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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**The Afghan Tribe is a Critical Capability: Leveraging the Center of Gravity**

**by**

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

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## Abstract

*The Afghan Tribe is a Critical Capability: Leveraging the Center of Gravity.* The concept of the population as the center of gravity is not new. As David Galula wrote in Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice, “The support of the population is as necessary for the counterinsurgent as for the insurgent.”<sup>1</sup> Mao Zedong identified the importance of the population during the Chinese communist insurgency when he wrote, “The guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea.”<sup>2</sup> In Afghanistan General Stanley McChrystal has outlined a strategy to safeguard the population and win over its support. Coalition forces and the Taliban are fighting for control of the same thing: the people of Afghanistan. This paper addresses the issues at hand in Afghanistan and how they should be addressed to provide an exit for the United States. It explains what mechanisms must be in place for the United States to leave Afghanistan better than she found it. Finally the paper identifies issues that the United States Army must continue to pursue after the war in Afghanistan is won to ensure the institutional knowledge that is being developed today is not lost to the future generations of soldiers and officers who will take the field in the next counterinsurgency.

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1. David Galula. In *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice (PSI Classics of the Counterinsurgency Era)*. New Ed. New York, N.Y.: Praeger Security International Paperback, 2006. 52.

2. Mao Tse-Tung. *Quotations From Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. PZ3608 ed. United States and Canada: Bantam, 1967.

## INTRODUCTION

*Analogically, the guerrilla fights the war of the flea, and his military enemy suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend; too small, ubiquitous, and agile an enemy to come to grips with. If the war continues long enough - this is the theory - the dog succumbs to exhaustion and anemia without ever having found anything on which to close its jaws or rake with its claws. – Robert Taber, 1965.<sup>3</sup>*

In Afghanistan, as in other Counterinsurgency (COIN) campaigns, the center of gravity for the counterinsurgent forces and the insurgent is the population. Unlike an opposing army or an enemy's capital the population has a conscience and will. Its mood and opinion can change. After the United States led invasion in 2001 the Taliban was routed from the country. However, in recent years the Taliban has gained ground as an insurgency. In that time the population has soured on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) in Kabul and the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) effort to defeat the resurgent Taliban.<sup>4</sup>

By leveraging the Afghan tribal system ISAF can renew the population's confidence in the central government and develop the critical capability to protect the population with tribal security forces. By giving the citizenry of Afghanistan a reason to have confidence in the central government by co-opting the existing tribal governing system, ISAF can have the ability to bolster the GIROA with the population's goodwill, using a system the people know and support. Existing tribal militias can underpin the center of gravity—the population—by providing operational functions, particularly security. When tribal militias become part of

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3. Robert Taber. *The War of the Flea: Fighting Guerrilla Warfare in Theory and Practice*. New York: Lyle Stuart, INC, 1965. 27-28.

4. BBC. "Afghan Poll." Afghan Poll. [news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11\\_01\\_10\\_afghanpoll.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/11_01_10_afghanpoll.pdf) (accessed 21 April 2010).

the security apparatus they will have the legitimate capacity to protect their families and their country.

### **Where did the COIN go?**

*The Vietnam experience left the military leadership feeling that they should advise against involvement in counterinsurgencies unless specific, perhaps unlikely, circumstances obtain -- i.e. domestic public support, the promise of a quick campaign, and freedom to employ whatever force is necessary to achieve rapid victory.* - David Petraeus.<sup>5</sup>

When the United States Army trains for conflicts, it typically uses the Clausewitzian concept of center of gravity. This is very clearly delineated as “a source of massed strength - physical or moral - or a source of leverage, whose serious degradation, dislocation, neutralization, or destruction would have the most decisive impact on the enemy’s or one’s own ability to accomplish a given military objective; each center of gravity is related to the corresponding military objective to be accomplished.”<sup>6</sup> Addressing a center of gravity in this traditional sense is easy to understand. More importantly it is easy to plan for. As Milan Vego explains, “...centers of gravity are separated in terms of space and time. They have to be attacked simultaneously and / or sequentially, to ultimately defeat or neutralize a given military or theater-strategic center of gravity.”<sup>7</sup> The recurring theme in traditional center of gravity analysis is clear: the center of gravity, the source of strength of the enemy, must be attacked, destroyed or eliminated in order to remove that capability from the battlefield and our enemies’ use.

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5. “History News Network.” History News Network.  
<http://www.hnn.us/blogs/entries/42627.html> (accessed 29 April 2010).

6. Milan N. Vego. “GL.” *In Joint Operational Warfare Theory and Practice and V. 2, Historical Companion*. Reissue, 1st edition, 2009 reissue ed. Washington D.C.: Dept. Of The Navy, 2009. GL 4-5.

7. *Ibid.*, VII-21.

In counterinsurgency operations this is not the case. Objectives are not as easy to identify and the enemy may not be a uniformed combatant who is easy to pick out on the field of battle. In the past, military commanders and scholars have defined the center of gravity in a counterinsurgency as the population. The population as a center of gravity for the counterinsurgent and the insurgent is an old concept. Mao Zedong famously stated that “the guerrilla must move among the people as a fish swims in the sea,” indicating the importance of what he called the “hope of ultimate victory”—the support of the population.<sup>8</sup>

During the United Kingdom’s divestment of her overseas colonies after World War II, known as decolonization, British Commonwealth forces found themselves engaged with an insurgency in Malaya against the communist Malayan National Liberation Army. It was during this conflict that General Sir Gerald Templar, Director of Operations and High Commissioner for Malaya, coined the phrase “hearts and minds” when he stated, “The answer lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan People.”<sup>9</sup> What Templar meant was not that the counterinsurgent in Malaya had to be nice to the population in order to curry favor, but that a proper counterinsurgency campaign has an emotive and cognitive portion: hearts and minds.<sup>10</sup> The objective of counterinsurgency is to create an environment so the insurgent can be removed from the population so he can be killed, captured or left without support from the population, at which point the insurgent quits.

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8. Mao Tse-Tung. *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1961.

9. David Kilcullen. “Counterinsurgency in Iraq: Theory and Practice, 2007.” Lecture, Counterinsurgency Seminar 07 from Small Wars Center of Excellence, Wargaming Division, Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, Marine Corps Base Quantico, 26 September 2007.

10. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency in Iraq*, 16.

Thus the population is the center of gravity for both the insurgent and COIN forces. The insurgent relies on the support of the population to provide information, logistics, safe haven and legitimacy for his cause. COIN forces must convince the population to do none of those things, but rather to support them and the legitimate government. Templar and the British Commonwealth forces understood this and were able to destroy the Malayan insurgency and successfully extricate the UK from Malaya.

The United States has likewise conducted several successful counterinsurgency campaigns that can be traced back through the history of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps. During the Indian Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the Philippine Insurgency from 1899 to 1902 the U.S. military successfully led a counterinsurgency campaign that pacified the insurgents and won over the targeted population.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Marine Corps captured its counterinsurgency experiences in its 1940 *Small Wars Manual*.<sup>12</sup> That publication chronicled lessons learned from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, and likely contributed to the U.S. Marine Corps counterinsurgency plan in Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> Integrated as part of the Marine Corps Combined Action Program (CAP), the manual prescribed that U.S. forces should employ as many indigenous troops as possible early on to restore law and order, and stressed the importance of focusing on the social, economic, and political development of the people more than on material destruction.<sup>14</sup>

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11. Robert Cassidy. "Winning the War of the Flea: Lessons from Guerrilla Warfare." *Military Review*, October 2004.

12. *Ibid.*, 5.

13. *Ibid.*, 5.

14. *Ibid.*, 6.



Though the United States Army never captured its counterinsurgency lessons learned, it likewise had very good success with the Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG).<sup>15</sup> The CIDG program made a significant contribution to the war effort in Vietnam. Approximately 2,500 soldiers of the 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Group raised and led an army of 50,000 tribal fighters that conducted operations into the enemy's rear areas and secured large parts of the population and the countryside that would have otherwise been conceded to the enemy.<sup>16</sup>

The Civil Operations and Rural Development and Support (CORDS) program, consolidated under Military Assistance Command Vietnam in 1967, provided a robust military and civilian approach to counterinsurgency.<sup>17</sup> Military advisors trained and mentored police and regional forces, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) worked with their Vietnamese counterparts to provide development projects to improve local security and develop infrastructure.<sup>18</sup> Begun in November 1968, the Accelerated Pacification Campaign, run through CORDS, led to the government of Vietnam controlling most of the countryside by 1970.<sup>19</sup> It is estimated that during this time period the joint military / civilian enterprise contributed to the pacification, or governmental control, of 2,600 hamlets – approximately three million people.<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of the outcomes of the successful counterinsurgency programs that the U.S. has fought and won throughout its history, the stinging loss from the Vietnam conflict forced the U.S. military away from any lessons that might have been learned. As various military and civilian leaders have intoned during the run up to the Gulf War, Afghanistan and

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15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

Iraq, there will be no more Vietnams. The Army's intellectual renaissance after Vietnam has focused almost exclusively on the culturally preferred, conventional big-war paradigm.<sup>21</sup>

A demonstrable example of the cultural avoidance of counterinsurgency within the U.S. military can be seen in the counterinsurgency manuals of the Army and Marine Corps prior to the cooperative publication of FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* in December 2006. Prior to the publication of the new counterinsurgency manual, the Army had not updated its manual since 1986 and the Marine Corps since 1980.<sup>22</sup>

Given the culture of the U.S. military after Vietnam, and the aversion to the negativity that permeated the services after the loss in Southeast Asia, it is understandable that the institutional memory purged itself of historically successful COIN campaigns. With the almost exclusive focus on the next "big war" throughout the services, there is little surprise that the US military has had such a difficult time transitioning to COIN operations to secure and win the population in Afghanistan, despite routing the Taliban in 2002. As part of the purging of the institutional memory of developing a COIN campaign, the U.S. military had forgotten the importance of culture as it relates to the population it is attempting to stabilize. Additionally, as the U.S. and ISAF plans for the eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan, what will the indigenous force that must be developed to ensure continued security and stability look like?

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21. Robert Cassidy. "Prophets or Praetorians: The Utopian Paradox and the Powell Corollary." *Parameters* (2003): 132-133.

22. Samantha Power. "Riley Professional Reading Group: NYT reviews FM 3-24." Riley Professional Reading Group.  
<http://rileyprofessionalreadinggroup.blogspot.com/2007/08/nyt-reviews-fm-3-24.html>  
(accessed 25 April 2010).

## Understanding the Tribe

*Even if you take a Pashtun person to paradise by force, he will not go. He will go with you only by friendly means.* – Inam – ur – Rahman, head of the Swat Valley peace committee in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup>

One of the critical components of a successful counterinsurgency campaign is cultural understanding. This is not to say a COIN force has to understand the culture to make sure it does not offend the people it is trying to win over or hurt their feelings (though that is a facet). It is primarily so the COIN forces know what is important to the population and how it can leverage or exploit it in their favor.

One of the failings of the military intervention in Afghanistan and ISAF's subsequent inability to suppress the growing insurgency is the lack of understanding of tribal dynamics and relations.<sup>24</sup> It can also be argued that ISAF failed to understand the cultural dynamics of Afghanistan and how to best leverage those dynamics to create a stable country that would no longer harbor international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda. To analyze these failings within the framework of a major tribe, this paper will focus upon the Pashtu, as it is the largest ethnic group in the country and represents the largest ethnic faction of the resurgent Taliban.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Jim Gant. "One Tribe at a Time." War and Reality in Afghanistan. [blog.stevenpressfield.com/wp-content/themes/stevenpressfield/one\\_tribe\\_at\\_a\\_time.pdf](http://blog.stevenpressfield.com/wp-content/themes/stevenpressfield/one_tribe_at_a_time.pdf) (accessed 7 April 2010).

24. Kevin Abourzek. "UNO program immerses soldiers in Afghan culture." *The Lincoln Journal Star Online*. N.p., 10 Apr. 2010. Web. 29 April 2010. <[http://journalstar.com/news/local/article\\_a2bfa784-450f-11df-926b-001cc4c002e0.html](http://journalstar.com/news/local/article_a2bfa784-450f-11df-926b-001cc4c002e0.html)>.

25. CIA World Factbook: Afghanistan. "CIA World Factbook." <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (accessed 1 April 2010).

The code of Pashtunwali dictates how a Pashtun man sees the world and interacts with people. In the tribal model Pashtunwali defines what it means to “really” be Pashtun.<sup>26</sup> The code is believed to be traced back to the nomad culture of Afghanistan when space and resources were abundant and a man’s survival depended on his relationships rather than the rule of law.<sup>27</sup> Pashtunwali has several tenets that serve as a code of honor and a guideline for how to lead one’s life.<sup>28</sup> By adhering to Pashtunwali a Pashtun possesses honor (*izzat*); without honor he is no longer considered a Pashtun, and is not given the rights, protection, and support of the Pashtun community. Pashtunwali’s honor-based society is governed by the concepts of chivalry (or bravery, courage) (*ghayrat* or *nang*), hospitality (*melmastia*), and council (*jirga*). The council is the main legislative authority in the men’s public realm.<sup>29</sup> Revenge (*badal*) is closely related to honor. If a Pashtu’s honor is violated then he is obligated to seek revenge or there is no honor.<sup>30</sup> There are many offenses to *izzat* that can be settled with negotiation, but several others that require blood revenge.<sup>31</sup> This can lead to a cycle of feuding by avenging the avenger and so on.

Pashtunwali is fully ingrained into the cultural and societal make up of the Pashtu tribes. These tribal law codes are widely practiced as a component of customary law.<sup>32</sup> With

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26. “Pashtunwali.” GlobalSecurity.org - Reliable Security Information. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/pashtunwali.htm> (accessed 2 April 2010).

27. Ibid.

28. Palwasha Kakar . “Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women’s Legislative Authority.” Kakar. [www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf](http://www.law.harvard.edu/programs/ilsp/research/kakar.pdf) (accessed 5 April 2010).

29. Ibid., 2.

30. *Pashtunwali*, 1.

31. Ibid.

32. Kakar, *Tribal Law of Pashtunwali*, 1.

his cultural collection of tribal laws the Pashtun have governed themselves as a *de facto* social federation.<sup>33</sup>

When asked about the mindset of an Afghan, Howard Hart, a member of the CIA clandestine service for 25 years and former station chief in Islamabad, stated, “There is not, and never has been, anything remotely approaching a shared national identity.”<sup>34</sup> In his view there is no concept of being an Afghani. J. Alexander Their of the US Institute for Peace wrote, “Family and tribal affiliations outweigh all others.”<sup>35</sup> Jim Gant, a Special Forces officer, spent several months living with a tribe in Afghanistan and ingratiated himself to the point that the tribe adopted him as a family member.<sup>36</sup> He identified that “...the tribesman is less concerned about country – which for him is almost irrelevant – and more concerned about protecting the domain of his family, his customs, his tribal leadership, his warrior pride. He lives in a regional world where day-to-day military strengths mean the difference between survival and being overrun by other tribal elements whoever they might be (the Taliban, other aggressive tribes, or the Russian army).”<sup>37</sup>

When the United States began assisting Afghanistan in crafting its constitution and backing Hamid Karzai as the heir to leadership, the tribes resisted greatly. The appointment of a national leader without consensus of the tribes, and the development of a political institution that reduced the power of tribal leaders, failed to lend legitimacy to the central government.<sup>38</sup> Tribes by nature are conservative; they don’t like change and are resistant to

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33. Amitai Etzioni. “Bottom-up Nation Building.” *Policy Review* DEC 2009/2010 (2010): 58.

34. *Ibid.*, 52.

35. *Ibid.*, 53.

36. Gant, *One Tribe at a Time*, 5.

37. *Ibid.*, 24.

38. *Ibid.*, 59.

it.<sup>39</sup> This is particularly true if an alien force attempts to change the way tribes live, manage their lives or govern their population.<sup>40</sup>

This concept may seem somewhat unusual but it is not very different from the development of the United States in its infancy. Etzioni adequately writes, “One of the greatest insights of the neoconservatives....was the recognition that there are great limits to social engineering, that societies tend to be highly resistant to change, and that design drives initiated by governments are prone to failure. Sadly, they ignored the fact that the same grand insight that applied to Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York also applies in full to Helmand and Kandahar, Basra and Swat.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Corruption and Pashtu Rejection of Kabul**

*Corruption is directly linked to leadership.* - 1LT Yar Mohammed, Afghan National Police.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the cultural dynamics of the tribal system in Afghanistan, there are many other issues that cause the tribes to view the central government with suspicion and in some cases outright disgust. Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan’s finance minister from 2002 to 2004, explained, “The core threat we all face is the Afghan government itself. About two-thirds of revenue is lost to abuse...the money is all looted because [leaders] are insecure about what may come next in Afghan politics.”<sup>43</sup> In an interview Sarah Chayes, a former special advisor to GEN McChrystal, stated, “We started out with a country that hated the

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39. Ibid., 15.

40. Ibid.

41. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 54.

42. “Neat quotes worth saving.” Talking Proud - USA -Service and Sacrifice. <http://www.talkingproud.us/Quotes.html> (accessed 29 April 2010).

43. Robert Kaplan. "Man Versus Afghanistan - Magazine - The Atlantic." Breaking news, analysis and opinion on politics, business, culture, international, science, technology, national, food &” The Atlantic. <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/03/man-versus-afghanistan/7983/> (accessed 13 April 2010).

Taliban and by 2009 were driving people back into their arms. We enabled an administration, led by Hamid Karzai, that is less a government than a protection racket, in which bribery is the basis...of transactions from small sums paid to criminals at roadblocks...to tens of millions of dollars smuggled out of the Kabul airport by government ministers.”<sup>44</sup> The Taliban is growing in power due to corruption and the government’s abuse of the population.<sup>45</sup> A recent BBC poll shows that support for Karzai is waning across the population with support for his administration dropping to 55 percent, compared to 78 percent in 2006.<sup>46</sup> A 2009 BBC / ABC News poll of the population showed that 50 percent of the population believes government corruption has increased in the last year and 63 percent believe corruption is a big issue in their area.<sup>47</sup>

One of the glaring examples of corruption in the government is Karzai’s half brother Ahmed Wali Karzai. Wali Karzai has been accused of profiting off the illegal drug trade in Kandahar, laundering money for criminals, conducting illegal land deals, and playing a central role in the alleged fraud in the last presidential election.<sup>48</sup> Officials have asked for President Karzai to intervene and remove his half brother from serving in any official capacity in his government, but the president refuses to act.<sup>49</sup> With the concept of honor

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44. Kaplan, *Man Versus Afghanistan*, 6.

45. Ibid.

46. Andrew Legon . “Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt: The Afghan National Police Challenge.” Foreign Policy Research Institute. [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org) (accessed 4 September 2009).

47. “BBC - Press Office - Afghanistan: national opinion poll.” BBC - Homepage. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/02\\_february/09/afghanistan.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2009/02_february/09/afghanistan.shtml) (accessed 12 April 2010).

48. Dexter Filkins. “Despite Doubt, Karzai Brother Retains Power - NYTimes.com.” The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/31/world/asia/31karzai.html?pagewanted=1> (accessed 5 April 2010).

49. Ibid.

being foremost in the code of Pashtunwali, these examples of corruption may be primary reasons for the rejection of GIROA.

The tribes also see the government in Kabul as not part of their tribe or family, but an outsider that is trying to usurp authority from tribal leaders.<sup>50</sup> This is especially the case as the GIROA was crafted by foreigners and has lost much of its credibility due to associations with drug lords, warlords, and the suspected manipulation of the 2009 presidential election.<sup>51</sup> Regretfully much of this is easily linked to the GIROA through the president's half brother.

Of all the government agencies, the one the majority of the population is most likely to have contact with is the Afghan National Police (ANP). One former Afghan General aptly stated, "The police are the reflection mirror of the government in which the general public judges the entire system."<sup>52</sup> Regretfully the NATO Deputy Commander for Police Training recently said of the ANP, "They have the worst reputation for a national institution in the country – the highest level of corruption."<sup>53</sup> The ANP suffers terribly in the perception and reality of their abilities. Twenty percent of recruits test positive for drugs.<sup>54</sup> In the Helmand province, British officials estimate that 60 percent of police are using illegal drugs.<sup>55</sup> Less than 10 percent are literate, lower than the national literacy rate of 15 percent.<sup>56</sup> With this fundamental shortfall in education ANP have a very difficult time writing reports, recording

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50. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 53.

51. *Ibid.*, 58.

52. Legon, *Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt*, 6.

53. Wire Feed. "General Provides Update on Afghan Police Training." *US Federal News Service (Washington)*, 10 April 2010.

54. Rod Nordland. "With Raw Recruits, Afghan Police Buildup Falter - NYTimes.com." *The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/03/world/asia/03afghan.html> (accessed 22 April 2010).

55. Legon, *Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt*, 3.

56. Nordland, *With Raw Recruits*, 1.



information and maintaining records for investigations.<sup>57</sup> Patrolmen receive only eight weeks of training while officers receive four and a half months.<sup>58</sup> At the conclusion of training an average of only 5 percent of the recruits pass the firearms and marksmanship test.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the poor quality of recruits, the ANP is known to be rife with corruption. ANP have set up checkpoints on the highways throughout the country to extort money from travelers and truck drivers.<sup>60</sup> Police have been accused of torturing prisoners as a method of collecting information and looting property during the conduct of home searches.<sup>61</sup> Police take payoffs from criminals to forgo arresting them, and they also take payoffs from shop owners and the general public, running a Mafioso style protection racket.<sup>62</sup> This is due to a culture in which corruption is endemic and to the fact that the police are not locals; they take their cut and move on to the next location.<sup>63</sup> With this type of behavior from the ANP there is little reason to believe the unfavorable opinion will change without a significant change in strategy that moves beyond just making more police.

### **The Tribal Government and Tribal National Police**

The U.S. military's forces have relearned the hard lessons lost from their institutional knowledge after Vietnam. In nine years of conflict in Afghanistan, they have come to understand the nation's tribes, along with the importance of Pashtunwali to the people's

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57. Legon, *Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt*, 3.

58. Legon, *Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt*, 5.

59. Nordland, *With Raw Recruits*, 1.

60. Oppel, Richard. "Corruption Undercuts Hopes for Afghan Police - NYTimes.com." The New York Times - Breaking News, World News & Multimedia. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/world/asia/09ghazni.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/world/asia/09ghazni.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1) (accessed 28 April 2010).

61. Legon, *Ineffective, Unprofessional, and Corrupt*, 3.

62. Ibid.

63. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 57.

customs and culture. Armed with these lessons and newfound understanding, the ISAF Commander (COMISAF) should take a new tack in Afghanistan. The majority of the population still views the tribal elders as the decision makers within their communities.<sup>64</sup> The elder has been the cornerstone of Afghan governance for thousands of years and formally or informally will continue to fulfill that role.<sup>65</sup> Since this internal method of governance already exists, the GIROA should co-opt the tribes, with their existing organization, and incorporate them into the governing process.

COMISAF should recommend to the GIROA to permit the tribes to maintain their identity and their sense of honor by empowering them to lead their own kinsmen. It would go a long way to win back the respect and the trust of its alienated population. To this end, the tribes would be subservient to the provincial government: the governor, the provincial council and the province's members of parliament.<sup>66</sup> This form of government has already seen a positive response from the Pashtun tribes. In a 2008 survey, the Asia Foundation found that local traditional bodies such as the *shura* and *jirga*, as well as government appointed councils such as the Community Development and Provincial Councils, enjoy the support of two-thirds of the population.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the tribal and government leaders, religious leaders should also take part in the leadership of their communities. Seventy percent of polled Afghans feel religious leaders should be involved in local decision making.<sup>68</sup> Allowing religious leaders access to

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64. Darin Blatt, Eric Long, Brian Mulhern, and Michael Ploskunak. "Tribal Engagement in Afghanistan." *Special Warfare* JAN/FEB (2009): 25.

65. Ibid.

66. Dan Green. "Going Tribal: Enlisting Afghanistan's Tribes." *Special Warfare* JUL/AUG (2009): 15.

67. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 60.

68. Ibid.

the governmental decision making process is contrary to what the U.S. believes as a pluralistic democracy. Nevertheless, in the case of Afghanistan, permitting religious leaders to have a leadership role, formal or informal, would support popular perception of having a hand in their destiny through their traditional local leaders. That said, ISAF must monitor the religious leaders to ensure they are not spreading a militant anti-west message.<sup>69</sup>

In a limited form the Afghan National Police are already being supplemented or replaced with tribal militias. This experiment was carried out with great success in the Bermel district near the town of Shkin. In 2006 tribal militias that had fought with U.S. Special Forces A-Teams were demobilized by the Afghan government in order to stand up Afghan National Security Forces. As the militia was stood down, many of these tribal soldiers were hired as security guards to protect Special Forces fire bases. Due to a lack of ANP in the district, Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha (SFODA) 3315 selected several of its tribal militiamen to attend police training. As a result of placing familiar national police within their tribal areas of influence, the elders recognized the value of having a police force they could trust. Over the course of ODA 3315's eight month deployment, the police they developed from the former tribal militias made nine arrests, three of which were the direct result of tribal elders cooperating with their ANP.<sup>70</sup> It is estimated that throughout Afghanistan there are somewhere between 65,000 and 180,000 tribal militia forces that work on US Special Forces fire bases.<sup>71</sup> These tribal soldiers that are accustomed to working with Special Forces within their tribal areas would be exceptional candidates to send to ANP training. The success that was demonstrated with this project should be replicated

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69. Ibid., 61.

70. Blatt, Long, Ploskunak, *Tribal Engagement in Afghanistan*, 24-25.

71. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 56.

throughout the country where possible. COMISAF should direct Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force - Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) commanders to work with tribal leaders in their area to nominate tribal militiamen to attend ANP training. After nomination, these potential new police must be vetted to prevent infiltration into the police of Taliban or known criminals. Once the tribal militiamen return as ANP they should be used to enforce laws in their home areas. These men would be best suited to work with the elders and leaders in their communities and take advantage of a lifetime of knowledge in their areas.

As ODA 3315 demonstrated, and COMISAF should continue to pursue, a tribal engagement strategy to leverage the tribes as a cornerstone for developing an Afghan National Security apparatus can be successful. But as ODA 3315's experience and successful tribal engagements in al Anbar, Iraq have also shown, coalition forces must live with or in very close proximity to their tribes.<sup>72</sup> This will allow the ISAF to mentor the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and demonstrate trust to the tribal leaders in the latter's ability to protect the ISAF soldiers. In the context of Pashtunwali, this type of action speaks directly to honor: trusting the tribe with your respect and safety and the warrior mentality of the Pashtu people by training, leading and fighting with the tribal ANSF. This is not to suggest that replacing the ANP with tribal forces will stamp out corruption. However, it has been shown that tribal militias will practice restraint when they are working within their tribal areas, since they may be related to many of the people who live and work there.<sup>73</sup>

The proposed integration of tribal leadership into the decision making process of the central government is not without issue. The process of building capacity within the tribes must be done in concert with the Afghan government in order to give the population a greater

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72. Green, *Going Tribal*, 16.

73. Etzioni, *Bottom up Nation Building*, 57.

role in their future, not build a parallel system of government that usurps the authority of the GIROA.<sup>74</sup> COMISAF can avoid this pitfall by carefully planning and then monitoring the tribal engagement process to ensure tribes are not permitted to develop large representative bodies that can relegate the provincial leadership to meaninglessness.

Due to the 30 plus years of constant warfare, many of the tribes find themselves leaderless, or the tribal leadership has been corrupted or undermined by the Taliban or other influences. In these situations, leaders in power may not be traditional tribal leaders or there may not be a single individual leading the tribe.<sup>75</sup> These tribes will take the longest to develop and would be the last to begin the tribal engagement and security development process. ISAF must enable these tribes and ANSF must supplement them for their security and protection. By developing tribal security in other areas COMISAF can direct the relocation of ANSF to areas where the population is unable to defend itself, or to tribes which are too ruined to muster leadership. Once semblance of stability returns the tribes can conduct *jirgas* (part of the Pashtunwali code) to elect new leadership of consensus.<sup>76</sup>

Of course some individuals will remain aligned with the Taliban, and they must be engaged kinetically. However, leveraging the majority of the population by giving them ownership of their future will separate the insurgent from the population and permit ANSF and ISAF forces to destroy him.

### **Conclusion**

Regardless of the eventual national political outcome in Afghanistan—progressive democracy or some other hybrid—the operational commander cannot ignore the COIN lessons

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74. Green, *Going Tribal*, 15.

75. *Ibid.*

76. *Ibid.*

recently relearned in the country's deserts and mountains. Lessons learned and best practices from Afghanistan must be captured by ISAF and the U.S. military and built into the institutional knowledge to apply to the next insurgency.

One of the lessons that commanders must build into current and future operational and training plans is the importance of cultural understanding so coalition forces understand the people they are protecting and recognize how the enemy is thinking. By properly preparing to understand the human terrain where they are operating, COIN forces will be better prepared to leverage the population to their advantage. In Afghanistan the engagement of the tribal leadership structure to empower the belief in self determination will significantly enhance the capability of ISAF.

COMISAF should allow the development of tribal security forces that will have the ability to secure the population. When the operational commander empowers the population to secure itself, ANSF will be free to conduct operations in areas where the insurgency has the greatest presence and destroy Taliban that are embedded in the country.

These steps would greatly enable ISAF and the ANSF to root out insurgents and separate them from the population and give the tribal leadership ownership and responsibility in the governance of their country and its future. By empowering the Afghan tribal leadership COMISAF can leverage the will of the populace, thus harnessing it as a friendly center of gravity underpinning the GIROA and the coalition.

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