until the following day to supplement American security in the district. A new American Special Forces team were flown in to replace the existing force, now combat ineffective after losses suffered from the attack. The American team was compelled to help the American replacement team get familiarized with the extremely complex set of dynamics on the ground. The team also requested that their Afghan police counterparts "put a buffer between the outstation and these demonstrations that we're pretty sure are going to ensue." The posturing of the

ethnically disparate Afghan security forces only "accentuated" the preceding day's events. The stare down between the two groups was only made worse during the "late morning funeral procession" being held in the village.

Perceptions of the image the team projected to the local populace was that all the American personnel were inside of the base camp with the Tajiks. The team's concern was it was projecting an image that aligned the Americans with the Tajiks. To show "camaraderie" with the local populace and the team's Afghan police counterparts, the American team leader joined them outside of the camp. The scene outside of the joint base camp was described as one where the local funeral procession stopped, and an angry crowd was building. The locals verbally assaulted the team's beleaguered Afghan police counterparts as a sign of their dissent. Soon the entire U.S. team exited the base camp, an act that created the following impression:

> It started to come across as, is that we as the U.S. force were coming out of the out-station and the Afghan Special Police were out in the street, but it wasn't intended this way, but it had this appearance of "us against them," even though I was standing there next to captain [redacted Afghan Special Police commander], his deputy was next to us, but it felt like we were opposed.

The local Pashtun crowd dispersed, and his American team members wisely moved back into the base camp; however, the American team's image "gave the unintended perception that we were falling back in line with the Afghan ODA [Tajiks]." As the Tajik team sergeant rode out of the base camp on an all-terrain vehicle with his rifle leveled at the commander of the team's police counterparts, the recollection was, "We need to diffuse this situation." The American team leader pleaded with the Tajik team sergeant, whom had just lost his team leader in the insider attack to "put your weapon down." The American team leader positioned himself in the middle between the Tajiks' in the base camp and a heavily armed Afghan police force out in the street. However, the Tajik team sergeant refused to comply with the American team leader's pleas.

In a fit of anger, the Tajik team sergeant expressed that "his guys got killed yesterday" and that he is "pissed off." While expressing his empathy for the team sergeant's loss, the American team leader told that he understood his sorrow but "what he was doing was going to make everything far worse." The American leader's pleas were not enough

to get the team sergeant to back down. The situation only deescalated after the American team leader asked his Afghan police counterparts to "to go and we'll talk about this later, let's just get out of here." While waiting for the new American Special Forces team to get their security set inside the compound and prior to taking off, the team leader "wanted my guys on the outside a little for political reasons." The reason for demanding this of his team was "if our guys [Afghan Special Police] feel like we don't care, then in a month the next insider attack will come from our own guys [Afghan Special Police]." During this incident the American team used an action strategy for de-escalation based on their team leader's ability to envision the images his team was projecting to the local populace. After recognizing that the team's positioning conveyed alliance with the Tajik dominated army unit, the team leader was able to re-position the team in a way that conveyed solidarity with their Pashtun Special Police partners. This re-positioning and the team's eventual withdrawal ended all possibilities for violence between the Tajik and Pashtun security groups.

P. FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND CONFLICTS BETWEEN AFGHAN SUB-GROUPS

American teams used action strategies which resulted in hindering future interactions with Afghan sub-groups because they lacked knowledge about their existing conflicts. Actions and behaviors indicative of this strategy were appearing to favor one group over another and placing groups in positions of authority over rival groups. Operators' that discussed these strategies in their narratives, did so from a learning perspective, applying lessons during the development of future strategies. The reasons teams implemented these strategies were based on ignorance and American's proclivity for general trust (Buchan, 2009) based on identity (security force members, police, etc.). Teams enacting these strategies constructed ambivalent social identity types. The following three critical incidents illustrate action strategies where American teams failed to understand existent conflicts between Afghan sub-groups.

1. Tribal Differences Were the Major Issue

This incident explores the action strategy used by an American team that entered their assigned district uninvited. There was a weak government presence in the district and security forces faced strong insurgent opposition to their control. Insurgents were defined as being Afghan Taliban. The population residing in the district held strong feelings of having been abandoned by the Afghan government. These feelings were reflected in the population's unwillingness to support the team's ALP efforts. As a result of the population's dislike for the Afghan government, Taliban insurgents operating in the district received strong support that was based on familial relations and perceptions they were going to be the victors in the conflict. The primary premise for this incident focuses on sub-tribal heterogeneity. The action strategy taken by the American team failed to understand existing conflicts between a tribal population living in the district and an Afghan police force supporting the manning of a checkpoint in their village. The Afghan police force manning supervising the checkpoint were historic rivals of the tribe living in the village. The rivalry between the two Pashtun sub-tribes went undetected by the team until it was too late, which resulted in the village's elders demanding that the ALP checkpoint be removed from their village and left the team's flank vulnerable.

The team established a relationship with the elders of a village to the east of the team's base camp. The team's interest in the village was based on their observations of "a ton of [insurgent] activity" taking place within the village. The reported and observed insurgent activity motivated the VSO team to recruit a handful of local ALP from the villages around their base camp for the purposes of eventually "reestablish[ing] a checkpoint" that used to exist within the village. The team's "overt" and "covert" visits into the village were greeted warmly by the village's elders. "There were no real issues. We were sitting down, and we were talking, and we made inroads with the villagers." The team was warmly invited into the village elder's home for talks. During the visit the team was fed and served chai, which led to the observation, "They wanted us there, they knew that when we come that supplies come with us. So, their attitude toward us was good." After meeting with the village elders on multiple occasions, both in their village and at the

team's base camp, the elders agreed to support the "reestablishment of the ALP checkpoint."

The ALP that were used to man the reestablished checkpoint were from neighboring villages. The elders knew the ALP members and "didn't mind them at all;" however, the Afghan National Police (ANP) force that was sent to train and supervise the ALP checkpoint in the village came from the provincial capital. It was the source from which "the problem arose." After the ANP entered the village "the whole cultural tribal difference started to rear its ugly head." The police force from the provincial capital "were of a different tribal affiliation" then the village's population; therefore, the "relationship from the start was bad."

The actions and behaviors of the outside police force in the village was described as:

> They were very corrupt, uncooperative. The ANP that were in there were very disrespectful towards them. They were very overly aggressive with any of the locals. Let's say they would go and conduct like a foot patrol in that particular village. They were not super friendly with the way they were going in.

Other offensive behaviors enacted by the ANP in the village were described as they would "throw" the villagers around and hit them while taking over property, such as buildings without asking permission. The consequences for the team's future interactions with the village were described as:

> It completely—very quickly deteriorated the relationship that we had with those guys because we were trying to counter anything negative that they did and it finally just got to the fact that there was just more negative than positive happening.

Other outcomes linked to the police force's behaviors were "attacks on that particular [ALP] checkpoint." The village elders stated very frankly that "we are tired of supporting you." The attacks on the ALP checkpoint in the village rapidly became more coordinated and lethal, to the point that the "ALP were like 'Wow, sorry guys we are out of here."

When asked if the ANP precipitated the deterioration of relations with the village, the operator very adamantly expressed, "Yes, they were definitely the antagonist." The effects of losing the ALP checkpoint were described as devastating to the team's mission:

> Because that checkpoint went down, it pretty much took away what the—for lack of a better word—what was our farthest east position that let us have an idea of what was going on or have some type of force in that area and it completely opened up the whole eastern side to where we were at.

The team was unable to regain a "foothold" back in the village after the elders pulled their support and the ALP refused to man the checkpoint.

The team's failure to understand the sub-tribal conflicts which existed between the population's they were charged with securing and outside Afghan security forces caused them to lose influence in a key area of a challenging district. The team presented a hybrid social identity with the village's population. This identity unfortunately represented the actions and behaviors of both American and Afghan security groups. Given the overwhelming uncertain American teams faced while entering districts uninvited it was difficult for them to recognize the subtle conflicts existing between tribally diverse groups. However, as evidenced in this incident, failure to recognize these conflicts often resulted in catastrophic effects for American teams using hybrid social identity types.

2. Our Good Guy Was Shot in the Head

This incident explores the action strategy used by an American team in response to the death of an ALP member whose body was discovered in a rival Pashtun tribe's village. The team was invited into a district by a tribal elder within the ethnic minority Hazara community. There was no government presence within this portion of the district. No impressions were given that any sub-group within a very diverse region held strong feelings of having been abandoned by the government. Tensions between ethnic and tribal factions within the district caused significant instability. The district was comprised of predominately Pashtun tribal groups who were often in fierce competition with each other for control over power and resources. Residing in the middle of these conflicting Pashtun groups lived an ethnic Hazara minority community. Contestability within the district was

explained as being heavy primarily in the remote and rural eastern portions of the team's area. The contestability in this area was attributed to the cultivation of opium poppy used to finance insurgent activities, according to the operator.

The events leading up to this incident begin when an elder from an outlying Pashtun village entered the VSO team's base camp asking for the team's help to secure his village. The elder had to have traveled a long way to seek the team's assistance. The team's experience interacting with the people within the elder's area were "never really friendly … there were drugs out there, fields of opium, and fields of marijuana. It was more of like the hinter lands." The elder's village area was also a place used by the Taliban to exploit the areas illicit resources.

The situation for the area changed on the day the elder entered the team's camp asking for assistance. The elder told the team that the "Taliban are passing through and they are hurting people, I am done with it." The statement was followed by the elder asking, "Can you please help me?" The attitude of the people living in the elder's village about the Afghan government were described as:

> These people have no trust in their government at all. Realistically, why should they? So, the more you talk to them, the more you kind of would sympathize with their position.

The significance of this event indicated that the people in the elder's area were starting to believe the American team was committed to security in the area. The team immediately traveled out to the elder's village and trained a 25-man ALP force led by the elder.

Circumstances changed however, when the village elder was discovered dead in a Pashtun village, far away from his own village. The sight of the dead elder was described as, he "had been shot in the head, but he was dead. The guy who owned the house was dead right next to him." The bodies of the deceased were discovered on top of the house. The best explanation for what occurred between the two men was:

> From what we could ascertain, he was there doing a good ALP thing. The guy had a grenade. He shot the guy, killed the guy, he fell on the grenade. Someone else

> shot him in the head. So, our good guy was shot in the head, killing the bad guy who had a grenade, and fell on it

The village elders wanted to know what had occurred and what the village elder was doing in the village. The outcomes from the team's failure to understand the conflict between the two Afghan sub-groups paid off because it "helped us actually recruit more people in the end." The VSO team expressed to the district's elders, "Look, you can't secure your own area that's why we are here," explaining the deceased elder's presence in the village. In the end, the VSO team wound down their tour in the district by recruiting the maximum allowable number of ALP. "After that incident, the villagers—all the villagers—came to our site, kind of descended upon our site. So, we probably had 200 people." The team used the visit as a forum to express why villages needed to support the APL program and be responsible for securing their own villages. Local elders were able to identify another man they implicated in the murder of the village elder. It was apparent to the team that the elder shot the man holding a grenade, but no one knew who killed the elder. "The [district's elders] explained to us what they had found out from talking to people that were out there that night that a certain individual was responsible for killing the ALP leader." Subsequently, the ALP force turned the individual over to the legitimate Afghan authorities for prosecution:

> They took him, and they turned him in to the police and he went to jail and I don't know where he went after that, but he went into the system. But, it worked the way it should.

During this incident, the American team was able to leverage their failure to understand the conflicts existing between Afghan sub-groups by presenting an argument that the village where the murders occurred was not participating in the ALP program; therefore, the murdered elder was in the village as part of his ALP duties. The team in this incident used the existence of conflicts between rival tribal groups to motivate all the villages in the district into volunteering to support the ALP program. The team used a hybrid identity type developed for establishing security solidarity between tribal rivals.

3. I Would Call it Initially a Mistake

This incident explores the action strategy taken by an American team that initially failed to understand the conflicts between Afghan sub-groups. This incident involves the same VSO team documented in the previous action strategy. Events leading up to this incident began during the team's entry into the district. The team established the district's ALP program within the Hazara areas of a Pashtun dominated district. The team's invitation to conduct VSO was extended by a Hazara elder that had helped the team with a stuck vehicle during their entry into the area. The primary issues stemming from the area's Hazara-Pashtun demographics centered around the main road through the district. This was a road that provided access to the government, main bazaar, and most importantly, access to "healthcare;" however, the Hazara minority lived in a pocket was surrounded by rival Pashtun villages.

It was also an area whose people were unfamiliar with Americans. The team's presence was described as "completely foreign to everyone there in every sense of the word." The team initially established relationships and built a nascent ALP program among the district's Hazara minority. This initial arrangement did not bode well with the team's superiors or the Pashtun tribes in the district. The team was eventually ordered to move the program into the Pashtun community.

The American team in this incident lacked understanding about the hostilities and distrust that existed between the Hazara and Pashtuns. The local Pashtuns immediately had problems with the American team's relationships with the Hazara and their recruiting of Hazara ALP. "The Pashtuns basically had no respect for the Hazara ALP." Even after the team moved their base camp into Pashtun's areas visiting Pashtun elders displayed contempt for the team's use of Hazara ALP to guard the camp. The problems that stemmed from establishing relationships with the minority Hazara population first was described as "initially a mistake."

The team moved into the Pashtun area not out of any "grand strategy" devised by the team's higher headquarters, because according to him, "No one knew anything about this area." He discovered, instead, that there were "political reasons" based on the

importance of the main road running through the area. Other reasons for establishing the team's base camp in the Pashtun area were described as, "If we would have stayed in just the Hazara area, the population is much, much smaller. It's definitely a minority, but it would have bred more contempt."

The VSO team used the Pashtun elder's contempt for the team's Hazara ALP security at their base camp as both leverage and incentive influencing the elder's decisions about support for the ALP. After the team initially established a base camp in the Hazara community, they packaged up a list of incentives, such as "school supplies" to entice the Pashtun's into supporting the program. Because of the team's leveraging strategy, "the Pashtun started working for us." The American team in this incident took a while to both fail and then learn about the conflicts that existed amongst the district's ethnic sub-groups. They were subsequently able to recover from what was defined as "initially a mistake" in establishing their initial relationships in the area. The American team only acquired this knowledge through a process of learning described as, "We found all this out over the course of then 9 months" of prolonged interactions with the district's diverse sub-groups.

Q. WITHDRAWAL FROM IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

Action strategies in which American teams withdrew from near impossible situations were enacted in areas considered unsusceptible to the ALP program. Actions and behaviors illustrated within this strategy were recognition of uncontrollable political factors, time constraints, and an inability to influence populations with no understanding of an Afghan state. Teams enacting this strategy understood that the costs of attempting an ALP program in these areas was greater than the benefits they could achieve. Teams also understand that they did not have the time to facilitate the interactions necessary for establishing an ALP program in these areas. Teams withdrawn from these areas and reallocated elsewhere were a better use of American resources. American teams enacting this strategy constructed mostly military social identity types. The following three critical incidents explore strategies in which teams were withdrawn from near impossible situations.

1. You Are Not Giving Us Enough Time to Make it Work

This incident explores the action strategy used by an American team that conducted VSO in a district where the accumulation of challenges made it nearly impossible to succeed at the mission. The team was invited into the district where the government presence was "in name only," according to the operator. The district's governor resided far-away in the provincial capital, the operator admitted having never met the man. The population of the district harbored strong feelings of being abandoned by the coalition and the government. These feelings stemmed from a 3-year lapse in coalition security presence in the district. It was a district that strongly supported the Afghan government prior to the prolonged absence of coalition security forces. The absence of security forces however, left the nascent district government and its population exposed to the terrors of Taliban retribution. This high-point of Taliban retribution in the district when they "burned down the district center" that contained all the district's government buildings. The only local leader willing to work with the team "felt abandoned and betrayed" by the Afghan government, according to the operator. It was also a district where insurgents violently contested any government attempts at asserting their authority.

This incident is an accumulation of the actions and behaviors the American team used in reaction to the provincial government's unwillingness to provide support for the remote district. The district had "no semblance of a district government," setting assistance for the "re-creation of the district government" as a primary goal for the team. The team discovered quickly that they would not be receiving any support from the provincial government. Initial actions taken by the American team leader were, "I started calling around and I tried to get the provincial government to come down." While in conversation with the provincial governor, the team leader declared, "I don't care if you send the secretary or the janitor—somebody from the provincial government should come down here." The provincial governor's response was "[redacted district] is the gutter of my province."

Other initial team actions taken by the team were unintentionally deceptive in which they told the district's leader, a leader unsanctioned by the Afghan government, that "the province hasn't forgotten about you—the coalition forces haven't forgotten about

you—you're important to the cause." Other promises made to the local leader concerning the teams and Afghan government's commitment to the district were "no we're here as long as it takes—we're not going to abandon you." The team deceptively arranged for the provincial governor of the neighboring province to visit. The neighboring provincial governor's visit, "caused some issues because now they all wanted to run to [redacted province] and they thought that they were controlled by [redacted province]." The team's ruse did not end at simply having the neighboring province's governor visit for reassurance to demonstrate the Afghan government's committed, it also went so far as to have them tour the neighboring district's Police checkpoints, located at the boundary of the district.

The team used these out-of-district checkpoints to create "local face" for engaging the populace and "co-opt" local leader support for the creation of an ALP force. The outcomes of the team's deceptive measures were described as "kind of interesting—but it helped—we started to get a little bit more support—more buy in [from the indigenous population]."

In the process of executing these illusory measures the team suffered four casualties after one of the team's vehicles struck an IED. In the aftermath of these casualties the received "a WARNO [warning order] that, 'Hey we're closing it down.'" The American team leader was filled with emotion after his team had sacrificed so much while trying to stabilize the district. He described asking his leadership, "So you're telling me that all the—everything that I tried to accomplish here – the sacrifices that these guys have made," that now higher headquarters was closing the VSO site in the district. The American team leader expressed to his commander, "You're not giving us the time to make it work." He further emphasized to his commander, "Hey sir, you realize if you shut this place down—you're never getting it back." The team leader's emotions and reasoning were not enough to persuade his commander to keep the VSO mission going in the district.

In the end, the team was prematurely withdrawn from the district after only 5 months in which they made many unfulfilled promises and sacrificed members of their team. Lofdahl's (2016) government competition modeling for VSO operations would have classified the population of the district as unsusceptible to accepting an ALP program. The American team in this incident used an action strategy that attempted to construct an

isomorphic and hybrid social identity premised primarily on deception. However, the conditions under which the team entered the district and premature withdrawal made the possibility for any measures of success nearly impossible.

2. In All Honesty, I Would Just Cut the Program

This incident explored an American team's action strategy used for reacting to the appointment of an ALP commander that would be viewed as illegitimate by the local populace. The American team was assigned the mission of establishing an ALP program in the district with only two-months left in Afghanistan. The district was "very well connected to the central government of Afghanistan," all the way up to the president of Afghanistan. However, the district's strong connections with the Afghan central government contributed to the American team's adoption of the immutable identity type they used during this incident.

The problem with starting an ALP program in such a district was explained as: "The president appoints who will go to provincial governor positions, district governor stuff. That's why they are bought and sold. That's why there is all that corruption at that level." Both the provincial and district governors were appointed by the Afghan president, both were from southern Afghanistan and had no vested interest in the people of the district. The problem with the appointment of outside leadership was based on regional and tribal differences. The local population's attitude towards their district governor was described as, "They are just like, fuck that guy, like he's from the south."

The population viewed the district's government, and everyone appointed to positions of power in the government as illegitimate based on the fact that the provincial and district governors were from southern Afghanistan. The team's philosophy on what makes ALP so effective for a district's security was, "One of the main reasons the ALP I think was the best thing going was because it was their area, they fought for it because it was their area." The provincial governor did not "truthfully care if [redacted province] turns to shit because all of his people are in the south." The political appointment of outsiders to government and security positions contradicted the philosophies from which

VSO/ALP are premised. The provincial governor's feelings based on who he appointed to be the next ALP commander of the district.

The predicament this appointment placed on the American team was described as "one of the dynamics that you know, you just have to deal with" during the VSO mission. The American team recommended an ALP commander they felt represented the people to the provincial and district leadership; however, "The provincial governor was adamantly against" the team's recommendation. The process for the selection of an ALP commander was "a political nightmare." The American team felt the situation was "getting crazy. You know, at this district level you are having presidential politics getting involved." The provincial governor's nominee for the district's ALP commander was a person for whom "everyone else in the district was adamantly against." The team's sentiments for the provincial and district government during the nomination process were described as:

> If you don't put this guy in to the ALP commander position, and he's not the guy we would have chosen, he's not the guy the local populace would have chosen—so you had your *shura*—let them try to elect like who do you nominate to be the ALP commander. Well, they nominate this guy. Well, this guy is connected with [the president]. [The president]'s people are calling us.

The nomination of an ALP commander that was under the provincial and district governor's influence was going to cause a situation where "nobody would have listened [to the ALP commander], nobody would have signed up [for the ALP program]." As explained by the operator, the provincial and district governor's nominee for the ALP commander position was "wining and dining" his team with some of the best food the operator had ever eaten in Afghanistan.

The provincial and district governor's nominee for the ALP commander did not win any influence with the American team. At the end of the nomination process, the American team made the determination on where to place U.S. resources for the creation of an ALP program. When the team's commander asked for their recommendation concerning the ALP program they made the following recommendation:

> Hey sir, in all honesty I would cut the program here and move somewhere else because this place isn't ready for it yet because you are going to cause problems.

The American team understood the appointment of an ALP commander from outside of the district would be unrepresentative of the local community. They also understood that people not native to the district had less vested interest in the areas security and this ran counter to the philosophy backing local defense initiative strategies used in counterinsurgency warfare, such as the ALP. In the end, the team that relieved the operator's team made the same recommendation to their commander, and an ALP program was never put in place within the district. The American team understood that the situation with the nominated ALP commander would have created a near impossible situation for the long-term sustainability of such a program. The VSO team that relieved this team was, therefore, prematurely withdrawn from the district and placed in a location where they could be more effective. In this incident, the American team used an immutable identity type in response to uncontrollable Afghan political decisions by recommending the abandonment of VSO operations in the unsusceptible district.

3. Getting Them to Back Some Sort of National Government Is Absurd

This incident explores an American team's sentiments about convincing unsusceptible Afghan populations to support their government. Feelings of abandonment were experienced by the American team based on the population's unwillingness to work with the American team. Ethnic disparity in the form of conflicts between sub-tribal rivals existed in the district's police force. These sub-tribal divisions were not described as having caused any interactional problems between the American team and their hosts, but it may have attributed to the team's inability to make in-roads with the elders. The district's population inherently support the Taliban movement and the district was assessed by the team as being controlled by local elements of the groups. Taliban control was overwhelmingly perceived within the complex of villages occupied by the American team. The population's connection to the Taliban made the area unreceptive to supporting the district's extrinsically motivated ALP program.

leading into the critical incident for this explorative example were initiated by the operator's descriptions about Conditions, such as the district's remoteness, isolation, and levels of depravity experienced by the villagers shaped the strategy the team used for

creating an uncommitted ALP force. IEDs along the main route into the complex of villages essentially cut them off from the rest of the world and resulted in the team creating an "artificially inflated" local economy and "hollow" security organizations. The American and Afghan team were solely dependent on air delivered logistics for everything, including vitally essential fuel. The assistance given to a local shop owner was artificially stimulating the local economy; it just was not possible for the shop owner to keep his store's inventory up after the American team left. It was a situation assessed by the team as "I think at one point this guy was being paid money to just run his own shop."

Another example of a project described as hollow gesture was the building of a well within a nearly abandoned village community. The well was built with the hope that it would incentivize the return of the village's residents. The American team's thoughts on the well were:

> If we build some wells, if we build these different things in that small town of [redacted], people will look at it; oh, that well looks great, we should move back into the area. You know and occupy these houses. So, we built literally some well was built and you know like a big pump and a motor was funded.

None of the Afghans moved back into the village while the team was there, and local farmers continuously "would plan to steal that pump or plan to somehow get it to benefit themselves." It was further clarified that no one in the community viewed the well and its pump as an item that provided for the greater good of the community.

> It would be somebody who had a poppy crop that would directly benefit from their ability to irrigate this thing with a pump that was what I would refer to as artificially injected into this almost like closed environment of this valley that wouldn't have had those things otherwise.

Thinking the local economy was going to turn into a thriving and sustainable entity because the team artificially supplied a local store or built a pump driven well was just naïve. The team's sentiments were developed after prolonged interactions with the district's population and the observance of an enlightening local *shura.* The audience for the *shura* was described as approximately 20 local elders, fighting age males, and even young children from the surrounding villages. The *shura* was being run by multiple Afghan security organization's commanders. One of the Afghan commanders was "giving them

his soapbox spiel" and "almost shaming" the audience for their lack of government support. The Afghan security team's message to the audience was interpreted as, "This is your valley, this is your village, and how do you let the Taliban come in here and do this to you?"

One elder responded to the accusation by stating, "I have lived here my whole life and I never saw—there was never an IED here until you guys came here." The elder—whom the operator described as probably illiterate, someone that had probably never travelled outside of that valley in his entire life, and that probably only knew how to farm opium poppy—had a valid point that resonated with the American team. The operator drew this assessment given his experiences in Iraq where insurgents looked to destabilize the local communities by attacking the infrastructure and disrupting transportation flows. In this remote and isolated community, however, there was no infrastructure to attack. There also was no real traffic flow to disrupt moving into and out of the village complex. Therefore, "those IEDs were just there to destroy, to blow us up. Blow up Americans and Afghan Army or Afghan Police." To lend credence to the influence that this dialogue had on the team's thoughts about the American mission to the district, the operator described the rural population's reactions to visits by Americans and Taliban alike, as a process to placate both sets of belligerents. The shifting of the team's attitudes about winning local sentiments after the *shura* were explained as:

> You know, those people are just—they are very basic. I mean they are concerned with like the poppy crop or the rain or the well dry…They don't know anything about presidential candidate and a national government has no effect on them unless we are there building village stability platforms and drawing enemy attention.

The American team's sense-making process were influenced by the elder's responses during the *shura.* The district should have been designated unsusceptible for VSO/ALP. After hearing the sincere sentiments of a local elder during a *shura* with local Afghan security leaders the team determined that their efforts in the district were futile. The team derived new meanings about Afghan governance and their place mission within an unreceptive population based on uncontrollable conditions affecting the district. The American team used an isomorphic identity type that was developed out of empathy for a population that was violently affected by their presence. The VSO site in the village

complex was closed shortly after the team's withdrawal from the area. The local population reoccupied their abandoned villages after American and Afghan security forces withdrew completely from the desolate area. Taliban IEDs, threats, and intimidations disappeared from the area after the absence of coalition forces.

R. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON ACTION STRATEGIES

This chapter explored action strategies used by American teams and their role in the construction of American team social identity. The next chapter will explore the interactive processes taking place within these action strategies which contributed to the creation and constant adaptation of team identity performances used to facilitate interaction with Afghan groups.

VI. EXPLAINING AMERICAN TEAM IDENTITY ADAPTATION IN COMPLEX CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined a typology for social identity (identity performances) construction and the action strategies American teams used for developing and adapting social identity. This chapter provides an explanation for the process in which teams enacted strategies, attended to feedback cues, and altered strategies to accommodate cultural conditions. Interpretations and explanations about the adaptation of American team social identity will be illustrated using an adaptive identity performance process, Figure 9 graphically portrays later in the chapter. This chapter also defines characteristics making up conditions affecting the environment that facilitate or hinder interactions between American teams and Afghan groups. These characteristics were determined to effect American team meaning-making and social identity adaptation based on the complexities and local cultural practices they experienced.

1. Initial Conditions Types

The categorization and modeling of salient characteristics that emerged during analysis of conditions American teams experienced in Afghanistan. The characteristics of these conditions were categorized into an initial conditions' typology. Assessment of the initial conditions types where then used to subjectively model American team probabilities for facilitating interaction within districts. The discussion begins with the importance of invitation and the consequences for teams not being invited into a district. It will then describe, explain, and model the probable effects across the four initial condition types-based invitation status, either invited or not invited. Discussions about the effect invitation has in comparison to four salient characteristics (governance, abandonment, disparity, and contestability) are accompanied by quad-chart models illustrating its comparison. The overarching goal of the quad-charts are to illustrate the probability of teams facilitating interaction. Probabilities are assessed on an interpretive continuum from highest to lowest.

Figure 4 is an example of a quad-chart-model used for describing government presence and the invitational conditions experienced by American teams.

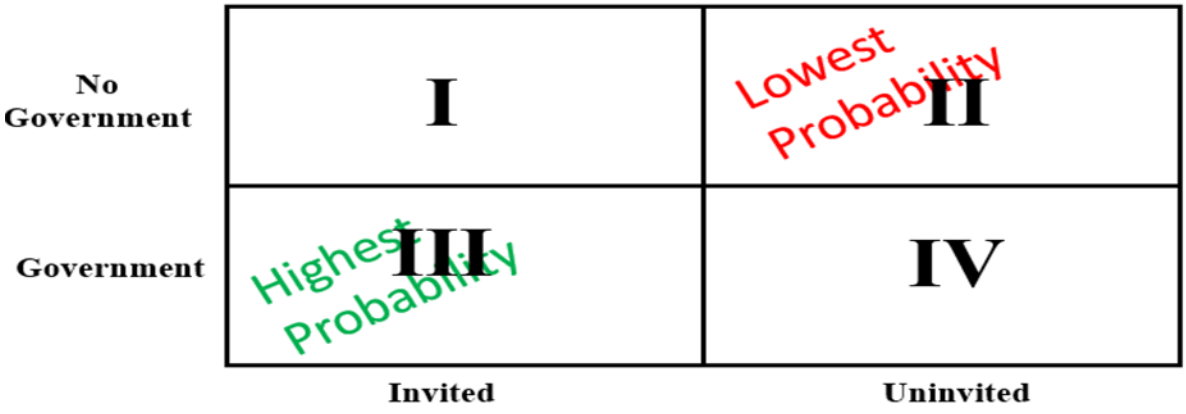

Figure 4. Government/invitation model

Invitation into a district is one of the primary tenets of VSO and the importance it plays is detailed in the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force's (CJSOTF-A; 2011) tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP) publication, titled *Village stability operations and Afghan local police: Bottom-up counterinsurgency.* This Special Operations publication provided a "theoretical foundation and overview" emphasizing the importance of teams being invited to live in the local districts and villages designated as being susceptible to the VSO/ALP program (DoD, 2011, p. 1). Teams invited to live and operate in a district had a higher probability of facilitating interaction and fostering strong relationships. In situations where invitations were not offered, the teams were faced with a more complex set of interactive challenges across the four initial conditions.

Grounded theory coding of critical incidents identified four conditions affecting interaction between American teams and Afghan groups. *Governance*, *abandonment*, *disparity*, and *contestability.* The combination of these conditions played a major role in affecting meaning-making and social identity construction dependent upon the action strategies American teams employed.

The first initial condition is whether there was an Afghan government and/or security force presence in a team's assigned district. As discussed in the setting chapter, VSO teams worked along three lines of effort—security, governance, and development—while conducting VSO missions (DoD, 2011). The Afghan government is a salient factor because members of local government often served as sanctioned gateways into the local community for American teams. This did not necessarily mean that the local community accepted or invited the team into the area, but that government presence provided a good starting point for initiating interaction and building rapport within these communities.

Figure 7 below, illustrates districts with a government presence in which teams were invited to live among indigenous populations fell within Quadrant III. This quadrant illustrates government/invitational conditions that represent the highest probability for facilitating American team interaction. There were outliers for this interpretation, such as circumstances where the local government was viewed as not being accepted by the local population based on perceptions of government corruption or complacency. Quadrant II illustrates government/invitational that represent the lowest probability for facilitating American team interactions where teams entered districts with no government presence and they were not invited. Government/invitational initial conditions that lie within quadrant I represent situations where teams were invited into districts with no government presence. Quadrant I represent conditions with a high probability for facilitating interaction, but not the highest. Invitation is of more importance for facilitating interaction then government presence. Quadrant IV represents conditions with the lowest probability for facilitating interaction.

Feelings of abandonment existed in districts where there had previously been either an Afghan government or coalition forces presence that was prematurely withdrawn. This model represents situations where the premature withdraw of Afghan government or coalition security forces left a possibly cooperative local population vulnerable to the threats and intimidation of local insurgency groups. For abandonment/invitational conditions modeled in Figure 5, those that lie within quadrant III represent conditions where American teams had the highest probability of facilitating interaction.

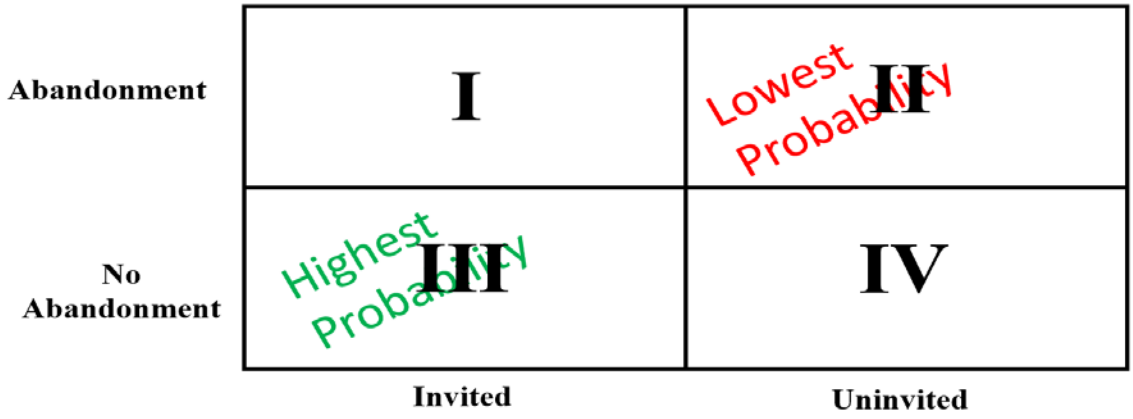

Figure 5. Abandonment/invitation model

Conditions falling within quadrant III also represent situations where American teams were invited into districts with local populations that harbored no feelings of abandonment. Quadrant II represents conditions with the lowest probability for facilitating interaction. Quadrant II represents teams that were uninvited into districts and the local population harbored feelings of abandonment representing.

Feelings of abandonment do not necessarily mean the local populace's sentiments resided with insurgent groups. According to operators, in most cases, the local populace just wished to be left alone by all belligerents involved in the conflict. In the case of the intermediary quadrants I (i.e., invited and previously abandoned) and IV (i.e., uninvited and never abandoned), teams were generally not invited back into districts that had previously been abandoned. Quadrant I represent incidents in which the Afghan government reestablishes a local presence and then invites American teams into the district. American teams with a lower probability for facilitating interaction resided within quadrant IV.

The third initial condition type is *disparity*. Disparity is determined by the interpreted levels of heterogeneity versus homogeneity that exist within a district. Working with the ethnically, tribally, or sub-tribally disparate groups residing within these remote Afghan societies was a challenging condition. Teams were determined to develop understanding and knowledge about the subtle rivalries and differences existing between

factionalized Afghan groups only after living among these group for extended periods of time. The conflicts existing between Afghan groups forced American teams to develop adaptive interactive strategies. Disparity caused teams to be more mindful of how they publicly displayed influence with local leaders, being careful not to upset the delicate balance of power within these societies. It also forced teams to be mindful, although unknowingly, about the factors associated with "segmentary solidarity" (Glatzer, 2002). In review, "segmentary solidarity" was a phenomenon in which Afghan groups in conflict with one another were willing to put their differences aside and ally with one another in opposition to a common threat, such as American teams. Figure 6 illustrates the disparity/ invitation model used to determine the effects that conflicts between ethnic and sub-tribal groups had on the probability that the American teams could facilitate interaction.

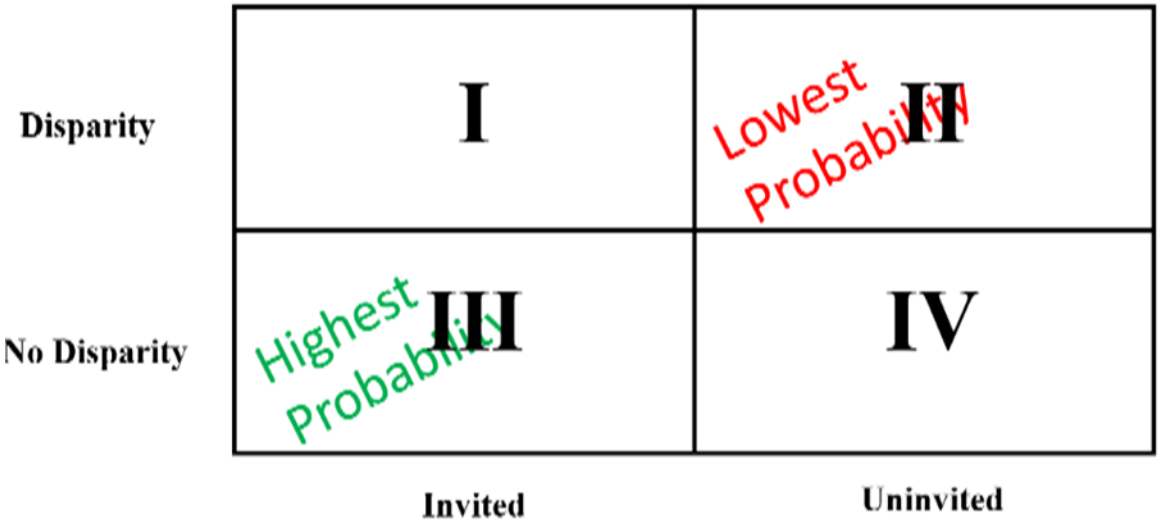

Figure 6. Disparity/invitation model

The disparity/invitational initial conditions categorized in quadrant III represent conditions with the highest probability for facilitating interaction. Initial conditions that lie within quadrant III reflect homogenous societies comprised of a singular ethnic group with little or no conflicts existing between sub-groups and teams were invited to operate in the area. Conditions that lie within quadrant II represent the lowest probability for teams

facilitating interaction. Quadrant II conditions were defined as districts with high levels of ethnic and tribal heterogeneity, and the American team was uninvited. Fault lines between groups, who are often in conflict for the nation's scarce resources, represented conflicts that American teams needed to recognize and bridge while attempting to facilitate interaction.

Quadrant I represent initial conditions where teams were invited into districts with high levels of disparity. Divisions between these ethnic and tribal groups presented significant interactive challenges for American teams; being invited into these areas provided a higher probability for the facilitation of interaction. As illustrated in quadrant IV, areas defined as heterogeneous, that teams did not receive an invitation to enter, provide lowest probability for facilitating interaction.

The final initial conditions type to be discussed is *contestability* which is illustrated in Figure 7. Contestability is the willingness of insurgent groups to violently engage American teams and Afghan security forces for control of a district. The degree of contestability varies significantly, influenced by the fighting season which occurs during the warmer, spring and summer months. Some teams arrived during the extremely cold winter months while insurgents were dormant, only to inaccurately assess the intentions of their adversaries and the confirming feedback they receive from the local populace. Nascent assessments about adversarial intentions would quickly alter team action strategies and social identities with the onset of the fighting season.

Quadrant III in the Contestability/invitation model reflects the highest probability for facilitating interaction. Initial conditions defining quadrant III were based on the lowest levels of contestability and teams being invited. Quadrant II represents the worst-case scenario in which teams found themselves uninvited and immersed within a heavily contested district. Some VSO teams used these opportunities to implement strategies involving demonstrations of force, thus enhancing the teams influence amongst the local population. As in the other models, higher levels of contestability are more conducive for facilitating interaction when an invitation for American presence is given by local leaders. Quadrant I was, therefore, provides a higher probability for facilitating interaction even

though it represents higher contestability than Quadrant II; however, invitation is considered to trump contestability in the use of this model.

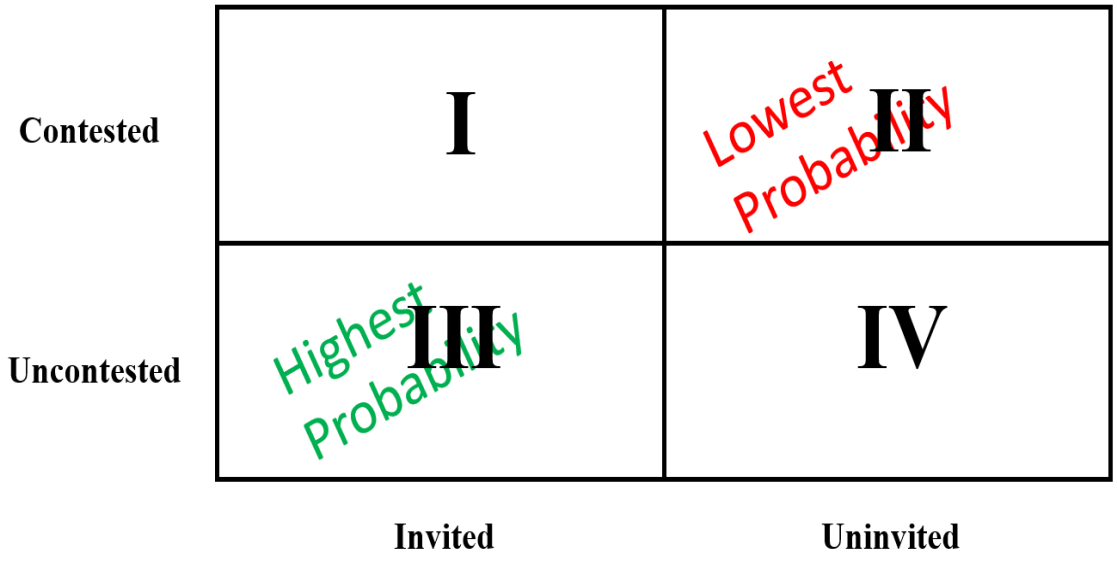

Figure 7. Contestability/invitation model

This section outlined an emergent initial conditions typology that was constructed out of grounded theory analysis. Invitation was defined as being more important for facilitating interaction than all four of the most salient initial conditions. It detailed the use of quad-chart models for visualizing the effects the four most salient conditions had on the action strategies used by American teams. This initial condition typology is based on the outcomes of the action strategies explored in Chapter V. The goal of this section is to demonstrate the effects of the relationship between these initial conditions' types and the process by which teams altered their social identity strategies. It must be stated that there were far more initial conditions affecting the facilitation of interaction than the four outlined in this section; however, these were the most salient during grounded theory coding. The combination of invitation status and initial conditions add multiple feedbacks that affect American team interactions.

2. The Effects of Initial Conditions on Team Information Processing

The proceeding incident supported the effects initial conditions had on shaping team social identity construction and meaning-making. These conditions also affected their information processes. American teams developed novel information acquisition and processing methods in response to the conditions they experienced. The announced end of U.S. combat operations in Afghanistan in 2014 also effected local feelings of impending American abandonment. These initial conditions forced the team to alter the ways in which it gathered and processed information based on interactive uncertainties. As a by-product, it also forced the team to adapt the construction of their social identities from presenting a purer American identity, to more of a hybrid Afghan-American identity.

An illustrative incident of the initial conditions effects on American team information processing is documented within the narrative of a team entering a highly contested district after the U.S.'s announcement for withdrawal of forces from the country. This announcement froze the team's ability to recruit ALP and hindered their abilities for facilitating interactions with local communities. The district contained a strong government presence and a committed Afghan local police group; however, local elders no longer volunteered male community members due to the announced U.S. withdraw. These conditions significantly altered the ways in which the team acquired, validated, and processed information. The incident begins when the team receives second-hand information from the local government that insurgents are planning to transport locally cached weapons to an isolated village some distance from the district center where the team was based.

Because of reduced access to direct intelligence, the American team in this incident realized that they needed to rely more on indigenous intelligence networks. The team validated this source's information covertly by employing unmanned aerial systems to over-watch and track the car transporting the weapons, which was driven by information's source. This novel technique also enabled the team to establish credibility and expand cultural networks cited as:

> Later, the source calls in and says, "Yep, we went. We picked up 4 PKMs [heavy machine guns]. They're all brand new, still in the Cosmoline."

The team used a hybrid social identity (i.e., American and Afghan Security Team) from which to conduct a raid on the village where the team tracked the weapons. The raid caused the Taliban to fire into the village and subsequently wound a local girl. The operator described the consequences of the Taliban attack as a *catalyzing moment*:

> So, in the process they wounded a little girl, right. So, she got fragged. We provide medical aid. She's not too badly hurt. We provide medical aid and a village elder who was related to her was completely outraged by the fact that they had chosen to shoot inside the village thus risking the population rather than to attack the ANA soldiers who were sitting, you know, on the hillsides around the village. So, he considered that cowardice on the Taliban's part and essentially declared his—you know, it was the *catalyzing moment* for him that he was now going to fight against the Taliban and to resist the Taliban.

Because of the Taliban attack, the hybrid Afghan-American team were able to expand their cultural networks into the targeted village by rounding up a "number of young men" from the village and transporting them back to the district's capital for questioning. The operator explained that taking the young men in for questioning was merely a ruse to enable the village elders to travel to the district's capital. The ruse made it look like the elders were petitioning for the release of the young men, when they were providing valuable intelligence information to the district governor. This information primarily focused on the location of insurgent weapons caches inside of the remote village. The operator described the information process as:

> The district governor rounds up a number of young men and takes them back to the district center, holds them as a forcing mechanism to get elders from the village to return 2 or 3 days later. And when they do, this particularly outraged old man becomes part of the district governor's intelligence collection network.

The hybrid Afghan-American team failed to recover the heavy weapons that the governor's intelligence source originally reported. It was in the remote village, but the team was unable to discover the exact location. The governor's expanded intelligence network because of the raid, however, paid even greater dividends during subsequent raids. The information provided by the village elder concerning the location of weapons caches became more refined during the team's subsequent raids into the village, as described by the operator:

> We ended up going back once by ground and we found two of the caches, a little less than 10,000 pounds of explosive components, and blew them in place… this time [next mission into the village] we go back with air cover the entire time and still get into a minor indecisive long-range gunfight, but discover these two caches, blow them up. He [village elder] comes back yet again and says, "Hey, you missed one of them. Here's where it is." We went back by air, found that one as well.

The existence of a strong government presence, high contestability, and the fact that American withdraw was imminent forced the team to adapt the ways in which they gathered and processed information. Given the impending U.S. withdrawal, the team understood local hesitation towards supporting their ALP programs or the team's organic intelligence network. This forced the team to construct a hybrid social identity that conveyed a message that the team was leaving but Afghan security forces can keep the district secure. Because of these hybrid identities, the team was able to leverage the district governor's intelligence networks. The leveraging of indigenous intelligence networks however, decreased the reliability of information the team received about insurgents. To counter this problem, the team deployed novel systems for validating information. In this example, the team demonstrated the use of unmanned aerial systems as a validating source. The covertness of using unmanned systems enabled the team to validate information supplied by indigenous sources in a manner that did not convey distrust to their indigenous hosts. This increased the reliance the team could place on information acquired from indigenous networks, while demonstrating trust and solidarity within Afghan government and security forces.

The highly contested conditions in the district worked in favor of the hybrid team in this information processing example. The insurgent's rocket attacks into the village injured a little girl and pushed a very influential village elder's sentiment towards the Afghan government. This condition, in turn, expanded the district governor's intelligence network in the village, meaning that it also expanded the team's cultural network. The team's ability to adapt their social identity performances increased their ability to interact with the indigenous population in ways that increased the reciprocal exchange of information between them and their hosts. This example illustrated the effects that initial conditions had on VSO teams' information processing and meaning-making.

B. OUTCOMES OF THE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

Several different methods for conducting this grounded theory research were used during analysis. The analytical coding process was conducted using Charmaz's (2014) coding techniques but implemented the methods identified by Gioia et al. (2013) for structuring and presenting qualitative rigor. The research's use of the term *concept* is consistent with its use in organizational studies, in which it "mean[s] a more general, less well-specified notion capturing qualities that describe or explain a phenomenon of theoretical interest" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 16). To avoid confusion between use of the terms *construct* and *concept*, the research viewed a *construct* as being more applicable for use in empirical methods of investigation, methods involving variables and measurements (Gioia et al., 2013). This section clarifies the meaning and use of the term *concept* up front to avoid any misunderstandings later in the chapter. The next section presents the outcomes of the initial coding process by describing the emergent concepts discovered during analysis.

1. Concepts

The process of initial coding was not mutually exclusive from the process of data collection. Interviewing and initial coding occurred simultaneously, and initial coding shaped the interview protocol based on the emergence of a more coherent theoretical framework (Gioia et al., 2013). The initial coding process was conducted using a line-by-line coding technique. The purpose of using a line-by-line coding technique was defined by Charmaz (2014) as "a heuristic device to bring the researcher into the data, interact with them, and study each fragment" (p. 121). This tedious coding technique helped construct the "implicit meanings" and discover American team "actions" that possibly would have been ignored in other initial coding techniques (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). Initial coding facilitated the discovery of "explorative direction" and the comparative analysis of similar patterns of action. The technique also provided a basis for discovering relationships between emergent processes which contributed to the evolution of an "emergent theoretical framework" (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

After the recursive process of initial coding, constructed 4,805 initial codes, which contributed to the discovery of 55 emergent concepts. Many iterations of comparative analysis and memo writing, became the basis for selecting the 55 most salient and significant initial codes illustrated in the study's data structure Figure 8 below graphically portrays. The initial coding and subsequent interviewing process repeated until subsequent interviews failed to divulge new "data relationships" for an increasingly more pronounced emergent theoretical framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Theoretical saturation was achieved after initial coding 52 of the 73 critical incidents. Once initial coding became theoretically saturated, the process of identifying initial relationships between emergent concepts and themes began.

2. Themes

The process of "sifting, sorting, synthesizing, and analyzing" the most salient initial codes, forced continual thought at multiple levels of analysis to derive "what was going on" within interactions between American teams and Afghan groups (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140; Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20). An *emergent theoretical framework* based on adaptive social identity emerged during the initial coding process that influenced changes to the interview protocol during the collection of subsequent data. Grounded theory analysis required working across multiple levels of analysis, from the line-by-line initial coding at the level of retrospective reality, up through the salient concepts that emerged from initial coding, then onto the more abstract thematic level of focused codes (Gioia et al., 2013).

The focused coding phase culminated during the analysis of incidents when no new data related to the emergent theoretical framework emerged. Focused coding analysis was a higher level, perceptual task and resulted in highlighting which themes were most important in relation to the emergent theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2014). The process required the making of "informed choices" based on supporting narrative and emergent codes that went into building a theoretical anatomy. The focused coding process also required constant comparisons between incidents to discover the "similarities and differences" between concepts (Charmaz, 2014, p. 140; Gioia et al., 2013). Focused coding shaped initial conceptions about an adaptive American team social identity phenomenon

"that many people may have experienced or witnessed but have not yet conceptualized" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 141).

During focused coding using the 55 most salient concepts, discovered after initial coding, derived 19 focused codes based on emergent themes. Concepts and themes are illustrated in Figure 8 below. Saturation was achieved in applying these 19 focused codes after coding 48 out of the 73 critical incidents. After theoretical saturation, a process was started to define the relationships between concepts identified during initial coding and themes that emerged after focused coding. This non-linear process required analysis to move back and forth between initial coding concepts and focused coding themes. It was only after relationships between initial coding concepts and focused coding themes were established before analysis transitioned into theoretical coding and the defining of aggregate dimensions.

3. Theoretical Coding and Aggregate Dimensions (Data Structure)

Theoretical codes are intended to be integrative, meaning they "lend form" to the study's emergent concepts and themes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150; Gioia et al., 2013). Gioia et al. (2013) referred to the process as "distilling" out second-order codes [focused codes] by combining them to form aggregate dimensions. Aggregate dimensions were constructed based on relationships between the research's concepts and themes (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 20). Charmaz (2014) described this process as moving the "analytic story in a theoretical direction" (p. 150). Analysis drew on the knowledge of both Gioia et al. and Charmaz in this phase of the grounded theory process. This phase is the subject for debate amongst grounded theory scholars, as to how much the codes are "emergent," or an application of preexisting knowledge (bias) held by the researcher (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150; Glaser, 2005).

Thematic coding resulted in the construction of the data structure (Figure 8). The data structure is a visual representation that illustrates the relationship between raw data (concepts) and aggregate dimensions (themes) of this research's theory on alternate social identity (Gioia et al., 2013). The data structure also illustrates the 55 concepts grounded in the operators' narratives. It also illustrates the 19 focused codes that are interlocutors linking the aggregate dimensions and concepts. The data structure is analogous to human

anatomy in which the skeleton is a static representation of the body. In this instance it is a frozen representation of the research's substantive theory. Figure 8 is a linear and abstract model in comparison to the theory's process which will be discussed in subsequent sections. However, the data structure is a model that graphically portrays the rigor that went into this inductive research (Gioia, et al., 2013).

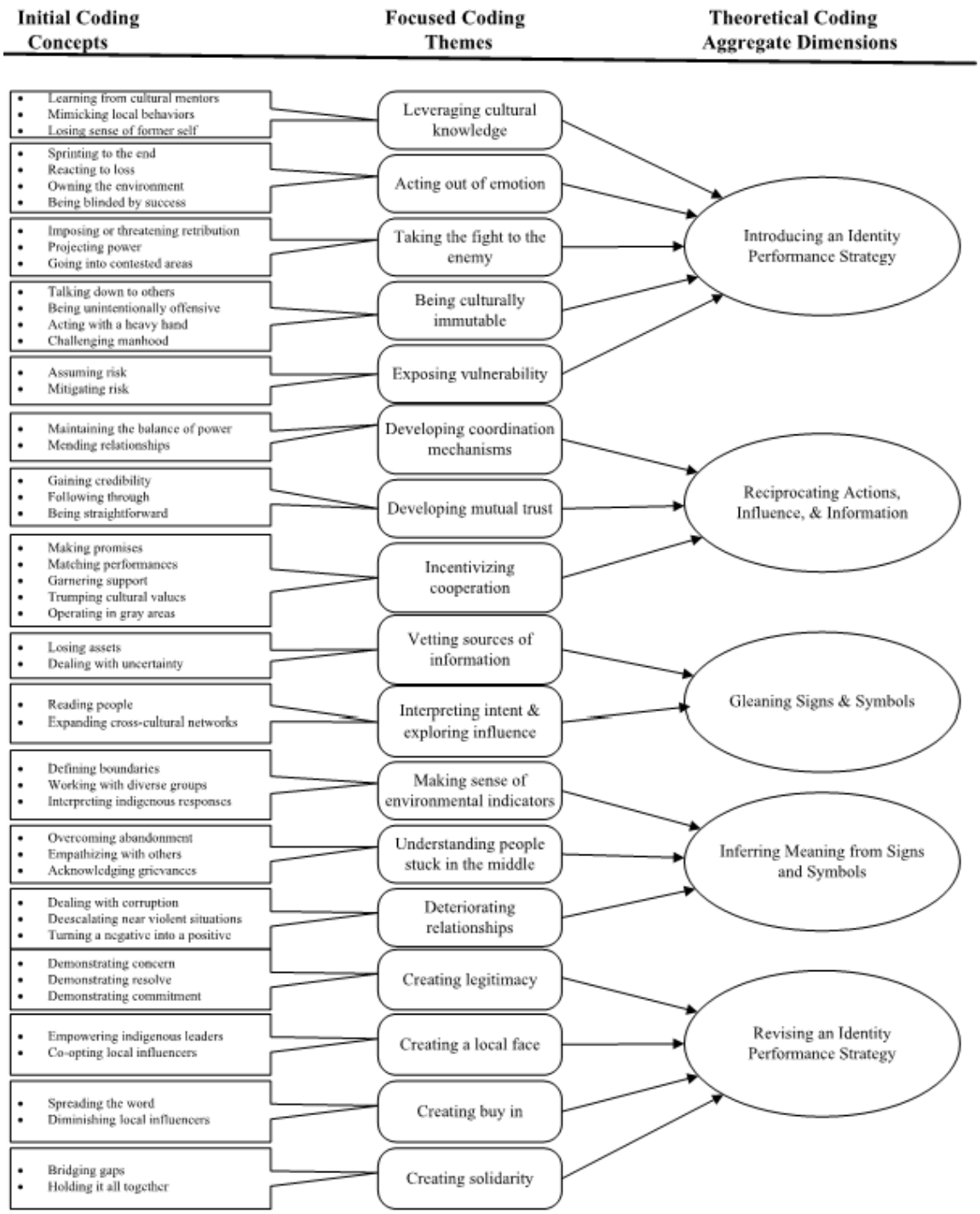

Figure 8. Data structure

C. INTRODUCTORY IDENTITY PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

The research viewed introductory identity performance strategies as *a priori* social identity strategies teams developed prior to immersing themselves among Afghan communities. These nascent social identity strategies were influence based on information teams possessed about the environment's conditions. These baseline social identity strategies were used as instruments for comparison after future interactions with the Afghan groups. These initial social identity strategies or identity performances deployed by teams were either confirmed or disconfirmed based on the reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, or information between their team and Afghan groups.

From the perspective of this research, identity is a key component in the way American teams viewed themselves organizationally. The action strategies that teams deployed for shaping their social identity were defined in the ways they conveyed team images to rural Afghan populations as methods for sense-giving. These introductory strategies, while not viewed as identity performance strategies by the operators, were deliberately influenced and constructed by VSO teams based on perceptions about the physical, human, and information environment. These introductory identity performance strategies were also shaped by the teams' past collective experiences working in foreign environments, possibly societies and cultures to those they were experiencing. In some instances, members of these VSO teams had a working experience with the population in which the team was immersing itself; such experiences assisted in the creation of the team's introductory identity performance strategy going into the mission. In other situations, the VSO team possessed nothing more than a general understanding about the social and cultural norms of the greater Afghan society at large.

1. Identity Performance Strategy

Introductory identity performance strategies were comprised of all the identities, behaviors, actions, influences, and information exchanged during a team's initial interactions. The strategies were heavily influenced by the combination of environmental conditions and the sociocultural knowledge the team possessed, neither dimension being mutually exclusive to one another. Identity performances were enacted action strategies

often rehearsed and practiced prior to interactions. Manners of dress and grooming standards were altered to fit the part. Language, messaging, and cultural practices were considered prior to first contact. Action strategies were developed in accordance with the village stability operations methodology, and as described by the operators, goals were defined in terms of locally sustainable programs for governance, security, and development, particularly in highly contested areas. All goals were in concert with and influenced by the Afghan National Government. Team goals seemed simple enough abstractly; however, they came with a great deal of uncertainty while enacting action strategies.

2. Conclusions

Introductory identity performance strategies were *a priori* personas. They were developed using combinations of past team member experiences and abstract understanding about the complex cultural environment. They were created to project an initial image of the team in unstable and uncertain conditions. The presentation of these initial identity strategies served as a baseline for reducing interactive uncertainty by constantly monitoring for signs and symbols of both their own and the Afghan population's intentions and expectations. Through this feedback, VSO teams inferred whether monitored signs and symbols acquired during interactions confirmed or disconfirmed the action strategies teams used to form their social identities. Confirming interpretations reinforced social identities and assisted in facilitating interaction. Conversely, when teams interpreted the projection of their image to be disconfirming and therefore hindered interaction, they experimented with adaptive identity performances. The evolution of these adaptive social identity strategies, as expressed in in operator's stories, led to the discovery of the salient identity types explained in Chapter V.

It is important to note that the adaptive identity performance strategy typology described in the previous chapter applied to both introductory and adaptive identity performances. No two identity performances of the same type occurred in the same manner throughout this research. It is also important to note that the teams' identity performances never remained permanent. VSO teams adopted, adapted, and created adaptive identity

performances continuously throughout their immersion in the Afghan landscape. It was a dynamic and continuous phenomenon entailing sense-giving, information gathering, sense-making, and revising identity performances. Identity performances were dependent on process, not outcomes.

The next section introduces the introductory phase of American team image projection and the conveyance of nascent intentions. These phases often occurred simultaneously to one another, they were ongoing and continual, and occurred even during periods when neither group, American nor Afghan, were physically interacting in the presence of one another. These phases are presented linearly the purposes of simplifying description and explanation of the emergent adaptive social identity theory. Figure 9 illustrates the physiology of the adaptive social identity process.

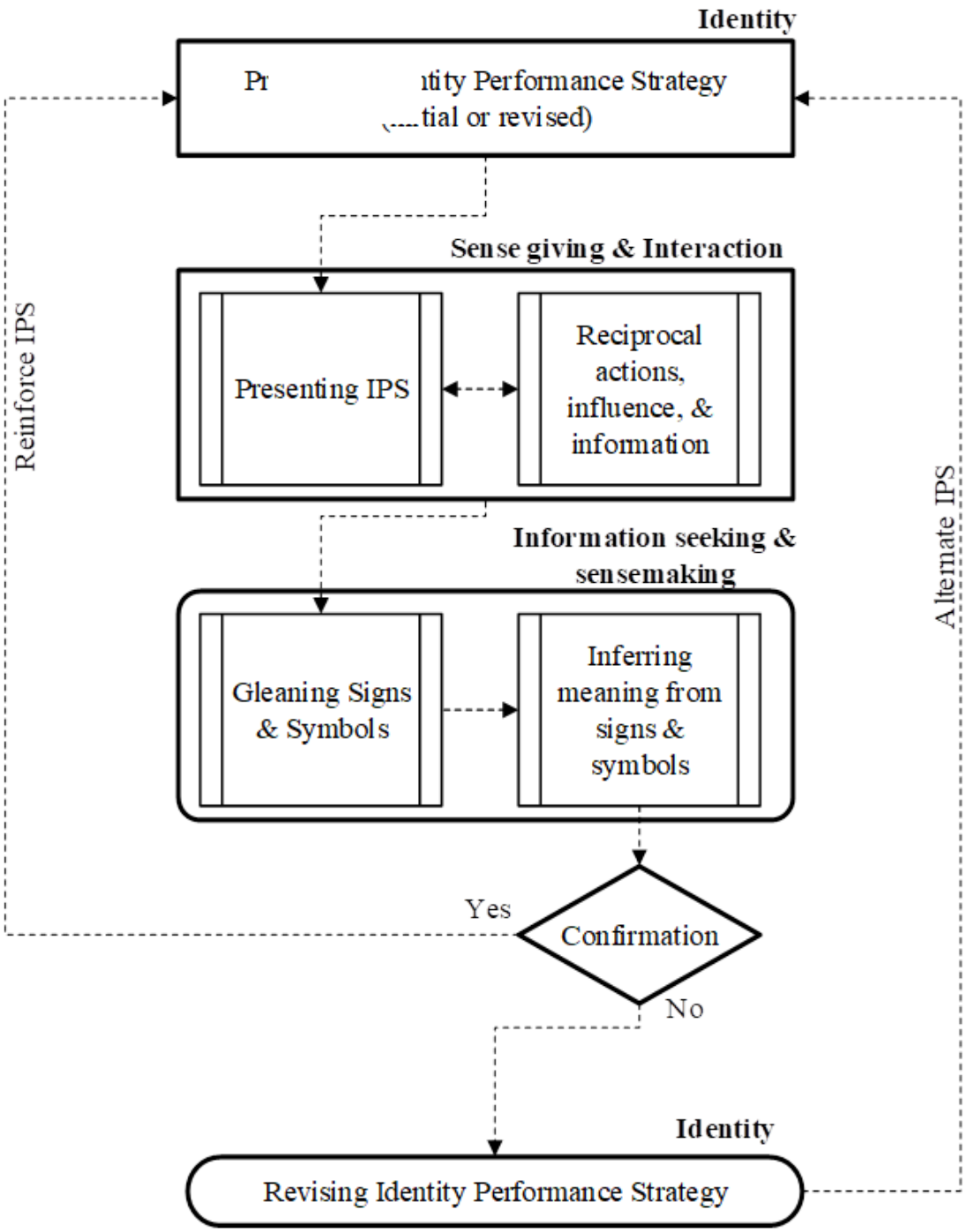

Figure 9. Adaptive identity performance process

D. PRESENTING AN IDENTITY PERFORMANCE

Both introductory and revised (adapted) identity performances were presented during this phase. The discussion will be divided into two categories covering the concepts and emergent themes discovered during the presentation of an identity performance as an aggregate dimension (Gioia et al., 2013). The introductory portion will discuss the themes associated with introductory and adaptive identity performance such as leveraging cultural knowledge, exposing vulnerability, taking the fight to the enemy, and being culturally immutable. The only reactive theme identified, that falls within this dimension, was acting out of emotion. In was discovered as occurring in response to environmental conditions and cues determined as traumatic experiences that affected teams. Acting out of emotion and was discovered as influencing the revising of a team's performance strategy, usually in response to traumatic experience such as the death or wounding of a team member.

The relationship between the emergent concepts and themes for the presentation of an identity performance as an aggregate dimension are discussed in this section. The emergence of similar patterns for the introduction of identity performances were discovered and categorized within five salient themes. The following salient themes for presenting an identity performance discovered were: (a) leveraging cultural knowledge, (b) exposing vulnerability, (c) taking the fight to the enemy, (d) being culturally immutable, and (e) acting out of emotion. The themes and their associated concepts will be discussed in this section. Table 4 lists a few of the operator quotes supporting this aggregate dimension.

Table 4. Presenting identify performance

Aggregate Dimension	Representative Quotations
Presenting of an Identity Performance Strategy	*"I didn't have any illusions as in one day we're going to win them over to our side but there were a lot of, there seemed to be a lot of misconceptions or a lot of mistrust towards the Afghan government in general and so the way we had it structured was we would talk for 45 minutes or so and then we would break and throughout the day we would do different things like we got a detail together. We had Afghan Commandos and Afghan ALP with us. The Commandos, I knew some of them from earlier operation in the Afghan, the ALP that we had knew them and our interpreters because they have had five or six rotations with the SEAL teams, they knew these Commandos too. So the way we set it up was they would take a detail of political people and then go get food and bring it back to the compound. So every now and then and it was especially good if I could do that after they accused us of being harsh and not taking care of the people, it's like oh yeah well so and so is already out there getting you guys firewood and food and we're bringing you this or that and we're compensating for the inconvenience. We brought this for you or something like that."* *"So in the process they wounded a little girl, right. So she got fragged. We provide medical aid. She's not too badly hurt. We provide medical aid and a village elder who was related to her was completely outraged by the fact that they had chosen to shoot inside the village thus risking the population rather than to attack the ANA soldiers who were sitting, you know, on the hillsides around the village. So he considered that cowardice on the Taliban's part and essentially declared his, you know, it was the catalyzing moment for him that he was now going to fight against the Taliban."* **"***Immediately after that incident when we went back, it was better. You know, I think it was a matter of us–they saw us so much because we were around all the time. We really focused in [redacted] at that point, so when we started–when we got shot there, we kept on going back. We are not going to stand for this and we started making a presence to go there.***"**

Initial Afghan perceptions about American teams were based on past experiences with westerners, the team's initial reputation, and/or rhetoric generated from insurgent groups.

1. Leveraging Cultural Knowledge

The leveraging of cultural knowledge emerged as a theme based on general understandings about Afghan societies. Teams acquired this knowledge from either pre-deployment training or past Afghanistan experiences. Some examples were language, regional political and military history, Islamic theology, tribal, and the cultural codes of

conduct. Teams received language training in regional dialects, such as Pashto or Dari. They studied the political and military histories of their assigned districts. Learning about the all-encompassing presence of Islam and its various sects, such as *Sufi* was important. Advanced knowledge about *Pashtunwali* shaped the presentation of introductory identity performances. Teams that used a working knowledge about local culture in their action strategies had a higher-level understanding about how these traditions were practiced upon entering their assigned districts.

What emerged were the differences in how this knowledge influenced the altering of team social identity. Teams lacked the more nuanced micro level understandings about how cultural norms were practiced at the village level. Emergent concepts such as learning from cultural mentors, the mimicking of local behaviors, and even individuals that lost a sense of their former selves were associated with the leveraging of cultural knowledge; however, the acquisition of cultural knowledge was a dynamic learning process. It started with a general understanding and eventually morphed into more specific understandings in which teams used this new-found knowledge. A more detailed discussion will be conducted in proceeding sections on the role concepts such as learning from cultural mentors, mimicking local behaviors, and the losing a sense of former self played in the presentation of revised identity performances American teams used.

a. Learning from Cultural Mentors

Learning from cultural mentors was in numerous operator narratives. It was a learning process in which American teams, either consciously or unconsciously, acquired sociocultural knowledge and understanding from members of the indigenous community, such as security counterparts or village elders. Interpreters were significant mentorship sources. Even though interpreters were generally not native to the districts in which they provided language support to teams, they were often making teams aware of and providing valuable insights into social cues that teams failed to recognize. An example of interpreter mentorship is their explanations for the significance of tea or food not being offered while visiting with Afghan groups. This nuanced sociocultural knowledge helped facilitate the reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, and information in future interactions with

Afghan groups. The concept of learning from cultural mentors supplied these American teams with knowledge about localized practices of sociocultural behaviors, norms, and the rules for the conduct of business. In many instances, this knowledge from cultural mentors led to the revision of a team's action strategy, that often involved the mimicking of local behaviors.

b. Mimicking Local Behaviors

The concept of mimicking local behaviors emerged from situations where teams mirrored the Afghan community's social and cultural behaviors. The goal for incorporating such a concept was a multifaceted one. Teams mimicked local behaviors for dress, grooming, language, and cultural practices to demonstrate reverence for the local culture. Mimicking was also used as an intrinsic incentive for the development of trust. An example of leveraging cultural knowledge was discussed in Chapter V, where an operator adhered to the strict Ramadan Fast as a measure for establishing the perception of credibility among the local populace. According to many operators whose teams used the mimicking of local behaviors within their action strategies, the concept promised the potential for unlocking the cooperation of Afghan communities that are unsusceptible toward a team's first attempts at VSO.

c. Losing Sense of Former Self

According to Weick (1995), identity is formed "out of the process of interaction" where "shifting among interactions is to shift among definition of the self" (p. 20). The concept of losing a sense of former self emerged during the nascent stages of this research. This is the process that an individual goes through while living among a foreign culture that results in them becoming fully assimilated members of these foreign communities. While only one operator, the team's leader, described suffering from a loss of self. This outlier occurred under conditions where the operator was extremely isolated and had complete autonomy over VSO operations. Bochner (1982) identified the assimilative process as affecting groups of sojourners deeply immersed within a foreign landscape. One highly documented example of team level assimilation not deeply explored by this research

can be found in articles describing the removal of Major Jim Gant's VSO team in 2012 (Gant, 2009; Thompson, 2014).

The danger from either teams or individual team members, such as team leaders, falling prey to this assimilative process is that their actions, influences, and information behaviors work towards supporting the superordinate goals of the dominant culture. Teams or individuals losing a sense of their former selves, means losing their national identity. Individuals losing a sense of their form selves conduct tasks and support the goals of the culture in which they are immersed. These native goals often countered American goals for stabilizing rural Afghan districts. The phenomenon of "going native" only occurred in one case within this investigation, in which it was found to have spawned out of a strong desire to leverage cultural knowledge and mimic local behaviors. It could be viewed as the ideal state in the revision of an identity performance, complete assimilation; unfortunately, this ideal state would into outcomes that were contrary to U.S. goals.

2. Exposing Vulnerability

Exposing vulnerability was an emergent theme discovered during the presentation of identity performances in which American teams expose themselves to the indigenous population in ways that could be perceived as increasing the potential for physical or emotional harm to the group. The projected image of exposing vulnerability to Afghan groups was often illusory or deceptive. American teams made tremendous efforts toward disguising these ruses to manipulate the senses of Afghan groups. The deceptively higher levels of vulnerability being perceived by Afghans, however, were due to undetectable control measures emplaced by teams. The goal of exposing vulnerability was to build trust. This theme often occurred during teams' sense-giving efforts to project an image that conveyed to their Afghan hosts that teams trusted their abilities to protect their group.

Examples of exposing vulnerabilities included taking non-militant postures outside of the team's base camp, removal of protective equipment and weapons while meeting with indigenous leaders inside of their villages, and the exchange sensitive information with Afghan security partners. Two concepts that emerged were assuming and then subsequently mitigating risk. Teams assumed risks and sensibly took measures for

mitigating those assumed risks. In some situations, however, the assumption of risk simply could not be mitigated, and teams were forced to place a general trust in their Afghan security partner's abilities to provide protection, reliable information, and successfully act in a manner beneficial to the joint partnership's superordinate goals. The following excerpt supports this theme:

> Now in true American form we would take significant measures to mitigate that. It looks as though I'm just walking over to a random compound without my kit or without a weapon. But I would always bring a weapon, a side arm if nothing else. And then there's certainly plenty of people back in the compound paying attention and ready to move and so we, I think took a lot more mitigating measures because of it.

a. Assuming Risk

The assuming of risk was defined as a team's willingness to place members or the entire team in dangerous situations. As documented in Chapter V's action strategy examples, the assuming of risk was undertaken under two different temporally driven antecedent conditions for exposing vulnerability. The first condition occurred under time constrained conditions where the risk simply could not be mitigated. In time constrained situations, teams had to quickly weigh the potential for failure against the ramifications to future interactions if the team decided not to assume the risk. During these situations, teams were required to blindly consider the position, competency, and regional perceptions about indigenous groups or actors and what generally trusting them meant for the enhancement of future interactions (Buchan, 2009). Timely decisions involving assumed risk often occurred during the introduction of initial identity performances when circumstances dictated that teams make quick decisions with a lot of assumed risks and insufficient time to deliberate about how best to mitigate these risks. The following excerpt supports the emergence of this concept:

> We were kind of new there. So, they knew that there was another American presence, but they were army and we were distinctly different from them. So, once we did that, they actually took us back. It was funny because this guy actually it was the weirdest thing. I probably took a little risk here in doing this, but that's just the way that I kind of went along anyways, so me–after that it was all done, everyone knew it was happening. So, he took me back to his–so his Qalat is a little bit separate from the main village that was there. So, he took me back and I went

into it seemed like a little back alley way and it was just my team was back at the vehicles and I said hey, I will be right back.

b. Mitigating Risk

The mitigation of risk often occurred after initial introductions had already been made with Afghan hosts. Teams used risk mitigation concepts defined as calculated and deliberate processes that affected the adaptation of their initial social identity. Risk mitigation is defined as the process VSO teams used to mitigate the potential consequences of exposing vulnerability. Some examples of these mitigation measures emerged as: concealed weapons, the wearing of body armor underneath of uniforms, the use of code words and gestures for signaling danger, the deployment of technological assets, and the emplacement of concealed marksmen. The presentation of identity performances involving risk mitigation emerged as a deceptive practice that gave the indigenous population the sense and illusion that teams were making themselves vulnerable.

3. Taking the Fight to the Enemy

Taking the fight to the enemy was based on environmental conditions that indicated government control over a district was being highly contested by insurgents. The projection of an aggressive team image, such as taking the fight to the enemy, served two purposes. The first purpose was to create what VSO teams defined as "white space." When queried about the meaning behind their use of this term, operators defined it as areas perceived to be under the control of the Afghan government and where the probability of being attacked by insurgents was unlikely. The creation of white spaces was essential for the recruitment, equipping, and training of local defense forces. Highly contested areas restricted and constrained the American teams' access to Afghan populations. Operators reasoned that the only way to create white space was to act violently and proactively against the physical threats posed by environmental adversaries.

The second purpose for teams taking the fight to the enemy emphasized measures used for gaining power within Pashtun tribal societies, namely military gallantry (Glatzer, 2002). Success in military conflicts was a deeply revered quality held by members of Pashtun communities. In many cases being successful in military conflicts determined the

transition of power within Pashtun tribal circles (Glatzer, 2002). The aggressive nature of U.S. special operations organizations made them a natural fit for presenting aggressive performances. Only a few operators discussed being initially cognizant about the role military gallantry played in establishing enhanced relations with locals. It was only through tested experience within the environment that American teams learned the significance of being the militarily dominant force had on local perceptions. As documented in Chapter V, this action strategy also brought with it, the potential to negatively alter local perceptions.

Using too much force or applying force on the wrong targets could result in projecting a bullying image. This theme was evidenced in the narrative of one operator, in which the conventional forces commander had used excessive force. According to the operator, it was a situation in which the conventional force commander "would take contact and they would just level everything. Drop you know, 10,000-pound bombs on everything. Which you don't need to … it was just the easy button." This misappropriation of force just "created more insurgents," according to the operator.

The overuse of force exampled in the preceding paragraph filled the local population with a sense of loathing for American teams and coalition forces in general. This theme is identified as an important premise for the presentation of identity performances used by American teams. Several salient concepts related to this theme are imposing or threatening retribution, projecting power, and going into contested areas. These concepts contribute to the theme and involve teams' either demonstrating or enacting controlled violence. One operator described the guidance he gave to team leaders concerning the application of force as:

> You have to be so judicial about your targeting. Goes back to that story when you are with your ANCOP [Afghan police]. If you kill the right guys, okay, you are going to have a positive impact. But, if you kill the wrong guys, you are going to have–well, what it is, is a force multiplier for the insurgency. So, you have to be very, very judicious about who you kill. So, the intelligence piece is more important than the kinetics. So … it takes a lot of maturity to do that.

a. Imposing or Threatening Retribution

Imposing or threatening retribution was a concept that reflected the actions and behaviors in which teams threaten or perpetrate emotionally harmful acts. The concept was

used to deter local support for insurgents and to influence cooperation with American teams. Teams used this concept in response to insurgent violence they perceived as being locally supported. It was also used within populations unsusceptible to their superordinate goals. It was discovered that teams imposed or threatened retribution through the use of the following means: (a) violence, (b) village politics, or (c) denial of resources. Some examples of this concept were the threatening of individuals' lives after attacks, reporting corrupt behaviors to higher level Afghan leaders, or denying the delivery of humanitarian aid to villages where attacks originated. Imposing or threatening retribution is a concept infused into the identity performances of American teams in the aftermath of successful military engagements against insurgents. Interpretations for teams using this concept were based on their desire to correct the oppositional behaviors of uncooperative Afghan actors and groups, including Afghan government groups.

b. Projecting Power

The projection of power emerged as a process where teams demonstrated the coalitions overwhelming military superiority to the indigenous population to deter attacks against organizations that support the Afghan government. It was part of the presentation of an identity performance where teams looked to aggressively—yet non-violently—send a visual message to Afghan groups. Some examples of these show of force demonstrations were low flying helicopters and aircraft over defiant populations and large village clearance operations comprised of American teams, NATO allies, and Afghan security forces. These clearance operations were intended to illustrate the ability to project military power prior to entering strongly contested areas.

c. Going into Contested Areas

The concept of going into contested areas emerged in incidents where American teams travel into areas interpreted as being controlled by insurgents. Teams travelled into contested areas to expand "white space," to project an image of military dominance over insurgents, to reclaim control of areas lost to insurgents, or to embed VSO teams into heavily contested districts. Another reason for traveling into contested regions was to disrupt the flow of insurgent manpower and materials, such as homemade explosives.

Efforts by American teams to travel into contested areas differed from previous coalition operations int these regions in that they were generally designed to not only clear areas held by insurgents, but to hold onto the area at the end of clearing operations. Control over once-contested areas was maintained by constructing base camps, checkpoints, and then creating local security forces. American teams travelled into contested areas as a part of their processes for presenting identity performances designed to influence the Afghan population's sense-making about the invincibility of local insurgents. They also attempted to instill in local populations, particularly local tribal leadership, the sense that the Afghan government was committed to security and governance for these districts.

4. Being Culturally Immutable

The presentation of identity performances in which American teams were unwilling to or ambivalent about adapting action strategies that accommodate for Afghan cultural norms, emerged as a theme defined as culturally immutable or ambivalent. This theme is defined as a teams' failure to learn and adapt their action strategies and identity performances based on knowledge about Afghan social and cultural customs. As discussed in Chapter V, culturally immutable teams used action strategies that involve the following actions and behaviors: (a) violated sacredly held cultural norms, (b) failed to understand conflicts between Afghan sub-groups, (c) failed in attempts to deescalate near violent situations, (d) applied shows of force that hindered interaction, and (e) were forced to withdraw prematurely after failing to facilitate interactions with Afghan groups.

This section discusses four emergent concepts that arose from operator narratives in which American teams displayed culturally immutable actions and behaviors. Concepts discovered during analysis and related to this theme were talking down to others, being unintentionally offensive, acting with a heavy hand, and challenging the manhood of Afghans. Discussions will be given for each one of these concepts and their relationship within the overarching theme. The first concept to be discussed is the irreverence associated with the concept of talking down to others.

a. Talking Down to Others

Behaviors associated with the concept of talking down to others were identified as addressing male members of the Afghan population in a derogatory, chastising, and irreverent manner. One example of a behavior that illustrates talking down to others was identified as demanding indigenous leaders act in support of coalition defined goals, teams acting in this manner habitually ignored the process of jointly defining superordinate goals with hosts. This caused indigenous leaders to "lose face" in front of those for whom they led (Bochner, 1982). Other examples were interpreted as using an air of superiority, thus projecting an image for the team that conveyed the message, "I know more than you do." Teams that talked down to their Afghan security counterparts, government leaders, and village elders had a magnified sense of self-importance and attitude that offended Afghan leaders, in most instances, it caused entire communities to "lose face" (Bochner, 1982). The differences between this concept and proceeding concepts was interpreted as one of consciousness; talking down to others was determined to be enacted consciously by perpetrators.

b. Being Unintentionally Offensive

Being unintentionally offensive are actions and behaviors that offended Afghans based on ignorance. This ignorance about local customs stemmed from a lack of knowledge on the proper norms associated with sociocultural etiquette. American teams that enacted action strategies that were unintentionally offensive either learned their behaviors were offensive or continued to project these images. It was determined that learning not to be unintentionally offensive was dependent upon the teams' ability to monitor and infer meaning from their indigenous hosts' responses. What was learned was then applied to adaptations of the team's future identity performances. American teams that failed to learn from the offensive behaviors they enacted were destined to continually project a culturally immutable image and therefore, hinder their future interactions.

c. Acting with a Heavy Hand

Acting with a heavy hand is as a process for interaction that uses disproportionate responsive actions and behaviors than what is necessary with respect to local perceptions.

A few of the distinguishing characteristics of this concept were identified as forcing people out their homes, the wanton destruction or damaging of property, and the disproportionate use of physical violence. It was a concept that either facilitated or hindered interactions, dependent upon context and the proportions of force used. The demonstration of military power and ability to be assertive was certainly respected and valued by Afghan populations but acting with a heavy hand had to be perceived as justified in the eyes of the local population. Teams that demonstrated acting with a heavy hand strategy that facilitated interaction, did so using a proportional measure of force considered both respectful and justified by the local community. Conversely, teams that acted using a heavy hand that involved a disproportionate amount of physical force that was perceived as unjustified by locals, projected a culturally immutable image that hindered future interactions.

d. Challenging Manhood

Challenging Afghan manhood was an irreverent process that publicly questions an indigenous elder's manliness in front of his followers. As evidenced in Chapter V, using strategies that involve this concept proved to be extremely ineffective. According to the only operator that discussed the concept, it was a strategy that caused multiple Afghan leaders to "lose face" in front of their people, thus hindering future interactions with the offended groups. The strategy was considered an outlier within the narratives analyzed; the concept was only discussed by one operator whose team supported a VSO team that he classified as being knowingly irreverent and uncompromising on local cultural norms.

5. Acting out of Emotion

Acting out of emotion is comprised of actions and behaviors that demonstrated American team emotional investment in the success of their assigned areas or in response to emotionally traumatic events, such as team casualties. Teams that used this strategy, adapted inwardly focused identities based on reactions to the environment for their own emotional benefit. Teams acting out of emotion projected irrational team images indicated by belligerent behaviors such as hollering, displaying fits of rage, and acting in ways perceived as disrespectful by Afghans. The consequences of this process were found to

strip Afghan leaders of any voice on environmental security, development, or governance. Acting out of emotion hindered future interactions with Afghans groups.

Several key concepts emerged as contributing to the process. Concepts related to this theme were identified as: (a) sprinting to the end, (b) reacting to loss, (c) owning the environment, and (d) being blinded by success. According to operators, their team's irrational behaviors during interactions with Afghans were not always immediately clear while events were ongoing. Operators expressed only understanding their team's irrational actions after years of retrospection about incidents. Subsequently, some operators used the lessons drawn from acting out of emotion to train and prepare Special Operations teams preparing to conduct missions that required interaction with indigenous security forces in complex cultural environments. Severe time constraints related to the end of American combat actions in Afghanistan had an adverse effect on the American teams' ability to facilitate interaction.

a. Sprinting to the End

Sprinting to the end was a concept that stems from the American teams will to succeed in a time constrained cultural environment. The sprint to the end phenomenon occurs after teams were successful in creating ALP programs in one area of a district and then required to expand the program into new and more unfamiliar portion of a district. Sprinting to the end is defined as a phenomenon where teams lose focus on risks and threats based on the use of previously successful action strategies in which time is more of a factor then it was in their previous successes. American teams that use this strategy enact behaviors that fail to account for existing sub-group conflicts. They also fail to realize that there is not have enough time for discovering, learning, or knowing about these preexisting conflicts. American team decisions under severe time constraints and the desire to be successful were interpreted as based more emotion than logic. One example of sprinting to the end occurred in an incident where the American team was constrained by time and forced to work with multiple Afghan security organizations with whom they were unfamiliar.

b. Reacting to Loss

Reacting to loss is a process comprised of actions and behaviors in response to the loss of team members because of insurgent violence. Reacting to loss was defined as the physical or emotional reactions American teams had in response to the death or wounding of team members or trusted members from the Afghan community. Teams enacting identity performances affected by their emotional reactions to the loss of team member(s) displayed behaviors associated with the deindividuation process (Zimbardo, 1969; Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1972; Milgram, 1974; Lovibond & Adams, 1979). These de-individuated behaviors developed under the guise of stereotypes about all members of the offending groups and were formed out of fear or hatred. The teams' responsive actions after the loss of team members resulted in the following actions and behaviors: (a) reprisal clearance missions, (b) challenging manhood, and (c) disproportionate uses of force. These actions were detrimental to future interactions. These actions were formed out of strong emotions, often influenced decisions to exact some measure of retribution from the local populace.

c. Owning the Environment

The owning of the environment occurred in districts where the local population felt trapped in the middle of the violence between the conflict's belligerents. Often, these communities felt abandoned by the Afghan government and coalition forces. Actions and behaviors that reflected owning the environment involved teams that received no support from the Afghan government or Afghan leaders. Teams faced with these circumstances determined that the only way to be successful within these conditions was to take ownership by making decisions for local Afghan leaders. Teams owning the environment projected an illusory image that suggests the Afghan government was committed to these abandoned populations. It was an image that was interpreted as stripping the indigenous population of their voice in local matters. Owning the environment is defined as the adaptation of identities that viewed the consumption of resources, information, and the handling of decisions as being solely under the control of the American team. An example supporting this concept is the creation of faux economies, such as building markets fully funded and supplied through coalition monies and resources. Other examples are the

creation of American-driven development projects, conducing unilateral (i.e., American only) military operations, and the creation of local defense forces without the input of tribal leaders. American teams enacting action strategies that included taking of ownership were found to create short term security; however, these security gains came at the sacrifice of long term and sustainable security solutions. This concept closely associates with the "fixes that fail" theory since security, governance, and development programs ceased to exist in these districts after American teams were withdrawn (Senge, 1990, p. 388). Teams owning the environment placed an American face on the solutions and programs for stabilizing these districts. Owning the environment facilitated interactions with locals that could be described as indifferent or uncommitted to the American teams cause.

d. Being Blinded by Success

The concept of being blinded by success is related to sprinting to the end. Being blinded by success is defined as a process where team success leads to overconfidence. Overconfidence causes teams to dismiss or blindly miss environmental indicators that were potentially detrimental to their lives and interactions. A primary characteristic of this concept was the teams' failure to account for the same factors they had accounted for in previously successful operations in similar circumstances. Teams were hyper-focused on one goal which caused them to miss environmental indicators that inevitably hinder interaction.

6. Summary of the Presentation of an Identity Performance Strategy

This section reviewed the themes and concepts that contributed to the presentation of identity performance strategies. This aggregate dimension emerged through the analysis of operator incidents of interactions their teams had with Afghan groups. American teams emerged as using five different yet related themes for the presentation of identity performance strategies. American teams introduced identity performances that involved the leveraging of cultural knowledge, exposure of vulnerabilities, taking the fight to the enemy, being culturally immutable, or acting out of emotion received varying responses from their Afghan audiences. Based on these responses, teams either reinforced strategies perceived as being confirming or learned to successfully revise strategies they found to be

disconfirming based on the responses of their Afghan audience. As discussed, some teams were discovered to have neither learned nor revised their identity performances; subsequently, their interactive experiences resulted in not only hindered interactions with Afghan groups, but most often resulted in their teams being prematurely withdrawn from their assigned districts. American teams identified as failing to learn and subsequently revise identity performances were categorized as culturally immutable. The next section explains the theoretical processes discovered after presenting identities.

E. RECIPROCATING ACTIONS, INFLUENCE, AND INFORMATION

The reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, and information served as an interactive framework within this research and was derived as an aggregate dimension for the development of American team identity performance strategies. This aggregate dimension is defined as the reciprocal exchange of the actions, influence, and information between American teams and Afghans based on each group's interpreted intentions and expectations of one another. These reciprocal exchanges were identified as evolving in a way that generally compensated for recognized deficits in each group's knowledge, capabilities, clout, or resources needed for accomplishing negotiated stability goals for districts. The in vivo code "help me, help you" was discovered in numerous operator narratives where teams looked to project a team image that conveyed they wanted to assist in creating stability for these Afghan communities.

The reciprocal exchange of actions, influence, and information between American teams and Afghans was identified as the primary reason for American teams to immerse themselves at the grassroots level of Afghanistan society. Without these continuously evolving reciprocal exchanges or interactions, American teams would have been unable to establish the type of coordination, trust, or cooperation necessary for influencing the development of local programs designed to deny insurgents refuge in these districts. Developing local defense initiatives, connecting the remote indigenous populations with the Afghan government, and evoking beneficial change to these remote subsistence farming communities either succeeded or failed during interaction.

Flows of reciprocating actions, influence, and information not only served as the premise for the sense-giving, sense-making, and identity performance process at the heart of the emergent grounded theory—it was the catalyst which drove the creation, learning, and revision of identity performance strategies. The reciprocation of actions, influence, and information (interaction) was the point at which American teams and Afghans simultaneously measured one another's perceived intentions and expectations. It was a process in which each group learned to negotiate and compromise with one another on superordinate goals for stabilizing these districts. It was during the analysis of this process in which three key themes emerged that were identified as contributing to successful, failed, or ambivalent interactions between groups. The aggregate dimension of reciprocating actions, influence, and information between these socio-culturally diverse groups shared a common pattern across all critical incidents.

These patterns emerged within the context of a complex cultural environment in which common themes emerged such as coordination mechanisms, the creation of mutual trust, and the incentivizing of cooperation. These three emergent themes enabled American teams to provide their Afghan hosts with a sense for their intentions, measure their hosts' expectations, and develop or revise identity performances through a process of gleaning and inferring information.

1. Developing Coordination Mechanisms

The development of coordination mechanisms was a naturally occurring—rather than deliberate—theme. It was defined as the process that American teams went through to solidify, synchronize, and produce interactive routines. These routines are developed under the auspices of Afghan tribal traditions, namely from the perspective of the *shura* or consultations between adult male Afghans. Teams adapted their coordination primarily with Afghan security partners and tribal leaders by using methods that were adopted from local variations of the egalitarian based systems for coordination. The *shura* served as the team's unit of analysis for initiating contact.

Other coordination mechanisms were the development, adaptation, merging, and adoption of a hybrid set of operating procedures between American teams and their Afghan

security partners. These hybrid standard operating procedures were used to de-conflict responsibilities, synergize the effects of joint military operations, target portions of the civilian population, and present an image of solidarity. The following key concepts related to coordination mechanisms were: maintaining the balance of power and learning how to mend fracturing relationships Table 5 presents operator narrative supporting the reciprocation of actions, influence, and information.

Table 5. Reciprocating actions, influence, and information

Aggregate Dimension	Representative Quotations
Reciprocating Actions, Influence, and Information	*"But, when the guys in [redacted village] came, that was like a big one for us because he walked up to our site and said, "look, if you can help me, I have 25 young men who are ready to sign up and secure our portion of the valley." Because the only other pass–this was the only road, but there was a mountain pass that came around [redacted village] and back up through here. So, it would have been right–you can push that as a Hazaras checkpoint here, there is a Hazaras checkpoint here, lock down the Hazara area, and gave the [redacted village] guys to block the only other pass that other people would use–mountain passes with their goat and everything, and donkeys–to get through. So, then we can lock it down from the south. So, we jumped on that, we trained him, we trained his guys."* *"So, when we got down to [redacted district], the district governor who was an ANA was like–and the ANP chief–were, "hey, I am interested in this and we would like some ALP down here." I said okay, well I'll tell you what, I need you to take responsibility for [redacted district], because this is where we are bringing in governance now. We had some small development projects going, we had security going now. We need to tie in the governance."* **"***We did the whole bridge for maybe 25 hundred bucks if that. That includes paying the local laborers – a week's worth of labor. It was very, very cheap. We built the bridge – we built the process – it was standing for probably about four five weeks – we had a massive torrential rain and it tore that bridge apart. Nobody ever complained about it though. They heard – what the villagers saw is they heard their request come to us – we found a – we were trying to work within local solutions for their local problems. As opposed to creating a flow from the District that's unsustainable – those unrealistic or promising ones – we instead turned it back on the locals and said, "Hey if you help us we'll try to help you. We're in this together. This is our village – let's work on this together." We brought some of the materials – they brought the labor – we paid a fair price – not an inflated price – we got the bridge built. It worked for a while so when it went away it wasn't a quote-unquote disaster in the sense of like the damn bridge fell down.***"**

a. Maintaining the Balance of Power

Learning the intricacies and nuances of the ethnically and tribally fractured populations presented a significant challenge during the development of coordination mechanisms. This was a challenge that required prolonged exposure to the fragmented populace to achieve the levels of understanding necessary for maintaining the balance of power in these areas. American teams that were successful in recognizing the conflicts that existed between Afghan sub-groups were most capable of digging beneath the societal surface of local communities. They had to achieve a level of understanding about the signs and symbols that indicate differences exist that splinter sub-groups. Maintaining the balance of power is defined as the process VSO teams use to recognize conflict between Afghan sub-groups. Failure to recognize the existence of rivalries brought the potential to turn non-violent rivalries into violent conflicts, especially when one group is perceived to be gaining more power and American teams appear to favor one group over another.

Chapter V presented a critical incident where an American team was able to recognize and successfully address the bifurcated relationship that existed between two rival Pashtun families controlling a village where the team was expanding the ALP program. Another critical incident presented a situation where an American team failed to recognize the differences between rival Pashtun sub-groups in a remote village forced to suffer the retributions of an ANP force comprised of a rival Pashtun sub-group. In the latter incident, the VSO team failed to understand the hostilities that existed between the Pashtuns and their ANP partnered force. Therefore, a vital checkpoint in the village, which was considered key for stabilizing the area had to be evacuated. According to operator describing the incident, the team found out too late about the harsh treatment the ANP force supervising the checkpoint inflicted on the village population.

b. Mending Relationships

As in all human relations, participant groups experience high and low points in their relations. The implications for American teams failing to recognize that relations with Afghan groups were on the decline, however, could be disastrous. The concept of mending failing relations emerged specifically during American team efforts at developing

coordination mechanisms with Afghan groups. The concept is defined as the actions and behaviors teams use to repair fractures or failures in their relations with Afghan groups. These strategies were used to rectify conflicts and move forward in a unified effort with security partners. As illustrated in critical incidents detailed in Chapter V, American teams used various identity performances while attempting to mend deteriorating relationships. The combination of the following emergent characteristics was applied to the mending of relations: (a) isomorphic, (b) mimicking local behaviors, (c) displaying empathy, and (d) incentivizing cooperation. These relationship mending efforts occurred not only to maintain the balance of power, but also to develop coordination mechanisms that harnessed the combined abilities of Afghan groups in opposition to insurgent hostility and violence.

2. Developing Mutual Trust

American perceptions of trust varied significantly relative to Afghan views about the construct, so the emergent development of mutual trust between these groups was no simple matter. A pattern emerged, however, that matched the trust trajectories derived by Buchan (2009) in her work on trust development in cultural environments. The emergent patterns for the development of mutual trust between American teams and their Afghan hosts started as a combination of the presentation of identity performance strategies and the offering of incentives in the form of actions or resources. The mutual trust established between American teams and Afghan groups strengthened as teams' identity performance strategies were revised. These social identity adaptations were based on their hosts' responses and the incentives provided for the establishment of intrinsic trust (Buchan, 2009). It is important to note that the establishment of both intrinsic and extrinsic trust is approached from a purely American perspective within the framework for this research, investigating trust from an Afghan perspective is a topic for future research.

The development of mutual trust between American teams and Afghan groups involved several key concepts identified as: (a) the gaining of credibility, (b) following through on commitments, and (c) being straightforward about team intentions.

a. Gaining Credibility

Gaining credibility is defined as persuasive actions and behaviors teams use to project an image of confidence in their abilities to overcome all environmental obstacles. It was interpreted as an effort for convincing Afghan populations to believe in the American team's security, governance, and development efforts. This concept complemented American team trust development. Two methods teams used for gaining credibility within Afghan communities are a willingness to take the fight to the enemy and a willingness to share the hardships locals faced. Chapter V detailed incidents where teams gained credibility by demonstrating a willingness to take the fight to the enemy, such as the incident in which one team was able to destroy the local Taliban commander and his entire insurgent force. Another critical incident detailed in Chapter V illustrated shared hardships when one VSO team leader participated in the Ramadan Fast. In both critical incidents, teams were able to project credible team images in the view of local Afghan groups based on their willingness to either take the fight to the enemy or share local hardships.

b. Following Through

Following through is defined as the actions and behaviors teams' used to project the image that they intend to stabilize districts. According to operators, the concept of following through simply meant accomplishing actions and delivering resources teams had committed to providing after interactions with Afghan groups. The concept was instrumental for development of mutual trust between groups. Either American teams delivered on these often-extrinsic motivators, or they failed to follow through to their detriment in future interactions. Teams that successfully honored commitments they made to the local community improved the levels of trust existing between groups. Conversely, teams that failed to deliver on their commitments reduced the level of that existed between groups.

c. Being Straightforward

Being straightforward is based on honesty and openness about what the teams could do to help indigenous leaders stabilize districts. Operators described the consequences from

pursuing a straightforward action strategy as helping them earn the respect of local leaders. Teams that use this strategy were found to be mindful about never overselling their team's capabilities or resources. Being straightforward is defined as a process in which teams give Afghan partners honest and frank answers about information, the ability to deliver resources or services, and the patronage/support they could provide. Being straight forward was determined to be more effective with elders and leaders at the village level. Conversely, operators described it as not very effective with Afghan government or security force leaders, some of whom were described as only being interested in the resource's teams could provide.

3. Incentivizing Cooperation

The incentivizing of cooperation used negotiated bartering-like efforts to entice the cooperation of Afghan groups. It is defined as the process of offering intrinsically and extrinsically motivated incentives for cooperation. These incentives were offered by American teams with the expectation that targeted Afghan groups would reciprocate the gesture though actions, influence, and information that support the development of self-sustainable governance, development, and security programs. Incentives offered to these Afghan communities were not always motivationally positive services and resources; in some instances, American teams motivated uncooperative communities by threatening retribution or withholding resources.

Some of the characteristics and behaviors associated with the teams' incentivizing cooperation with Afghan groups were development projects such as wells, school supplies, and reconstruction of damaged bazaars. Other characteristics of incentivizing behavior came through much simpler gestures such as offering almonds, cigarettes, and paychecks for ALP volunteers. Incentives for uncooperative communities were characterized as threatening or imposing retribution, such as withholding humanitarian assistance, disruptive clearance operations, and threatening violence in more extreme instances. Military action was a motivator for cooperation. The imminent demise or capture of a local shadow governor, the public destruction of a local insurgent forces, or the prevention of a suicide bomber attack in a local bazaar were enough to motivate a shift in local sentiment

toward the Afghan government. Consequences stemming from incentivizing cooperation, either intrinsically or extrinsically, support the establishment of mutual trust between American and Afghan groups. Four key concepts that contribute to incentivizing motivation are: (a) making promises, (b) matching performances, (c) trumping cultural values, and (d) operating in gray areas.

a. Making Promises

Making promises involve the pledging of resources, time, influence, or actions to win cooperation of from local populations. According to operators whose teams took these risky propositions, their teams only committed to the delivery of actions, resources, or information when they had the highest degree of confidence that promises would be fulfilled. Promises were made by teams under the premise that the Afghan government would make a long-term commitment to districts. American teams that made promises and delivered on them increased the levels of mutual trust and credibility established between their teams and Afghans. Conversely, teams failing to deliver on promises experienced a decrease in the level of mutual trust and credibility. Most operators interviewed expressed that teams would never intentionally oversell or make promises to Afghan groups because the ramifications of unfulfilled promises were just too severe. Failing to fulfill promises hinders future interactions.

b. Matching Performances

The matching of performances was a concept in which increased levels of support were exchanged between American teams and their Afghan security partners, where each group attempted to outperform the other. This concept was interpreted as contributing to increased levels of mutual trust and improved coordination. Matching performances improved team demonstrations of commitment and created solidarity between American and Afghan security partners. As teams received increased levels of perceived support, they would subsequently increase their support, thus demonstrating and incentivizing continued commitment towards superordinate goals. The matching of performances was unspoken or non-contractual agreement (benevolence) on continuing a shared attitude for "returning the favor in kind" with indigenous hosts.

c. Trumping Cultural Values

The trumping of cultural values was identified as another method for motivating local cooperation where incentives caused Afghan groups to ignore team violations of local social and cultural practices. The concept of trumping cultural values is defined as the process where teams use to develop relationships with Afghan communities based on a level of mutual trust and honesty that superseded strict adherence to local cultural norms. Afghan groups were willing to make accommodations for their American guest's cultural ignorance under the premise that doing so was going to bring advantage to their village, tribe, or family (Argyle, 1982). Cultural studies document accounts where sojourners were treated more leniently or excused entirely from adherence to sociocultural practices (Bochner, 1982; Feldman, 1968; Schild, 1962). Bochner (1982) attributed the leniency or excusal of sojourners violations to sociocultural practices to the local populations understanding that their guest's intent was not to offend, violations were committed due to ignorance (Feldman, 1968; Schild, 1962).

d. Operating in Gray Areas

Ambiguity, equivocality, and novel circumstances contribute to the process of operating in gray areas. Operating in gray areas arises out of uncharted situations in which American teams had to forge new paths to foster continued relations between their teams and Afghan groups. It is a process American teams developed in response to ill-defined areas devoid of formalized rules for action and behavior. Examples are found in operator descriptions about situations where teams had to act in a manner that took advantage of the ill-defined black and white areas between formalized procedures. For example, when a VSO team needed winter clothing, ammunition, and fuel for a district's ALP force and the formalized American logistics system for providing these provisions failed, the team was able to take advantage of areas that were gray to incentivize the ALP force not to desert their posts. The bending or taking advantage of ill-defined rules for conduct enabled teams to create incentives that either assisted in the establishment or salvaging of interactive situations.

4. Summary of Reciprocating Actions, Influence, and Information

The aggregation of themes such as coordination mechanisms, mutual trust, and the incentivizing of cooperation were based on their interpreted relationship and contributions to this dimension. Reciprocating actions, influence, and information was a dimension that occurred simultaneously as the presentation of identity performances, gleaning information from signs and symbols, and inferring meaning from signs and symbols. The process illustrated in Figure 9 is a graphic representation of this dynamic process; however, the reciprocation of actions, influence, and information was identified as the premise under which identity performance strategies were created and revised. It was within this process that American teams not only developed coordination mechanisms, established and grew mutual trust, and incentivized cooperation with their Afghan hosts—but gave the Afghan population a sense of their team's intentions. It was a dimension that was used to glean their host's responses to team identity and measure the local populace's expectations. The data acquired during the conduct of reciprocal exchanges of actions, influence, and information was used to confirm or disconfirm the American team social identity.

F. GLEANING INFORMATION FROM INTERACTIVE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

The dimension of gleaning information from interactive signs and symbols was a process used for continuously monitoring the indigenous population's responses about the American team's intentions and their interpretation of local expectations. It is a dimension that involve information seeking for the purposes of reducing interactive uncertainty. It is defined as the continuous process American teams used for seeking and acquiring information through human perceptions (i.e., sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste) that includes the use of technologies like unmanned aerial systems (UAS), internet search tools, radar, and advanced digital camera systems. Gleaning information from interactive signs and symbols was an interface between the sense-giving, interaction, and revising identity performance dimensions (see Table 6).

The American teams' interactive information seeking ability was considered essential in the growth of their interactive competencies. This growth facilitated more efficient team sense giving and sense-making.

Table 6. Gleaning information from interactive signs and symbols

Aggregate Dimension	Representative Quotations
Gleaning Information from Interactive Signs and Symbols	*"Early on it's the skies the limit. We're assessing infrastructure, at this point we didn't have a firm understanding of how do people get their water, how do people get their electricity, any of those things… Anything that is life sustaining, firewood, how do people make an income, where do they sell their goods, what market does it go to, because that creates a network."* *"I clearly remember guys, like squirters [sic] were just running as fast as they could out of there. Some guys ran, some guys stood, most of the fires were just hand grenades cause it was fifteen-twenty meters. So some guys stayed and fought and the other guys ran. We got done with that engagement and we conducted SSE [sensitive site exploitation] and tried to figure out, okay who are these guys, a lot of them carrying ID cards from Pakistani Madrassas and all that, so we figured it was TTP and individuals that were coming over"* **"***Yes eventually we had our own UAV that you could throw and fly around. So we started using that all the time. It was quite a bit bigger than that. It was some experimental garbage out of [inaudible] and it was smaller and it was also expendable. Like if it crashed, which it did often, there was no loss which was kind of strange. They just send us more cameras and bodies because there is nothing classified on it but the feed was just phenomenal. And that was another one of those further down the road that sort of assets that we never offered and we promised or we said would never come that Qassim was just blown away, this is amazing because I can show him the feed. The guy who's flying it is standing next to me. He watches us throw it in the air, it needs little more than throwing it in the air because it's kind of big and he just sits and watch the IPad of this thing flying around.***"***

Determining the relevancy, accuracy, and value of information is the first theme for the dimension of gleaning information from interactive signs and symbols.

1. Vetting Information Sources

The vetting of information sources was a process in which American teams sought out and acquired background knowledge about potential information sources. It does not focus solely on the reliability of the information being provided by indigenous sources, but also considers the sources intentions and reasons. It is a process American teams used to validate the trustworthiness of Afghan provided information. American teams used this vetting process for building information networks made up of local Afghan actors. These indigenously created information networks were then used to seek out information to facilitate future interactions. Two key concepts that comprise the vetting of information sources are: (a) the loss of assets and (b) interpreting intent and exploring influence.

a. Losing Assets

Assets aided in seeking and retrieving information about the environment—particularly the sociocultural aspects of it. Unfortunately, the loss of these perception enhancing assets was detrimental for meaningful interactions with locals. The loss of non-human information acquisition assets was a concept that reduced the teams' abilities to make proper sense and revise identity performance strategies. One example was found in an incident that dealt with the reallocation of an unmanned aerial system being used to track an Afghan actor travelling to meet with a district's shadow governor. The Afghan had been visited by insurgents in the middle of the night and was traveling to meet with the district's shadow governor to convince him to stop threatening and intimidating his village. The loss of the UAS and the team's subsequent inability to locate the shadow governor projected an image of insurgent invincibility and American ineffectiveness to the local Afghan population. These images made Afghan communities less cooperative based on fears of insurgent retribution and the team's ability to keep them safe.

b. Dealing with Environmental Uncertainty

Dealing with environmental uncertainty meant teams had to facilitate initial interactions based solely on assumptions. Bochner (1982) asserted that uncertainty is experienced by actors placed within foreign cultural environments because of being faced with "un-mastered new contingencies," which contribute to feelings of confusion and

stress (p. 17). American teams had to come up with novel ways for dealing with social and cultural uncertainties, to close the gap on the team's socio-cultural information deficits (Galbraith, 1977). Assumptions were a valid and necessary substitute for team information shortages; however, assumptions came with the overhead of increased levels of discomfort and stress experienced by American teams during their initial interactions. Dealing with uncertainty is a process in which American teams developed how to identify the known unknowns about local Afghan social and cultural practices. This vetting and information seeking concept was essential for facilitating meaningful interaction with Afghan groups.

2. Interpreting Intent and Exploring Influence

The interpreting of Afghan intent and the exploration of team influence is a process American teams used to reduce information deficits while simultaneously making sense of cues coming from the human environment. It includes the methods teams used to determine whether information acquired during interactions could be used to interpret Afghan group intentions and measure the effectiveness of their influence. Two key concepts that contribute to the interpretation of intent and influence are: (a) reading people and (b) the expansion of cross-cultural networks. Teams need the ability to reduce uncertainty through prolonged interactions where they learned to recognize the confirming or disconfirming actions and behaviors of Afghan groups. The concept required that American teams to not only interact but interact in ways meaningful for all parties participating in the venture. This process required that American teams not only learn how to read people but also expand their human networks.

a. Reading People

Reading people was a process American teams for interpreting whether environmental cues were confirming or disconfirming. A semiotic perspective is used to depict the signs and symbols teams sensed during interaction. The process does not include the teams' interpretations only whether these data were worthy of being considered information during team sense-making. Reading people includes consideration of non-verbal cues such as not paying attention to during verbal communications, looking away, and side conversations between Afghan actors. Other signs and symbols identified by

operators were the crossing of arms, the serving of food and drink, and facial gestures such as frowning or staring intimidatingly. Learning to pick up on relevant body language, gestures, and the level of hospitality displayed by Afghan groups all provided valuable syntax that shape social identity when sense-making occurs. Prolonged interaction improved American team competencies at reading people; however, to improve accuracy in this technique, teams needed to expand the size of their local Afghan intelligence networks.

b. Expanding Cross-cultural Networks

In his paper on the strength of weak ties, Granovetter (1983) defined, "The strength of a [interpersonal] tie as a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (p. 1360). Granovetter's (1983) approach was taken while interpreting the expansion of social networks based on weak tie relationships. Expanding cross-cultural networks uses Granovetter's theory (1983), and is seen as a process in which American teams establish weak tie links between diverse Afghan sub-groups. The expansion of cross-cultural networks was dependent on the establishment of new weak tie links, defined as links that had previously existed outside of their indigenous network. American teams interacting in these complex environments increased their abilities to acquire information in ways that were proportional to the size of their cultural networks. Granovetter's (1983) definition of the "strength" of interpersonal ties supports the discovery of this concept on expanding cross-cultural networks. Cross-cultural network expansion was found to be a naturally occurring process dictated by environmental contexts and circumstances and in other instances it occurred because of deliberate team planning through targeted encounters and the incentivizing of cooperation.

3. Summary of Gleaning Information from Interactive Signs and Symbols

The gleaning of information from interactive signs and symbols was a key dimension that served as an interface between the interaction, sense-giving, and identity revision dimensions (see Figure 9). Two key themes emerged whose aggregation were

instrumental for this dimension's role. This section explained the concepts and relationships that themes such as vetting information sources, interpreting intent and exploring influenced played in the American teams' abilities to glean information from interactive signs and symbols. A semiotic perspective was used to explain how American teams acquired relevant data, at a syntactic level. Gleaning information from interactive signs and symbols was used for the collection of relevant data used to glean information for the adaptation of team social identity and to facilitate future interactions. The syntactic data (see Table 7) collected during the execution of this monitoring dimension was then provided to the next dimension discussed in this chapter—a dimension that explains the American team's sense-making process during identity performance adaptation.

G. INFERRING MEANING FROM INTERACTIVE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

Table 7 presents operator narrative that supports the emergence of this aggregate dimension and its links to the data. Inferring meaning from interactive signs and symbols is viewed as a dynamic meaning-making process based on the information seeking that takes place during interactions and it occurs simultaneously with sense giving, monitoring for cues, and then making sense of cues.

Table 7. Inferring meaning from interactive signs and symbols

Aggregate Dimension	Representative Quotations
Inferring Meaning from Interactive Signs and Symbols	*"There was a Taliban, I assessed him anyway to be a highly Taliban influenced Mullah that ran that village. I say he ran the village because over any of the other elders when we gathered everyone to speak, the Elders were suppressed and every time they wanted to speak they'd glanced at him in confirmation before they were, almost like they were allowed to speak. He and I, this is a different dynamic I think, one that I don't assess as being comfortable he needs to maintain his ground as the Taliban guy in front of this whole village, as me and him are arguing. Anything that we've screwed up in the past ten years, he threw out there like in Kandahar when the guy walked out and killed a bunch of civilians, that had only been a few months before that. He brings in anything that he could nitpick over at all that we hadn't done right."* *"Yeah, so we get there and there's white Taliban flags flying in the valley. We received mortar fire every day. It was kind of a struggle back and forth. The White flags that we were seeing, most of them had Ameroti Islami or Afghan Taliban, and I felt like it was both a sign for us in the area as well as the Pakistani's coming over saying 'hey this is our turf' or whatever. "* **"***So, one of the times we did this–it was actually on Thanksgiving Day and we went down and met with the elders and it was probably one of the first times that we hit a village where they were not–they did not want us there. It was very apparent from the get go. No elders came to visit us. We had to begrudgingly they one, came over to us, sat down with us, they didn't bring us tea. There were fires with some of the other people. Usually, especially when it was getting colder they would set fires up. They didn't' set fires for us. ... Anyways, so short meeting. He was like, 'well, we are not going to give you anyone.' We were like, 'well, we want to talk to you about maybe some stuff you need around here. You know, anything we can help you with.' Like, 'we don't need anything.' So, it was just very curt. I was like okay, they looked at me, and he gets up and he's like, 'do you have anything else?' I looked at him and I looked at my TERP and I am like no, nothing else, thanks. He just walked away.* **"**

A semiotic perspective is also taken for the explanation of this dimension, in which teams used interactive syntax gleaned by monitoring for cues were aggregated into semantic information used to confirm or disconfirm native responses. Meaningful responses were indicative of confirming behavior and reinforced American team identity performances. Table 8 below supports the semiotic perspective used during analysis based on operators' account recollections of their team's sense-making. Semantic information represents confirming or disconfirming actions or behaviors. Disconfirming signs and symbols were attributed to assumed or factual points of error about the team's identity performance and then applied to revisions in the team's identity performance.

The inferring of meaning from that which was not being explicitly communicated to the American team was discovered to be at the heart of the American team's sense-making processes. This critical dimension processed interactive signs and symbols gleaned during the presentation of a team's identity performance and then subsequently enabled teams to "comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict" indigenous responses It also provided information that teams interpreted as confirming or disconfirming and influenced the adaptation of their identity performances (Osland, Bird, & Gundersen, 2007, p. 10; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51; Weick, 1995, p. 4). An American team's abilities to make deductions or conclusions based on information gleaned during the presentation of identity performances was dependent upon whether this information was assumed or fact. American teams had to treat facts as evidence or use logical reasoning when relying on assumptions while interpreting their Afghan audience's responses. The Afghan population's cryptic reception of a team's identity performance was not explicitly indicative of either acceptance or rejection; therefore, teams needed prolonged interactions before determining the meaning behind their host's actions and behaviors (see Table 8).

Table 8. Inferring meaning through perception (semiotic perspective)

Syntax → data	Semantic → information	Pragmatic → knowledge
Cue (sign or symbol)	**Indicator**	**Interpretation**
Posture of children	1. Kids run inside their homes 2. Kids throw rocks at coalition force vehicles 3. Kids continue to play	1. Villages either afraid of coalition or insurgent repercussions 2. Villager do not trust GIRoA or coalition 3. Villager sentiment with GIRoA or coaltion
Serving of food and drink	1. Neither served 2. Chai only served 3. Serve both	1. Unwelcome 2. Stuck in the middle; wish to remain independent 3. Demonstration of support for GIRoA and coalition
Receiving curt responses	1. Folding arms 2. Short replies; abruptly walking away 3. Never agreeing or compromising	1-3. Local elders do not want coalition forces in their homes, villages or districts. Either strongly support insurgents or feel caught in between GIRoA and insurgents. Local population is independent and wishes to be left alone by both GIRoA and insurgents
Conditions of the local bazaar	1. Empty or vacant 2. Some shops open and patronized by locals 3. Thriving; indigenous populace travels from throughout district to utilize.	1. Impoverished local economy (susceptible to insurgency) 2. Opportunity to for coalition to sway sentiment 3. Indicative of strong local economy; less willing to support insurgents
Treatment of woman	1. Not letting girls go to school 2. How woman dressed 3. Exposure to coalition	1. Indicative of religious conservatism that aligned with Taliban 2. Determined how to approach and interact with woman 3. Determined the use of female engagement teams (FETs)
Enemy activity	1. No violent attacks for days or weeks (i.e. IEDs, ambush, indirect fire, etc.) 2. No evidence of locals being intimidated (i.e. night letters, justice from shadow governance, etc.)	1. Indigenous populace strongly supports GIRoA and coalition 2. Injustices adjudicated by GIRoA 3. Increased team confidence levels
Apprehension	1. Unwilling to commit to local defense initiatives (i.e. ALP) 2. Non-hostile and non-committal interactions with local elders 3. Interactions with local elders covertly; not around larger village populace	1. Fear of insurgent retribution 2. Local leaders are placating coalition forces 3. Local leaders make excuses for not fulfilling pledges of commitment
Burying dead	1. Burying deceased in local cemeteries 2. Moving the body of deceased outside of the local area for burial	1. The deceased is from the local area 2. The departed is an outsider, potentially foreign fighter or member of the insurgency

Three key themes comprising this dimension were: (a) making sense of environmental indicators, (b) understanding people stuck in the middle, and (c) responding to the deterioration of relationships. Inferring meaning from interactive signs and symbols was common to all American teams, regardless of the levels of complexity they experienced; however, this dimension differed between teams based on localized cultural practices and varying differences in the initial environmental conditions.

1. Making Sense of Environmental Indicators

Making sense of environmental indicators is comprised of two key constructs that were identified as sensemaking and learning. Making sense of indicators acquired in interactions included not only signs and symbols conveyed by human actors' but all novel data discovered in the environment surrounding where interaction takes place. Adjusting identity performances and action strategies was contextually dependent upon the teams' interpretations of both human and non-human indicators during these encounters. It was a process where the whole environment had to be considered, not just the sum of its parts. Teams did more than just derive meaning [sensemaking] from the signs and symbols acquired during interactions during this process, they also applied context and connected meanings for their interpretations of syntax. Confirming or disconfirming interpretations of the team's mental models and the revision of their identity performances

Revised identity performances were designed with the purpose of facilitating future interactions. It was interpreted as occurring in the same way Argyris (1976) discussed "theories-for-use" in his explanations about organizational double-loop learning processes (p. 370). These mental models were based on what the American teams collectively learned to project as interaction facilitating images based on the actions and behaviors of Afghan groups that teams monitored during interactions. This process of the error correction symbolizes team cultural learning which they applied throughout their adaptation of their social identities.

Sieck et al. (2010) highlighted this collective learning process in their cultural network analysis (CNA) research, asserting that cultural knowledge is derived through the correction of error in collective (i.e., societal) mental models used in the formation of knowledge networks (pp. 238–241). Sieck et al. took a cognitive anthropologic perspective of culture as being shared knowledge based on content or artefact. The identity performance learning model used by American teams was dependent upon indicators they acquired by monitoring non-human indicators and Afghan group responses to team identity. The methods teams used for acquiring these indicators were identified as intuition, isomorphic human characteristics, socio-culturally known facts, and trends that developed over time. Operators described the importance they placed on the posture and attitude of

children. Others explained that they learned the importance the serving of food and drink played in the confirmation or disconfirmation for their team's identity performances.

Table 8 above illustrates specific examples grounded in operators' retrospective narratives about prominent indicators teams acquired during interactions, the understanding teams derived by making sense of these indicators, and how teams applied meaning to the adaptation of identity performances. Action strategies detailed in Chapter V discussed interactions where the serving of food and chai are interpreted similarly by different teams, operators' mentioning these indicators conducted VSO at different time periods and in different locations. Teams learned the significance of being offered not only tea but food during their encounters with Afghans. One incident highlighted the monitoring and meaning making behaviors teams used to determine how they knew their presence was welcomed, and explained:

> We were sitting down, and we were talking, and we made inroads with the villagers from that village. Everything was great, everything was good. We sat down with them, we talked with them, they brought us into their houses, they were more than welcoming, the attitude towards us you could tell they weren't scared. They were open to conversation. They fed us … rice, beans, and I couldn't tell you what the meat was, but there was meat.

The team understood that being hosted inside an elder's home for open conversation while being offered chai and more importantly meat was indicative that their team was not only welcomed into the village, but their presence was wanted. One retrospective account described the meaning his team placed after being served meat as:

> You would have to stay for a meal and they would bring out boiled goat, but they didn't eat meat very often. The rich guys would eat meat, several times a week maybe. That was the rich guys. It's not like in America where it's, "Oh, we have got some protein at every meal." Most people would eat rice and bread, make some yogurt and meat was a special thing. So, we would get lots of meat, 18 different side dishes

Meat was a scarce and valued commodity in remote Afghan areas. Therefore, Teams surmised that villages that roasted a goat were indicating that their team's presence was not only welcomed but valued. Making sense of environmental indicators was a theme comprised of the following concepts: (a) Defining boundaries, (b) working with diverse

indigenous groups, and (c) deriving meaning through perception. These concepts were determined to be linked and supported how American teams made sense.

a. Defining Boundaries

The defining of boundaries were methods American teams used for categorizing portions of their assigned areas, managing limited resources for stabilizing these areas, and developing identity performances and actions strategies for interacting within delineated boundaries. In accordance to the tenets outlined in the VSO methodology, all teams approached the mission from the following three lines of effort—(a) security, (b) governance, and (c) development—where the security line of effort was deemed as the team's highest priority. American teams used the phrase "white space" to define an area perceived as being influenced and controlled by the Afghan government. It was a highly subjective phrase, but teams viewed "white space" areas as places their teams could travel through and into with a low probability of being attacked by insurgents. However, for teams newly arrived in a district, making sense of which areas were "white spaces" and which were not was no simple or safe process. It often required teams to place themselves in grave danger while exploring an unknown and violent environment for the purposes of measuring local sentiments about the Afghan government. This concept was a learning process that required teams to explore different areas within their districts to make sense about environmental conditions such as feelings of abandonment, population disparities, and insurgent willingness to contest its control. American teams assessed explored areas as "white spaces" based on their subjective measurements of these conditions. In addition to classifying bounded areas as "white spaces," teams also determined their susceptibility to the team's local defense initiatives in the form of the ALP program.

Defining boundaries is a concept defined as the process American teams developed for making sense of the boundaries separating secured areas from unsecured areas. It emerged through analysis that American teams created two dimensional maps based on areas level of susceptibility. These linear representations of the hostile landscape would then be used for leveraging the team's limited resources to create "white space." Maps distinguishing "white space" from "non-white space" enabled teams to develop effective

identity performances, action strategies, and manage limited resources intended for facilitating interactions with communities in a particularly designated area. For example, in higher contestability areas designated as "non-white space," American teams projected a more militant image to influence local perception and create the reputation that it was a militarily strong organization which plays on local cultural values that favor military gallantry (Glatzer, 2002). After a team handed out what could be perceived as a military defeat on local insurgents in these areas, they would create and adapt new identity performances more favorable for promoting the governance and development lines of effort. Defining boundaries was interpreted as a natural method used by teams to collectively segment and then reduce the uncertainties associated with unknown hostile environments.

b. Working with Diverse Groups

Working with diverse groups that were comprised of organizationally, ethnically, tribally, and religiously segmented Afghans varied according to the districts American teams operated. This emergent concept arose throughout operator narratives where these disparities were described by operators as creating barriers toward the facilitation of productive interactions. Overcoming the obstacles of working with diverse groups was found to take prolonged interactions between American teams and these disparate groups. Varying levels of time and the presentation of incentives for collaborative interaction were needed for teams to develop the understanding and mutual trust needed for building solidarity between these groups. American teams needed to understand the subtle difference and conflicts that existed between these groups before they could form the identity performances and action strategies necessary for creating unified efforts Afghan sub-groups. It was also discovered that teams working prematurely with diverse groups increased the potential that these groups would respond violently against teams during operations within local communities. An example of this phenomenon was detailed in Chapter V in which an American team used an action strategy the chapter defined as being blinded by success. Conversely, another example illustrating an action strategy intended for creating solidarity between disparate Afghan sub-groups is also illustrated in Chapter V and recognized the importance of teams placed on repairing deteriorated relationships.

c. Interpreting Indigenous Responses

The interpretation of Afghan responses was a concept that focuses solely on the interpretation Afghan's responsive signs and symbols. Interpreting indigenous responses is defined as the process American teams used to interpret the aggregate of the human indicators about the behaviors and actions Afghans displayed in response to the presentation of team identity performances. In most cases, inferring meaning from the equivocal and ambiguous indicators acquired from Afghans forced teams to rely on assumption, intuition, feelings, or unsubstantiated evidence while interpreting whether these indicators confirmed or disconfirmed identity performance. Included in this process was the need for teams to make sense of Afghan expectations and how to adapt identity performances in ways that conveyed the team's true intentions. Interpreting indigenous responses was discovered as particularly difficult during the fragile periods when teams made their initial introductions to Afghan communities.

2. Understanding People Stuck in the Middle

Understanding Afghan populations caught in the middle was a concept where operators understood that locals just wanted to be left alone. Afghan groups identified as being stuck in the middle were comprised of primarily independent subsistence farmers often residing in isolated village communities. These populations had no understanding about the Westphalian notion of a nation state, no exposure or experience with a legitimate Afghan government. Understanding people stuck in the middle is a process of learning to understand and interact with populations that wanted no contact with either the Afghan government or insurgent groups. These populations were historically independent and governed themselves according to the Pashtun traditions that have governed these remote areas for over a millennium.

This theme also applied to more connected and progressive Afghan communities that had supported the Afghan government and coalition in the past. Progressive Afghan communities had varying reasons for wishing to be left alone in comparison to the more remote populations. Districts that had once been occupied by coalition or Afghan government security forces, only to be abandoned by these forces later, developed an

attitude of being stuck in the middle of the conflict's violence. After the withdrawal of government security forces, these once cooperative communities were left at the mercy of insurgent groups' intent on exacting retribution. Insurgent repercussions left the local populace with strong feelings of distrust for American teams and the Afghan government.

This theme was common among American teams entering districts using tactics they described as "forced entry VSO." "Forced-entry VSO" tactics was a method for emplacing VSO team into highly contested districts to hold the terrain after it had been cleared. Operations such as these, were usually made into districts where previous operations were followed by an immediate withdrawal of forces. The rapid departure of coalition forces in earlier operations, created the ideal conditions for resurgent anti-government insurgents to exact retribution against locals that were cooperative with forces used to clear the area. American teams forced to facilitate interaction with populations harboring feelings of being caught in the middle, had to learn the subtle behaviors and actions indicative of Afghan populations suffering from these resentments. In one narrative an operator recalled the time a village elder residing in a heavily-contested district told his team, "The Taliban comes, we got to have chai with them—you come in we got to have chai with you—we're stuck in the middle. We just want to farm and live our lives."

Facilitating interaction with people interpreted as being caught in the middle of belligerents was a significant interactive challenge for American teams. American teams finding themselves in these situations required prolonged interactions before they were able to understanding that the population felt caught in the middle of a conflict they wanted no part in. Several key concepts comprise inferring meaning from indicators symbolizing the Afghan populations are: (a) overcoming abandonment, (b) empathizing with others, and (c) the acknowledging of grievances.

a. Overcoming Abandonment

Overcoming Afghan feelings of abandonment harbored by Afghan groups created unique challenges for American teams. Teams facing Afghan populations suffering these feelings went into initial interactions blindly only to discover a very non-committal indigenous population. American teams attempting to facilitate interactions with

populations suffering from feelings of abandonment learned to not only recognize local actions and behaviors that indicated these sentiments, but also discovered they needed to understand the source of these feelings. It was only after Americans teams acquired all the background information on why local Afghans harbored such feelings that they could begin the long and committed process of re-instilling faith, confidence, trust, and belief for the Afghan government into the local populace. Overcoming feelings of abandonment harbored by local Afghan communities was no small feat, as illustrated in action strategies detailed in Chapter V, teams entering districts suffering from the effects of being abandoned often presented an interactive hurdle too high for teams to navigate over. Teams that were unable to overcome the effects of abandonment were often prematurely withdrawn. One of the major conditions that contributed to abandonment was a lack of Afghan government presence. Afghan government and coalition incursions into these regions for short time periods projected non-committal images.

b. Empathizing with Others

The displaying of empathy through actions and behaviors were important factors which contributed to American team meaning-making processes and identity performance adaptation. Interacting successfully among populations suffering from strong feelings of being stuck in the middle required teams to project images that were empathetic about the situation; however, developing identity performances that conveyed empathy meant American teams had to be capable of inferring meaning from the nuanced signs and symbols communicated by Afghan groups during initial interactions. An example of recognizing these indicators is represented in the following statement discovered in one operator's narrative:

> People … have that mob mentality, they want to back what they think is going be the winning team and perception is reality a lot of time, and so the perception was there that the Taliban is very strong. Like I said they thought this guy had 200 fighters, all of them 8 feet tall and carrying flamethrowers and they might have dragons (anti-tank missiles). Who knows? So, there is this perception of invincibility for the Taliban there and there was 11 of us, if you count my air controller, 11 Americans and about 35 Afghans that we are partnered with. Umm, very experienced Afghans but still for an area that big was a pretty, pretty light footprint.

The meanings teams inferred about local perceptions of Taliban invincibility were derived out of empathy. The team understood local Afghan and coalition security forces had little success in defeating the districts local insurgents shaping local perceptions. Local support was influenced by whichever groups they perceived to be militarily superior. These perceptions were also based on the reality that local Afghan's did not want to be viewed as supporting the losing side, regardless of whether they ideologically favored one group over the other. The repercussions for being viewed as supporting the losing groups were too severe for the local populace and most American teams empathetically understood this as fact.

Even after the American exampled above overwhelmingly defeated local insurgents, local responses were understood by the team:

> After we [American team] killed this whole group, none of the local police, the district police, would claim the bodies. Because they, they were worried that there would be retaliatory attacks against them if they took the bodies.

The American team empathetically transported the bodies of fallen insurgents to the district center. Teams needed to be able to recognize and interpret local behaviors that were indicative of people stuck in the middle or that felt abandoned and respond empathetically. Empathizing with others is a process where American teams develop "the ability to replicate what they perceive another to be feeling or thinking" (Howell, 1982, p. 245). Having the ability to adapt empathetic identity performances comprising actions and behaviors that reflect having "walked in the shoes" of the Afghan population contributed to favorable future interactions. Empathic communications play a significant role in the creation and adaptation of empathetic team images.

c. Acknowledging Grievances

The acknowledgement of grievances was a used in response to Afghan groups caught in the middle of hostilities. The acknowledging of grievances created an atmosphere conducive for local males to lodge their protest formally and publicly. During this process the American team and their Afghan security partners were an active listening audience. The simple act of listening to local complaints either real or perceived by local males was

considered “treating them like men.” In isolated areas with populations identified as being stuck in the middle of hostilities, allowing the local male population to air their grievances was simply not allowed by Taliban influenced mullahs and elders. Even though American teams lacked the resources or capabilities to address these grievances, the simple act of listening was considered enough to enhance team influence suffering populations.

3. Deteriorating Relationships

The deterioration of relationships was a process where American teams experience interactions whose outcomes they considered bad or ambiguous after meeting with Afghan groups for whom they had strong relations. Cross-cultural relations were dynamic and tended to shift between good, ambiguous, and bad states. A decline in relations occurred due to exogenous influences, such as the desecration of a Koran by U.S. forces or the Sergeant Robert Bale’s Massacre that occurred in 2012 which negatively affected the VSO mission across Afghanistan. The American team and its individual members’ actions were also responsible for interactive declines. Regardless of the circumstances causing a deterioration, American teams were responsible for inferring meaning from Afghan responses which were indicators of whether a deterioration was even occurring.

In certain circumstances, the social and cultural practices of Afghan security partners were enough to cause relationships to take a turn for the worse. As an example, when American teams perceived pedophilia taking place between Afghan security partners and children, they began to adapt action strategies that demonstrated their abhorrence for the practice. “Bacha bazi” or boy play as it is referred to in Afghanistan Dari speaking community, was too much for operators to accept. American abhorrence for the practice caused immediate deteriorations in team interactions with Afghan groups believed to be participating in the custom. Americans’ repugnance for cultural practices they viewed with disgust, triggered relationship deteriorating responses from teams. Several concepts that comprise this theme are: (a) corruption, (b) the de-escalation of near violent situations, and (c) turning negative situations into positive ones.

a. Dealing with Corruption

Corruption exists in the industrialized and non-industrialized worlds; however, cultural perceptions about the levels of acceptable corruption differed significantly between Americans and Afghans. If not approached with understanding, knowledge, and empathy, these differences could significantly hinder interactions. Dealing with corruption was defined as the process American teams developed to mitigate its effects including the actions and behaviors of corrupt actors or groups. Common indicators that corrupt Afghan practices are taking place were based on patronage, embezzlement, bribery, and the withholding of public services. In situations where American teams judged the effects of confronting corrupt practices as being detrimental to future interactions, they described the necessity of "turning a blind." In one example where teams "turned a blind eye" to local corruption, the operator detailed how Afghan security partners charged local opium farmers less money than the Taliban for protection and transportation of the district's poppy harvest. The American team justified "turning a blind eye" to their Afghan partner's corrupt practices based on reasoning that it denied local insurgent groups additional financing. The team also reasoned if they ended the practice, it could shift local sentiments in favor of insurgent groups because poppy production was far more profitable as a crops than other local alternative crops.

Other narrative incidents detailing corruption involved local government practices, such as embezzlement and the denial of public services which caused a decline in development. Population's living in the shadow of governments enacting these corrupt practices, lost confidence in the government. Some team reactions to corrupt Afghan practices, described threatening to address matters with the superiors of corrupt practitioners. Raising issues of corruption to higher levels of Afghan organizations caused security partners to "lose face" with their superiors (Bochner, 1982). In some instances, teams that raised issues of corruption with Afghan superiors, received public apologies; however, other instances of addressing matters to superiors led to the replacement of either Afghan security force leaders or their entire teams. Addressing the corrupt practices of Afghan partners was not an action American teams conducted without understanding the

potential for hindering future relations, particularly in circumstances where their security partner's superiors benefited from these corrupt practices.

b. Deescalating Near-violent Situations

The concept of de-escalating near violent situations represented the extreme in the deterioration of relations. Some American teams directly contributed to the breakdown in relations based on violations of cultural practices or displays of abhorrence for cultural behaviors. In most incidents the outcomes from these deteriorations quickly escalated into near violent incidents, such as "green-on-blue" incidents in which Afghan partner actions and behaviors are interpreted as becoming hostile. American teams that found themselves in deescalating, near-violent situations took a heightened security posture in anticipation of being violently attacked (insider attack) by Afghan security partners. The deescalating of near violent situations is a concept defined as the actions and behaviors American teams developed for negotiating non-violent outcomes from American team images that Afghans perceived as deliberately insulting or in violation of the cultural practices. These novel and chaotic experiences forced teams to quickly infer meaning from the interactive signs and symbols being communicated to them by Afghan security partners. American team responses, beside increasing their security posture, was to consult with their higher headquarters. Outcomes from deescalating near-violent situations usually resulted in permanent separation between the American team and the offended Afghan security group.

c. Turning Negatives into Positives

The concept of deteriorating relationships focused on the actions American teams took after experiencing setbacks in their relations with Afghan groups. Turning negatives into positive was a process where teams were able to influence advantageous outcomes after recognizing a serious deterioration in relations. Turning negatives into positives is a process American teams developed for turning the circumstances surrounding a serious decline in relations into a relational advantage and enhanced influence with the offended group. In one example discussed in Chapter V, the American team used the *Pashtunwali* tenet of *nunawati* to prevent a total decline in relations with the district's Pashtun super tribe (Ibrahimov, 2011). They invoked this tenet after an American-Afghan military team

from outside the district destroyed the local bazaar. The team in this incident used their knowledge of local tribes and cultural rules to turn quickly deteriorating relations into positive ones. The concept of turning negatives into positives, particularly in rapidly deteriorating relationships, was identified as pivotal for the maintenance and facilitation of interactions with Afghan groups. This concept also presented novel challenges to the teams meaning making processes in reaction to the possibly violent intentions of offended Afghan groups.

4. Summary of Inferring Meaning from Interactive Signs and Symbols

Inferring meaning from interactive signs and symbols was a critical dimension within this substantive theory. The dimension involved the complex processing of interactive signs and symbols gleaned during the presentation of an American team identity performance. Subsequently, American teams processing these signals were able to establish "comprehension, understanding, explanation, attribution, extrapolation, and prediction" about Afghan group responses that either confirmed or disconfirmed the identity performances teams presented to Afghans (Osland et al., 2007, p. 10; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51; Weick, 1995, p. 4). This section detailed the American team's meaning-making processes and illustrated the inferring of meaning using a semiotic perspective (see Table 8).

How teams made sense of environmental indicators was influenced by the defining of boundaries, working with diverse groups, and their collective perceptions. Other themes shaping the way these American teams inferred meaning from interactive signs and symbols were identified as their collective abilities to understand people stuck in the middle and recognize the deterioration of relations with Afghan partners. Teams recognized Afghan groups that felt trapped in between belligerents were also able to infer meaning from interactive signs and symbols signifying these populations harbored feelings of abandonment. Teams interacting with communities stuck in the middle of hostilities were able to revise identity performances in ways that conveyed the acknowledgement of grievances and displays of empathy. Finally, unique conditions affecting the inferring of meaning by American teams were detailed in this section, discussed the deterioration of

relationships. The section closes by discussing how teams forged identity performances for dealing with corrupt Afghan security partners and relational situations that nearly resulted in violent outcomes.

Inferring meaning was a critical dimension explaining how American teams handled the interpretation of signs and symbols gleaned during the presentation of identity performances. American teams either interpreted Afghan group responses as confirming or disconfirming of their identity performances. If the responses were determined to be confirming, then the team's identity performance was reinforced and maintained during future interactions. However, if the meanings of Afghan responses were determined to be disconfirming then error in the team's identity performances were identified, assumptions were made, and new knowledge was created for use in revised performances.

H. REVISING IDENTITY PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

The revision of identity performances emerged as a dimension in situations where American teams received what they perceived to be disconfirming signals during the presentation of an identity performance. The revision of differing identity performances was viewed as a continuous and dynamic social identity process teams used to facilitate interaction with Afghan groups. The differences between an initial identity performance and a revised performance must be highlighted, initial performances were based on the varying levels of uncertainty American teams had about the environments they were entering. American teams possessed greater knowledge and more certainty after initial interactions had been conducted with Afghan group. Teams were found to identify errors in their identity performances and apply these corrections during the revision of identity performances. The process teams used for discovering errors in their performance identities was detailed in the previous section. This section details the adaptation of the often illusory identity performances they created. It was discovered that American teams conducting the VSO mission consciously created, rehearsed, and adapted identity performances in the same way an actor prepares for a "reality" based theatrical performance (Meisner, 1987). During the revision of performance identities, teams rewrote scripts, adapted clothing and appearances in which actions were choreographed in accordance with the cast's

interpretation of their past audience's responses to the performance. Like a theatrical performance, no identity performance strategy was ever performed in the same manner as previous identity performances. The effectiveness of these interactive strategies was measured by the Afghan audience's willingness to exchange actions, influence, and information with their American guests. Table 9 presents operator narrative supporting this theme.

Table 9. Revising identity performance

Aggregate Dimension	Representative Quotations
Revising an Identity Performance Strategy	*"We were just in our full kit. I would always make it a point – whenever I held a KLE or whenever I went into a school – pretty much whenever I went into a building I would take off my kit. It didn't matter where it was – obviously – really for schools and clinics – like I really made it a big gesture. But anytime I would talk to people I would take my kit off. I would usually have – like if I went into a clinic – I would have a concealed pistol – side arm and if I didn't because I wanted to make it like a big over gesture – I'm like taking all my stuff off – I would have like a PSD guy with me that would have a concealed pistol or like two guys that have concealed weapons on them. But if I was like making an overt like, "Hey leaving my weapon here." To kind of you know establishing that relationship of "Hey I trust you. I want to engage with you. I don't want to have a weapon on. I don't want to have a pistol – I just want to make you see that I don't have anything because that's how much I trust you. I want to build this relationship with you." I would kind of make an overly overt gesture in that process."* *"Once we felt we had adequately evaluated the threat in the immediate area of our camp and Qasim's headquarters, I sought to project the least-threatening posture possible while at, or between, both compounds. The intent of this decision was threefold: 1) demonstrate to the populace that legitimate security existed where Afghan security forces were established, 2) demonstrate to [redacted] our trust in his ability to provide that security, 3) instill confidence in the populace that the market area was safe, now that ASF had reestablished security. To be clear, though I sought to minimize how aggressive I presented myself, I did not allow my team members to do the same. I always carried at least one weapon, though often concealed, and I typically travelled with an interpreter and an SF medic at a minimum. The intent was to manage the perception of our team, replacing 'foreign invader, seeking violence' with 'village guest that wants to help.'"* **"***Yes, I sat down in the middle, and when I want to, I can turn it on and be pretty passionate about, "Hey man, like I give a fuck about your village. I want to see you guys be safe. I am tired of people dying, etc., etc." I had talked to my interpreter beforehand, I am like, "Look man, when I am getting passionate, I need you to get passionate. I need you to mirror the anger that I feel when I say something. I need you to mirror the laughter if I am laughing, etc., etc." So we practiced a few times and he did pretty well at it... like you definitely had to have a game plan. You can't just wing it. The only winging part of it was when I got up and I sat down in the middle. I think, and I could just be imagining it, but I think because I was sitting below them at that point, and they were actually a little bit elevated, but they saw how humble I was coming to them.***"*

There were several emergent themes and concepts identified as contributing to an American team's revision of an identity performance, where each instance possessed its own unique characteristics; however, every discovery of the theme also shared similar and more generalized patterns of behaviors, actions, and circumstances. In no specified order, operators consistently discussed themes for creating legitimacy, local faces, buy in, and solidarity as important to the revision of identity performances. These emergent themes aided in the revision of team identity strategies that projected not only an American team image, but an Afghan-American security team image. These hybrid images conveyed to the Afghan population that security, governance, and development was being taken care of by a united multi-national team. It also created the illusion that these hybrid teams were led by legitimate Afghan leaders and programs would be sustained long after the American departure.

1. Creating Legitimacy

The creation of legitimacy was an emergent theme that contributed to the revision of American team identity performances. Creating legitimacy was defined as the process, behaviors, and activities used by American teams to intentionally alter local perceptions about the Afghan government, security force capabilities, resources, and the level of stability these organizations bring to local communities. The creation of legitimacy ran parallel with team efforts aimed at diminishing insurgent influence within local communities. It was also a theme in which American teams attempted to give Afghan groups a sense that their government and security forces were acting in their best interest. American teams needed to facilitate efforts at legitimizing the Afghan government by presenting images that reflected these programs as being Afghan created and led. Several concepts emerged that supported the role this theme played in the revision of American team identity performances.

Identity performances advocating Afghan government legitimacy were not created *a priori* by American teams. These identity performances and the action strategies used for enacting them were influenced and shaped only after initial interaction had occurred. Prolonged interaction between teams and Afghan groups enabled them to acquire identity

confirming or disconfirming information, derive meaning from information, and apply this newly derived knowledge in the revision of team identity performances. The creation of legitimacy was composed of demonstrations of concern, resolve, and commitment.

a. Demonstrating Concern

Concern was demonstrated through actions and behaviors American teams enacted as a method to show genuine concern for the health, welfare, and long-term well-being of the local population. These moral and ethical acts were enacted by American teams without the expectation that Afghan groups would reciprocate the gestures. Examples of demonstrating concern were identified as providing medical care, clothing, toys, food, or school supplies to impoverished local Afghan groups. Identity performances in which the demonstration of concern played a role were developed to create the perception that they were Afghan created and led actions. Placing an Afghan face on identity performances demonstrating concern were designed with the intent of altering local impressions of the Afghan government.

b. Demonstrating Resolve

Demonstrating resolve was used in American team identity performances in which they attempted to convey to local Afghans their intentions to confront insurgent group influence under all circumstances. This concept is defined as the actions and behaviors American teams displayed to Afghan groups, including adversaries, face setbacks due to an uncooperative population, intimidation, or violent attacks were not going to deter them from achieving the goals outlined within the VSO methodology. American teams using this concept demonstrated an unparalleled resolve to all Afghan groups, particularly groups that felt stuck in the middle of belligerents.

c. Demonstrating Commitment

Demonstrating commitment contributed significantly to American team efforts at creating legitimacy. It was defined as the actions and behaviors American teams used for conveying their unalterable dedication, loyalty, and benevolence toward stabilizing districts. Examples of this concept were maintaining contact during firefights, pursuing and

attacking adversaries, and persevering through hindered interaction. It was a concept under which American teams acted in ways that were perceived as advantageous for the greater community. Demonstrations of commitment strengthened mutual trust, established legitimacy, and helped facilitate future interactions.

2. Creating a Local Face

Painting of a local face on stability programs and solutions to local problems was important in the creation of long-term and self-sustained governance, security, and development in districts. American teams understood that all efforts at stabilizing Afghan district's susceptible to VSO would be wasted if these programs were not locally supported, run, and led prior to the withdrawal of American teams. Creating local faces was intended to encourage Afghan elders and government leaders to take ownership for programs, particularly where decisions such as ALP recruitment, security operations, and the commitment of American-funded development projects reflected that they were wholly owned by Afghans. Creating a local face fostered the local communities' confidence in the local leadership's abilities to unilaterally run and administer stability programs. It also assisted in altering local perceptions about the Afghan government's ability to secure, develop, and govern neglected Afghan communities.

Creating a local face is comprised of the following two concepts: (a) empowerment of Afghan leaders and (b) the co-opting of Afghan influencers whom were not necessarily legitimate leaders. Both concepts played significant roles in the adaptation of American team identity performances designed to paint a local face on stability programs.

a. Empowering Indigenous Leaders

The empowerment of local leaders was an important concept contributing to the creation of local faces for stability programs. It is a concept defined as the American team's willingness to relinquish decision-making authority to local government, security, and development leaders. It was an empowerment measure where American teams subsequently influenced and supported decision made by Afghan leaders. The only caveats discovered for not supporting Afghan decisions were in situations where these decisions jeopardized the lives, safety, or moral principles of the American team. The empowering

of indigenous leaders caused American teams to adapt identity performances that promoted Afghan leaderships and kept American identity hidden or in the background during the creation and management of security, governance, and development programs. In addition to empowering indigenous leaders, teams also needed to recruit and promote key powerbrokers that were not necessarily legitimate leaders within the overall Afghan community.

b. Co-opting Local Influencers

The co-opting of local influencers contributed to attempts teams made for creating a local face for their stability initiatives. Co-opting local influencers is a concept defined as the promotion of members deemed influential within segments of the local population to roles within the district's legitimate security and political apparatus. These adoptive efforts were implemented by American teams to leverage the political and economic influence targeted actors held within local communities. The concept was determined to be an absolute necessity for not only the creation of local faces within the governance and security of these districts, but also for American teams to have any measure of success in creating stability programs. Both the empowering and co-opting of local influencers were considered essential concepts in American identity performances and action strategies aimed at the creation of local faces.

3. Creating Buy-In

Creating buy is a process used to influence the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of Afghan groups and win support for Afghan governance and district stability programs. The need for creating buy in—not only from local Afghan population, but also from Afghan security partners was essential for facilitating future interactions. It was not an instantaneous process; rather, buy in was only produced after prolonged interactions with Afghan groups. Creating buy in is a theme defined as the process American teams developed to alter local impressions on Afghan government administered stability programs. Creating buy is comprised of the following concepts: (a) spreading the word and (2) the diminishing of local influence. Creating the type of buy in necessary for isolated tribal leaders to support ALP programs often required multiple visits to a village or village

area. It was only after an iterative process of interactions and identity performance adaptation before American teams could confirm that their influence in these areas had become enhanced and they garnered enough support (buy in) to justify expanding ALP.

a. Spreading the Word

Spreading the word is a concept where American teams traveled out to isolated areas for the purposes of selling the ALP program to rural leaders. This concerted grassroots level effort by American teams was used by American teams immediately after entry into their assigned districts. Spreading the word is a concept defined as the actions and behaviors American teams developed for communicating with Afghan leaders in ways that garnered their support for team's governance, security, and development efforts. The process was likened to that of Christian missionaries spreading the gospel and was referred to as "evangelizing" by operators. Spreading the word, unlike "evangelizing," was not intended not to convert rural tribal Afghans over to Christianity, but to garner their support for local initiatives to recruit and train security forces made up entirely of members from local villages. After initial introductions, American teams needed to conduct several revisions to their identity performances prior to gaining local support. Techniques for spreading the word were detailed in Chapter V and included the use of such identity types as militaristic, isomorphic, mimicking, and hybrid.

b. Diminishing Local Influencers

The diminishing of local influencers, whom were all either politically or militarily in opposition to American team efforts, was an emergent concept that contributed to the team's creation of buy in for the ALP program. Diminishing local influencers is defined as the actions and behaviors American teams used to diminish influences that ran counter to theirs, these influences came from local powerbrokers that were held in high esteem by the local population. American teams used both violent and non-violent action strategies to diminish these adversarial influences. An example of a local powerbroker was given as a Taliban shadow governor. Shadow governments were administered by the leaders of insurgent groups in which they set up a parallel system for the administration of justice used by local people during the absence of legitimate government. Shadow governors held

a certain level of reverence among the local community, so the diminishing of the governor's influence through violent actions and behaviors could jeopardize or hinder the team's interactions with the local populations. The action strategies used to diminish the power of these local powerbrokers had the potential of turning local sentiments toward the insurgency if not enacted properly. Therefore, teams had to approach the diminishing of these influencers delicately and with mindfulness about the role they played in the local community.

4. Creating Solidarity

The creation of solidarity among the various Afghan sub-groups with whom teams were partnered was essential for facilitating interactions and promoting stability in districts. Creating solidarity is a process for promoting a hybrid security team identity, comprised of Afghan government and security organizations, to the local Afghan community. The rehearsing of actions and unified messaging prior to joint American-Afghan interactions with local communities emerged as characteristic of this theme. The idea for creating solidarity was to project a positive and unified image, which was a task that required American teams and their Afghan security partners to never convey to locals that conflict, hostilities, or fractures existed between them. This theme was another fundamental framework during the revision of identity performances. It took prolonged interactions and learning to establish unity between Afghan sub-groups and American teams before hybrid American-Afghan security teams could adapt the identity performances necessary for winning the support and confidence of local Afghan communities. Creating solidarity is comprised of the following two concepts: (a) bridging gaps and (b) holding it all together for the creation of hybrid security teams working in solidarity.

a. Bridging Gaps

The bridging of gaps was a concept where American teams identified points of friction that existed between Afghan sub-groups and then developed solutions to influence sub-groups to overcome conflicts and differences for the greater good of Afghan society. American teams often found themselves forced to work with diverse Afghan teams made up of different ethnicities, tribes, and religious ideologies. Action strategies and adapted

identity performances were developed by American teams to bridge the gaps preventing a unified district security team. In situations where teams needed to work with disparate Afghan security groups hostile to one another, teams needed to adapt identity performances that were careful to avoid perceptions that the team favored one sub-group over another. Creating solidarity meant teams had to develop solutions that all sub-groups in conflict could agree upon, even if it meant incentivizing cooperation.

b. Holding it All Together

Holding it all together was used in situations where American teams needed to reestablish solidarity between Afghan sub-groups in situations where their previous hostilities become triggered. It is a process that American teams used for synchronizing, coordinating, directing, and leading the unified actions of diverse Afghan sub-groups. In the absence of solidarity, any attempts at making concerted security, governance, and development in these unstable districts would consume the American team's often limited resources. American teams that failed to create solidarity and hold it together ran the risk of de-legitimizing the Afghan government.

5. Summary of Revising Identity Performance Strategies

The revision of identity performances used by American teams was viewed as a dynamic process based on the signs and symbols acquired during interactions. This section identified the differences between the presentation of both introductory and revised identity performances. It also established the point at which American teams applied learning and knowledge in the adaptation of identity performances and action strategies. The revising of identity performance strategies was a dimension where American teams consciously created, rehearsed, and adapted their performances in the same way an actor prepares for a theatrical performance (Meisner, 1987). In comparison to a theatrical performance, no identity performance was ever performed exactly as previous identity performances. Four key emergent themes arose during the analysis of this dimension. The creation of legitimacy, local faces, buy in, and solidarity were identified as instrumental themes that contributed to the adaptation of American team social identities. The next section will explain the outcomes of this substantive theory.

I. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter described and explained the substantive theory of identity performance adaptation constructed from this study. It detailed the relationship between the concepts, themes, and aggregate dimensions that contribute to the identity performance adaptation process. Descriptions and explanations define the process American teams use for conveying intent, monitoring cues during interactions, and interpreting Afghan expectations. It was a learning process that involved the correction of interactive error which was subsequently applied to the adaptation of the teams' social identity (identity performances). The substantive theory was dynamic and dependent upon process, not outcomes. Social identity adaptation was a continually occurring process in which American teams strived to facilitate interaction with Afghan groups. Interactions are the core mechanisms that American teams at the lowest levels of military organizations use to apply "soft power" (Nye, 2016; Nye and Owen, 1996). The next chapter will discuss propositions based on the typologies, actions strategies, and identity performance adaptation process discussed in this study's finding chapters.

VII. PROPOSITIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates the environmental complexity in which the VSO campaign was conducted and the challenge of gauging its success. In many cases VSO teams were only marginally successful in achieving legitimacy by the Afghan population, and it is not clear whether they successfully applied "soft power". It also demonstrates the significant challenges that US teams faced. The Afghan villagers and the VSO teams did not have easily discernible common interests from which to negotiate and build trust. Teams had to be adept at reading subtle cues, and the most successful teams were able to adapt different identity strategies flexibly as their context changed. When parties interact over time and become more familiar with each other they are more likely to build familiarity, mutual understanding and concern, the conditions that are needed to build trust. Following Barrett and Sarbin (2007):

> Communication is persuasive when there is a reciprocal process of exchanging information and developing shared meaning; credibility is achieved when both parties spend as much time on negotiation and learning as they do on delivering the solution, outcome, or preferred belief…. The assumptions behind a model of invitational rhetoric are that different perspectives are valuable resources, that change happens when people choose to change themselves, and that all participants are open to being changed by the interaction (p. 30).

Rarely were VSO teams and villagers able to attain this level of mutual understanding. As this study demonstrates, the relationships between villagers and VSOs remained tenuous and vulnerable throughout the relationship. The tenuousness of these relationships made it necessary for teams to continually re-assess whether and how to sustain a relationship with Afghan villagers and which identity strategies to employ.

The previous chapters explored the adaptive social identity processes that US teams employed to convince Afghan villagers to reduce or eliminate insurgent influence. I have analyzed 73 critical incidents of 39 US operators' accounts of attempts to influence their Afghan counterparts. I inductively analyzed 52 of those incidents and developed a grounded theory that extends knowledge on the patterns of intercultural interactions, including initial conditions, the strategies that were enacted and the identity performances

that were constructed and adapted as conditions evolved. Based on these patterns, I derive some preliminary propositions for future confirming research in other challenging communication environments.

A. PROPOSITIONS

Proposition 1. When operators are invited into a village, trust is more easily achieved. Operators are more likely to display benevolence in their identity strategies and are more likely to demonstrate intentions to be of service earlier in a relationship (Buchan, 2009). The assumption of benevolence gives the operators a degree of freedom in future interactions.

a. Corollary 1a

If villagers know that insurgent activity has arisen from within their village they are more likely to understand and tolerate aggressive displays by Americans. However, even an initial invitation is not a guarantee of benevolent relationships if teams are perceived as exceeding locally acceptable and legitimate norms (Felipe & Sommer, 1966; Goffman, 1971; Sommer & Becker, 1969).

b. Corollary 1b

When a team is invited into a district and displays a degree of force that is interpreted negatively by the villagers, the team must attempt to repair and reestablish trusting relations (Buchan, 2009). Efforts such as clearance operations may be viewed as too disruptive by villagers or as collective retribution for previous wrongs, decreasing the likelihood of regaining trust and cooperation (Bochner, 1982).

Proposition 2. Teams may display ambivalent identity strategies or immutable strategies that violate Afghan cultural norms. In such instances, their actions may offend and could lead to deteriorating relationships. If the villagers interpret the identity strategies as out of ignorance, they may overlook the violations and sustain relations (Sherif, 1970; Tajfel, 1970; Bochner, 1982).

c. Corollary 2a

When a team violates a sacred norm through an excessive display of force and villagers view these violations to be hostile, relationships are more likely to deteriorate or break altogether. It may also lead to violent reactions on the part of Afghan counterparts, including the potential for "blue on green" incidents (Sherif, 1970; Tajfel, 1970; Bochner 1982).

Proposition 3. When a team's actions are misinterpreted, and relationships have already deteriorated, the team may tend to rely on mimicking strategies to re-establish trust. They may rely upon their localized knowledge to adopt and mimic Afghan norms (Howell, 1982; Bochner (1982); Seick (2010).

Proposition 4. In areas where insurgents enjoy the sympathy of local power brokers who reflect the sentiments of villagers, teams are more likely to assert "soft power" (Nye), through indirect demonstrations of force to gain respect. In these instances, teams seek to diminish local influence without damaging their own image.

Proposition 5. When teams are invited into a village, have benevolent relationships and enjoy a degree of trust with the local populace, they are more likely take risks to enhance the level of trust by demonstrating intentions to be of service. They are more likely to enact strategies to selflessly serve the local populace, and to establish intrinsically motivated trust (Buchan, 2009). Intrinsically motivated trust between parties mitigates the need for mechanisms that demonstrate benevolence (Buchan, 2009).

Proposition 6. When benevolence has been established and positive relationships have evolved teams are more likely to display isomorphic identities that communicate universal human characteristics (such as family, death, and marriage) (Bochner, 1982). These relationships are more likely to enhance and facilitate future interactions.

Proposition 7. A team may misinterpret the social dynamics in a village, including failure to attend to internal group conflict among Afghans (Seick, 2010). These misinterpretations could lead to severe adverse consequences.

d. Corollary 7a

The team may fail to recognize it until the conflict is severe, requiring them to break the relationship.

e. Corollary 7b

Severe power imbalances between the sub-groups may force a team to break contact with these groups.

f. Corollary 7c

A team may recognize the sub-group conflict, observe a balance of power between the sub-groups and help to amend the damaged relationships.

Proposition 8. When a team is invited into a highly contested area it is more likely to lead with a demonstration of force (Glatzer, 2002). This strategy is more likely to enhance the team's influence when villagers are positively impressed by military gallantry (Glatzer, 2002). When initial conditions are such that a team is not invited into the contested area, a different dynamic evolves.

Proposition 9. Under conditions in which a team is not invited into a village by its leaders, the team is more likely to use a demonstration of force (Glatzer, 2002). This gesture tends to be viewed as a hostile act. When

g. Corollary 9a

In such conditions the local populace may attribute hostile intent, and relationship building will be viewed as extrinsically motivated. This makes it more difficult to develop trust (Buchan, 2009).

Proposition 10. An uninvited team may not actually use force but instead demonstrate the potential to use force. Such a display can hinder interactions and require the team to mend its deteriorated relationship (Seick, 2010).

h. Corollary 10a

In attempting to mend a damaged relationship a team may use a strategy to demonstrate its intention to be of service to the village (Howell, 1982).

i. Corollary 10b

In attempting to mend a damaged relationship, a team may apply a mimicking identity strategy, engaging in Afghan cultural practices, such as wearing garb, growing facial hair, fasting for Ramadan (Bochner, 1982; Howell, 1982).

j. Corollary 10c

In attempting to amend deteriorated relationships a team may engage in nonviolent activity aimed at diminishing the influence of key insurgents (Nye, 2004; Nye and Owen, 1996).

B. CONTRIBUTIONS

The information warfare literature addresses the challenge of launching information campaigns to "win hearts and minds" in other countries. These campaigns to change the behavior of enemy and neutral populations propose a variety of influence tactics, from outright deception to the use of force and noncoercive forms of social influence. Much of this literature remains at the level of espousal and belief, and there are few actual studies of the dynamics (information processes) involved when the U.S. military is attempting to persuade. We still know little about the challenge of carrying out information campaigns, how actors decide upon strategies, how they interpret cues from their targets, and how they evaluate their own efforts. This dissertation seeks to fill this important gap.

This study also contributes to the literature on trust. The trust literature primarily addresses western approaches to trust formation. These studies demonstrate that trust is largely a cognitive enterprise, and that parties most likely lead with extrinsic actions that hopefully lead to more intrinsically motivated trust and benevolent relationships (Buchan, 2009). As Buchan (2009) noticed, there is a dearth of studies concerning non-western

oriented trust negotiations. This study begins to address this gap and demonstrates that eastern approaches to trust building may not be primarily cognitive and assume that extrinsically motivated trust must be established first (Buchan, 2009). Second, the literature on trust primarily focuses on outcomes (Buchan, 2009). Research is needed that looks at cultural differences "at every stage of the trust development process" (Buchan, 2009, p. 374). There is very little research that addresses the dynamic process through which intercultural trust is initiated, threatened, and established. This study addresses that gap.

The previous chapters have explored the adaptive social identity processes that American teams employed to convince Afghan villagers to reduce or eliminate insurgent influences. I have analyzed the 73 critical incidents of 39 U.S. special operators' accounts of attempts to influence their counterparts. I inductively analyzed these incidents and developed a grounded theory that explores the dynamics of encounters, including the initial conditions, the strategies they enacted and the identity performances they constructed and adapted as conditions evolved.

C. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research directions could be based on the preliminary propositions above and on the emergence of a substantive theory that explains American team social identity adaptation in complex cultural environments. One research direction could be to operationalize identity performance and initial conditions types discovered in this inductive study. The operationalization of these could be explored in field experiments incorporated into Special Operations Command (SOCOM) or the newly formed U.S. Army Security Force Assistance (SFA) Brigade training platforms. Pre-deployment mission rehearsal exercises (MRE) might serve as environments for data collection. These data could subsequently populate predictive models to gain valuable statistical evidence to support the process and influence future interactive strategies.

Findings could also support the operationalization of typologies and action strategies for measuring the trust trajectories between American teams and Central Asian populations. Field experimentation could study future American security team presence in

Central Asia and might expand upon Buchan's (2009) research on negotiation and trust in cultural environments.

D. CONCLUSIONS

This research derived a substantive theory that describes and explains the meaning making and social identity processes that American teams used to facilitate interaction with Afghan groups. It also describes and explains identity performances and action strategies that hinder team interaction. The grounded theory model explains both an anatomical data structure and the associated process that links codes grounded in the operators' data to its emergent theoretical codes. The details of the emergence of 14 action strategies are based on the phenomenological experience of operators. The findings chapters also explain the physiology of an emergent substantive theory of American team social identity adaptation. This dissertation concluded by detailing ten propositions that provide novel insights into the social adaptation processes of American teams while attempting to apply "soft power" in a complex Afghan cultural environment (Nye, 2014; Nye and Owens, 1996).

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