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# General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment

Evaluating the Operating Environment  
in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009

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**Dissatisfied with the leadership of Army general David McKiernan and recognizing a decline in overall security in Afghanistan occurring since 2006, Pres. Barack Obama named Army general Stanley McChrystal the new commander of US and coalition forces in Afghanistan on 15 June 2009. General McChrystal was immediately tasked to conduct a 60-day initial assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and to recommend a new strategy that would stop the growth of the insurgency and assist the US-backed Afghan government in stabilizing the war-torn nation. General McChrystal had very little time to assess the exceedingly complex Afghanistan operating environment and to propose a new strategy to stop the Taliban momentum and ultimately defeat the insurgency. He quickly assembled a headquarters team, led by US Army colonel Kevin Owens, to analyze the complex strategic and operational environment in Afghanistan. That analysis, combined with his own study of the command, spurred McChrystal to subsequently recommend a greater resourced population-centric counterinsurgency strategy. This narrative focuses on General McChrystal and his strategic assessment team's analysis. It describes the assessment team and covers some of the early friction between the members of the team who had arrived with the new commander and the existing headquarters staff. It then dissects the Initial Assessment Working Group that relied heavily on the expertise of a number of civilian scholars invited to take part in the analysis. This study breaks down each of the additional assessment subcomponents all of which had their own separate working group. The seven annexes are as follows: (A) Military Plans, (B) Command and Control, and Command Relationships, (C) USG [US Government] Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan, (D) Strategic Communication, (E) Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force, (F) Detainee Operations Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections, and (G) Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration. Despite difficulties along the way, General McChrystal and his assessment team produced a remarkable document that convincingly argues for a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that was eventually adopted by President Obama and his North Atlantic Treaty Organization counterparts in late 2009. Attached to this narrative is an unclassified redacted copy of the final product: COMISAF's [Commander, International Security Assistance Force] Initial Assessment.**

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in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009*

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## Contents

	Page
DISCLAIMER . . . . .	<i>ii</i>
ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . . . .	<i>v</i>
ABSTRACT . . . . .	<i>vii</i>
PREFACE . . . . .	<i>ix</i>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	<i>xi</i>
GENERAL MCCHRYSAL'S STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT: EVALUATING THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT IN AFGHANISTAN IN THE SUMMER OF 2009	
Introduction . . . . .	1
The Tasking . . . . .	2
The Team . . . . .	3
The Assessment Begins . . . . .	7
Early Organizational Difficulties and Cultural Clashes . . . . .	10
The Team Comes Together and Moves Forward. . . . .	15
Initial Assessment Working Group . . . . .	17
General McChrystal Takes Ownership . . . . .	25
General McChrystal Takes Specific Troop Numbers out of the Assessment . . . . .	27
Strategic Assessment Annexes . . . . .	27
Conclusion . . . . .	48
NOTES . . . . .	49
ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	53
APPENDIX: "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," 30 August 2009 . . . . .	55



## **About the Author**

Col Matthew Brand is currently the director of staff for the Curtis E. LeMay Center for Doctrine Development and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. His previous assignment was the United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) command historian from June 2009 to June 2010, where he chronicled the activities of Gen Stanley McChrystal during his first year as the USFOR-A commander. After graduating from Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training in 1988, Colonel Brand flew approximately 3,400 hours during a variety of operational assignments as an HC-130 and MC-130P navigator for Air Force Special Operations Command before arriving at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 2001 to attend the US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). From 2002 through 2007, Colonel Brand remained at Fort Leavenworth, first serving as an instructor at the CGSC where he taught joint and multinational operations, air operations, and special operations, and then as deputy commander of Detachment 1, 505th Command and Control Wing, helping to integrate airpower into the Army Battle Command Training Program. Colonel Brand was then assigned to Fort Rucker, Alabama, from 2007 to 2009 as the LeMay Center's operating location director, ensuring that the doctrinally correct application of airpower was presented to the US Army Aviation Center of Excellence academic programs, exercises, and war games. Colonel Brand earned a bachelor of science degree in business administration from California State University at Northridge in 1987, a master of arts degree in management from Webster University in 1997, and a master's degree in military arts and sciences, history option, from the CGSC in 2007. He is married with two children.





## **Abstract**

Dissatisfied with the leadership of Army general David McKiernan and recognizing a decline in overall security in Afghanistan occurring since 2006, Pres. Barack Obama named Army general Stanley McChrystal the new commander of US and coalition forces in Afghanistan on 15 June 2009. General McChrystal was immediately tasked to conduct a 60-day initial assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and to recommend a new strategy that would stop the growth of the insurgency and assist the US-backed Afghan government in stabilizing the war-torn nation.

General McChrystal had very little time to assess the exceedingly complex Afghanistan operating environment and to propose a new strategy to stop the Taliban momentum and ultimately defeat the insurgency. He quickly assembled a headquarters team, led by US Army colonel Kevin Owens, to analyze the complex strategic and operational environment in Afghanistan. That analysis, combined with his own study of the command, spurred McChrystal to subsequently recommend a greater resourced, population-centric counterinsurgency strategy.

This narrative focuses on General McChrystal and his strategic assessment team's analysis. It describes the assessment team and covers some of the early friction between the members of the team who had arrived with the new commander and the existing headquarters staff. It then dissects the Initial Assessment Working Group that relied heavily on the expertise of a number of civilian scholars invited to take part in the analysis. This study breaks down each of the additional assessment sub-components, all of which had their own separate working group. The seven annexes are as follows: (A) "Military Plans," (B) "Command and Control, and Command Relationships," (C) "USG [US Government] Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan," (D) "Strategic Communication," (E) "Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force," (F) "Detainee Operations, Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections," and (G) "Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration."

Despite difficulties along the way, General McChrystal and his assessment team produced a remarkable document that convincingly argues for a comprehensive counterinsurgency strategy that was eventually adopted by President Obama and his North Atlantic Treaty Organization counterparts in late 2009. Attached to this narrative is an unclassified redacted

copy of the final product: “COMISAF’s [Commander, International Security Assistance Force] Initial Assessment.”

## **Preface**

When I arrived in Kabul as the first official United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) command historian on 12 June 2009, I received a few pieces of important advice from the command historian, US Central Command, Mr. David “Scotty” Dawson. Mr. Dawson told me to “be careful not to become the ‘special project’ officer for the command staff.” He continued, “Don’t get me wrong; you’ve got to be a team player, but you are there for an important reason, so that we can finally properly organize the history effort for this critically important campaign.” Yet, less than a week later, I was told by the USFOR-A chief of staff that the deputy command general for support, Maj Gen John Macdonald, US Army, wanted me to be the primary USFOR-A headquarters staff representative for the “60-day assessment” that the new commander, Gen Stanley McChrystal, was charged with conducting. This assessment was going to be General McChrystal’s number one priority for the first two months of his command. Although this was certainly a “special project” that would likely fall into the category that Mr. Dawson cautioned against, it was also a golden opportunity for the new historian to capture this story from the inside. It was the start of a journey that would lead to this narrative of the historic strategic assessment, an analysis that charted the way-ahead for US and coalition forces in Afghanistan as they battled a growing insurgency which was threatening the precarious Afghan government.

Key to understanding how the strategic assessment was conducted and my role in monitoring its progress is how the overall command structure works. The command relationships in Afghanistan for US and coalition forces are complicated because of the unique nature of international involvement in Afghanistan since 2001. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters is a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led organization with more than 44 contributing nations. Although its initial charter and mission were somewhat limited, it now essentially runs the tactical war fight across Afghanistan. USFOR-A began standing up in late 2008, becoming officially operational in early 2009, shortly after Pres. Barack Obama ordered an additional 21,000 forces to Afghanistan. This new US headquarters took over the Title 10 support role for US forces in Afghanistan from the 101st Airborne Divi-

sion, the division responsible for Regional Command-East in the early months of 2009.

As the strategic assessment began, the Headquarters USFOR-A staff numbered approximately 350 personnel, most of whom lived and worked at the New Kabul Compound (NKC) under the day-to-day control of General Macdonald. General McChrystal was the dual-hatted commander of both ISAF and USFOR-A but lived and worked at the ISAF headquarters compound and spent 99 percent of his time and energy running his operational command, delegating all but key decisions for USFOR-A to General Macdonald. General McChrystal was ordered to conduct the strategic assessment by the US secretary of defense, Robert Gates, and then later also tasked identically by his ISAF chain of command through NATO leadership at Brussels, Belgium. The assessment was conducted at Headquarters ISAF, led primarily by US officers on the ISAF staff. However, Headquarters USFOR-A had officers in almost all of the strategic assessment working groups, and I was responsible for monitoring the working groups and reporting back daily to General Macdonald at NKC on the progress of the strategic assessment and its effect on USFOR-A interests. Thus, this “fly on the wall” perspective allowed me to observe many of the key aspects of the strategic assessment and also allowed access to critical assessment personnel for interviews in this narrative.

The primary sources for this narrative are interviews with the key participants, the author’s personal notes, and the assessment, entitled “COMISAF’s [commander of the (US-led) International Security Assistance Force] Initial Assessment,” which was submitted on 30 August 2009 and is included as the sole attachment to this narrative. Leading participants in the strategic assessment tell the story of this incredibly historic period, often in their own words. Although the strategic assessment was developed with input from many staff officers, advisors, and outside experts, General McChrystal took the assessment and made it his own. He was the final arbitrator to the recommendations that formed the new recommended counterinsurgency strategy for US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. The strategic assessment was his assessment, and General McChrystal would lead the effort to stop the insurgent momentum and regain the initiative for US, coalition, and Afghan forces. Only time will tell if he was successful.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank all of the participants that I interviewed for this project for candidly sharing their experiences with me and allowing me to use some of their quotes in this paper. I would like to particularly single out Gen Stanley McChrystal for his leadership during the period of the strategic assessment and for allowing the release of this remarkable story while the major counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan are still ongoing. I would also like to thank US Army colonels Kevin Owens, Christopher Kolenda, and Wayne Grigsby and US Marine Corps colonel James McGrath for honestly sharing all the lessons learned from this historic period, both good and bad, to more completely tell the story of the strategic assessment. Finally, I would like to thank Lt Col Greg McCarthy, US Marine Corps, the deputy historian during my tenure at United States Forces-Afghanistan, for assisting with the initial editing process for this piece and for taking many of the command historian duties after his arrival, freeing me up to complete my writing projects.



# **General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment**

## **Evaluating the Operating Environment in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009**

### **Introduction**

By the summer of 2009, Afghanistan had become the main foreign policy effort of the United States. With the state of affairs there deteriorating, Pres. Barack Obama replaced Gen David McKiernan with Gen Stanley McChrystal on 15 June 2009. Obama requested that US defense secretary Robert Gates task the new International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commander with conducting a 60-day strategic assessment of the situation in order to craft a successful strategy to turn the war around. The assessment had a somewhat turbulent start due to a variety of factors involved with the new commander and turmoil created with a new team replacing some of the previous staff at ISAF headquarters (HQ) in Afghanistan. It also had a delayed turn-in because of the Afghan presidential election. However, despite these problems, the assessment successfully captured the incredibly complex environment in Afghanistan, breaking it down into understandable pieces, and presented a strategy for regaining momentum and eventually defeating the insurgency.

This paper primarily focuses on the *process* involved with creating the final assessment report over its actual *content*. In other words, how did General McChrystal and his staff go about organizing and completing the assessment? The assessment was an evolving document, but after a couple of weeks into the analysis, it had settled into a relatively fixed structure. An initial assessment section includes the commander's summary and the overarching strategic assessment and is followed by several annexes. The annexes are comprised of these subject areas: (A) "Military Plans," (B) "Command and Control [C2], and Command Relationships," (C) "USG [US Government] Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan," (D) "Strategic Communication [StratCom]," (E) "Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force," (F) "Detainee Operations, Rule of Law,



and Afghan Corrections,” and (G) “Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration.”

The name of the assessment changed several times throughout the evolution of the analysis. First, it was called the “60-day assessment.” Then, when the team realized that the actual assessing would occur in far fewer than 60 days (prior to the decision to delay the turn-in), it was relabeled the “strategic assessment,” which is what the ISAF and United States Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) staff knew it as for most of the process. However, when the assessment was released on 30 August 2009, the subject title on the cover letter from McChrystal to Secretary Gates was “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment.” This is the title that is used hereafter to refer to the report that McChrystal turned into the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the secretary of defense (SecDef), and the president. To avoid confusing the name of the overall assessment with the initial assessment section that is its core, the overall effort is referred to as the strategic assessment, just as it was by the staff throughout the process.

## **The Tasking**

Prior to his arrival in Afghanistan, General McChrystal received verbal guidance to conduct this assessment directly from Secretary Gates. Ironically, it was not until after the assessment had begun that the CJCS (or “chairman”), through Central Command (CENTCOM), then created the written order for General McChrystal, acting in his USFOR-A command capacity, to proceed. This written order was dated 26 June 2009. It is slightly unusual for a combat organization of this size to begin such a large undertaking as the strategic assessment without a formal tasking. However, in this case, since General McChrystal was handpicked by Secretary Gates based on the recommendation of Adm Michael Mullen, the CJCS, the defense secretary had provided his own verbal guidance directly to his new commander-select prior to his arrival and assumption of command. Secretary Gates told General McChrystal, “Go take 60 days, do an assessment, and tell me what you need.” General McChrystal took this to mean that after the assessment was completed, whatever resources he thought he needed, if any, would then be re-

quested. General McChrystal also realized that the assessment should be one effort for both the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), so he told NATO leadership back in Europe, “You ought to task me to do this—that way I’ll do one product for both groups.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, both CENTCOM and NATO provided written guidance to do the strategic assessment after the early stages of the assessment had already started. This created a somewhat awkward situation in that the CJCS and CENTCOM staffs contacted the USFOR-A HQ staff asking for what was being assessed so they could then provide written tasking for these assessed areas.

### **The Team**

First and foremost, General McChrystal was the leader of the strategic assessment. His participation is detailed later, but the strategic assessment was *his* assessment. He had dozens of members of his staff working on this analysis, but he put his stamp on the final product through countless changes in its multiple iterations prior to completion. General McChrystal brought in several of his own military advisors to become part of his Strategic Advisory Group (SAG), led by Army colonels Kevin Owens and Christopher Kolenda and Navy commander Jeffrey Eggers. Rear Adm Gregory Smith was also sent out to join the team from CENTCOM, where he was Gen David Petraeus’s public affairs officer. Admiral Smith was previously sent to Iraq in 2007 by Admiral Mullen, who was then chief of naval operations, for a “few weeks” to see if he could help General Petraeus, then the Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) commander, put together his winning counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy. The admiral ended up staying on at MNF-I for an entire year. The situation repeated itself in the summer of 2009. Admiral Smith was preparing for retirement when Admiral Mullen, now the CJCS, asked him to instead go to Afghanistan and be General McChrystal’s communication director. Admiral Smith, a career Navy public affairs officer, ended up leading the strategic assessment’s Strategic Communication Working Group.

Colonel Owens, a career infantry officer, had worked in several organizations with General McChrystal throughout his career, including the 75th Ranger Regiment and Joint Special

Operations Command, although he had never previously worked directly for him. He commanded a battalion in 2002 and a brigade in 2005–6 in Afghanistan. He was a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York prior to being rushed to theater to eventually take charge of General McChrystal's SAG. Colonel Owens soon became General McChrystal's lead coordinator organizing the assessment process. Colonel Kolenda served as battalion commander in Kunar, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan, from May 2007 to August 2008. In January 2009, he helped write the incoming Obama administration's strategy review, as well as other strategy pieces, in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). General McChrystal, as the director of the Joint Staff, became familiar with Colonel Kolenda's work at the OSD and asked him to come to Afghanistan as one of his special advisors. Colonel Kolenda led the overall initial assessment that is the main analysis of the strategic assessment. Commander Eggers had worked with General McChrystal previously and was one of the major editors of the written product.

Lt Gen David Rodriguez was selected to lead the ISAF Joint Command (IJC), and his official title during the IJC stand-up period was the USFOR-A deputy commanding general. He and General McChrystal had a deep relationship that went back decades, and his perspective influenced many aspects of the assessment. General McChrystal believed that the fact that both he and General Rodriguez were sent to Afghanistan together was no coincidence. He said,

I've known General Rodriguez for 37 years. We were cadets at West Point together. We were company commanders together next door to each other in the Rangers. My wife is the godmother of one of his kids. We've been best friends for years. We were here in Afghanistan together when he commanded the 82nd and I had some of the special operations forces. We had been at the Pentagon and worked together every day. We were very close friends. I believe that the secretary of defense and the chairman picked us together. One, they'd seen us operate. But they also knew the relationship we had. I think that was part of their calculus.<sup>2</sup>

Previously, General Rodriguez spent more than a year as the US Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) commander when he deployed with his division, the 82nd Airborne, in February 2007. General Rodriguez came with three handpicked Army

colonels to help with the stand-up of the IJC. Army colonel Clarence Chinn was the acting chief of staff for the US team standing up the IJC. Army colonel Patrick Dedham, who would eventually become the IJC CJ6 (responsible for providing NATO information systems and communications in Afghanistan to support the ISAF mission), was the point man for the IJC construction efforts at North Kabul International Airport (KAIA). Army colonel Wayne Grigsby, a career infantryman who had served 37 months in Iraq since 2003, was working on the Joint Staff when General Rodriguez asked him to help stand up the IJC and to stay on and serve on the IJC staff when it was to become operational in October. Colonel Chinn's role in the strategic assessment was limited since he was leading the effort to stand up the IJC. Colonel Grigsby, however, had a more involved role in the assessment as an early key player in the Command and Control Working Group.

Besides the players who arrived with the new commander, several personnel already in theater or recently arrived coincidental to the change in USFOR-A leadership had key roles in the assessment. Marine Corps colonel James McGrath, ISAF's CJ5 Plans Directorate deputy director, essentially led the Campaign Plan and the C2 Working Groups and wrote both working group annexes. McGrath, a career infantryman as well as a plans officer, graduated from the Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting. He had three tours in Iraq, but this was his first tour in Afghanistan. He was previously the lead planner for Combined Joint Task Force (JTF)-Horn of Africa. Working hand in hand with Colonel McGrath was Royal Air Force (RAF) group captain Jules Eaton, who led the efforts to complete the revision of the current ISAF operations order that was in place when General McChrystal took command. USFOR-A J5 director, Col Steven Briggs, US Army, led the US government's Integrated Civil-Military (Civ-Mil) Campaign Plan Working Group. The US government had begun an integrated campaign plan process prior to General McChrystal's arrival, and Colonel Briggs had been the USFOR-A lead representative. Thus, when the Strategic Assessment Civ-Mil Working Group began, Briggs was the obvious choice to become McChrystal's lead on this US-focused effort.

US Army colonel Raymond "Kent" Hann, the USFOR-A J7 (Operational Plans and Force Development) director, was ini-

tially a member of only the Civilian Casualties (CIVCAS), Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force Strategic Assessment Working Group. However, as time went on, because of some difficult issues within the group, Colonel Hann joined French air force colonel Olivier Bertrand as the group's informal coleader. Colonel Hann was voluntarily recalled from retirement to serve in Afghanistan and saw combat experience in Vietnam, helping advise a battalion of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. One of the training areas Colonel Hann was responsible for as the J7 was training US forces in the compliance of General McChrystal's 1 July tactical directive designed to minimize CIVCAS and collateral damage. Marine Corps lieutenant colonel Rhett Jeppson, the USFOR-A deputy J3 (Operations Directorate), was already working with a detainee operations study group led by Army major general Douglas Stone when the strategic assessment began with its own Detainee Operations Working Group. He became the working group lead, although he primarily acted as a conduit through which information from his group funneled into General McChrystal's working group. Finally, although these were the primary military actors involved with leading the assessment, many other staff members at both ISAF and USFOR-A HQ worked many long hours with these working group leaders to successfully complete the assessment.

The team leads referred to are the colonels mentioned in charge of the various working groups. While flag officers were the official leads of most working groups, they did not participate to any great extent in the day-to-day work on the assessment. They typically were periodically back-briefed on the respective working group's progress and provided feedback. General McChrystal generally gave guidance directly to the colonel leads during in-progress reviews or roundtable feedback sessions. The primary exception to this rule was Admiral Smith, who was much more involved with the daily progression of the StratCom Working Group. The strategic assessment coincided with Admiral Smith's own internal assessment and restructuring of ISAF's StratCom Directorate.

In addition to the military members working the strategic assessment, General McChrystal brought in several civilian experts to assist Colonel Kolenda with the initial assessment portion. These experts were from a variety of think tanks from the

United States and Europe and toured the country with Colonel Kolenda, getting updates from all of the regional commands. These pundits included Fred Kagan, an American resident scholar from the American Enterprise Institute, and his wife, Kimberly Kagan, president of the Institute for the Study of War. Also on the team were Dr. Stephen Biddle, senior fellow for defense policy for the Council on Foreign Relations, and Anthony Cordesman, the chair in strategy for the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Additionally, there were Catherine Dale from the Congressional Research Service and Andrew Exum from the Center for a New American Security. Terry Kelly from the RAND Corporation, Whitney Kassel from the OSD, and Jeremy Shapiro from the Brookings Institution were also part of the group. Lt Col Aaron Prupas, US Air Force, from the CENTCOM Commander's Initiative Group, also participated. Finally, adding an international flavor, Etienne de Durand from France and Luis Peral from Spain took part.

### **The Assessment Begins**

The assessment began amid the tumultuous first few days of General McChrystal's arrival and assumption of command of ISAF and USFOR-A in June 2009. Starting a project of this magnitude, while at the same time getting familiar with his new staff and command environment, was a huge undertaking for the new commander. Among the multitude of important tasks General McChrystal undertook in those early days was meeting with key government players, both Afghani and American, in Kabul. These included Afghan president Hamid Karzai and members of his cabinet, along with US ambassador Karl Eikenberry and key embassy staff. He also had to visit all of the regional commands (RC) and meet the RC commanders. Additionally, he received numerous briefings from the different ISAF and USFOR-A staff sections to become as familiar as possible, as rapidly as he could, with all aspects of his new dual-hatted command. As a result of this "fire hose" of critical engagement and in-depth theater indoctrination, General McChrystal simply did not have the time to spend getting into the early mechanical details of the strategic assessment. Thus, early on, he was forced to provide just the basic strategic guidance to his key

staff members and give them room to accomplish the task. However, perhaps based on the frenetic early pace of the new commander, none of the individual staff members were told that this overall assessment was theirs to run.

Army colonel Skip Davis, the outgoing leader of the SAG who was scheduled to depart theater in July, was told to gather the team of civilian think-tank scholars to put together the strategic assessment working groups based on the subject areas that General McChrystal was to examine. However, with his impending redeployment looming within weeks, which was well prior to the assessment's completion, Colonel Davis was not the right choice to be the primary officer in charge to lead the assessment team in its day-to-day tactical progression from cradle to grave. Colonel Davis seemed to recognize this, as he was from the outgoing General McKiernan team and not one of the new advisors brought in by General McChrystal, Secretary Gates, or Admiral Mullen. Without an appointed assessment process leader and with Colonel Davis unable to see the assessment through to the end, somebody needed to step in and fill the void.

Colonel Owens and Colonel Kolenda arrived together into North KAIA from Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan in the early morning hours of 12 June in the back of a C-130 packed with Georgia National Guard Soldiers. The C-130 cargo compartment carried a couple of colonels working the high-end strategic and operational changes that would determine the future of the American military involvement in Afghanistan, sitting next to some of the very citizen-soldiers who would begin to carry out this strategy on the tactical end of the spear. Both Colonel Owens and Colonel Kolenda had been asked on short notice to come over and join General McChrystal's team. Colonel Kolenda recalled, "I knew that General McChrystal had been directed to do an assessment, and I assumed those of us being brought in were going to be a part of it, but beyond that, I wasn't sure what my exact role would be." He added, "Shortly after arriving, I got with Skip Davis, and we began to discuss how we would frame the assessment and what kind of key chapters we needed to look at."<sup>3</sup>

At the time, Davis and Kolenda knew that there would be an assessment of the civ-mil as well as the military campaign

plans, but as Colonel Kolenda put it, “there wasn’t a planned overall assessment of the situation in Afghanistan and what the appropriate implementation strategy recommendations would be as we implemented the Obama administration strategy review.”<sup>4</sup> The two decided to add what became the first main section of the report—the initial assessment, an analysis of the strategic environment. Ultimately, the staff referred to the entire process as the strategic assessment as the project progressed through the summer, capturing the essence of the colonels’ recommendation. The initial assessment became the heart of the overall assessment. Special subject areas, such as the civ-mil campaign and the military plans review, would become annexes to the initial assessment in the final version sent to the president. Based on his previous experience as a battalion commander in Afghanistan, along with his work on the Obama strategy review and several pieces he wrote on the Taliban and the environment in Afghanistan, Colonel Kolenda was given the lead of the Initial Assessment Working Group.

Colonel Owens arrived with roughly the same lack of clarity as Colonel Kolenda on what his exact role would be on General McChrystal’s team, beyond being one of several handpicked advisors. He said, “I came over here with unspecified duties. Really, we all rushed over here together, and, frankly, we said, ‘we’ll figure it out when we get there.’”<sup>5</sup> After a short time, he recognized that Colonel Davis was on the way out and somebody needed to grab the reins. Colonel Owens described it well:

The Strategic Advisory Group was led by Skip Davis, and he was out of here by late July. . . . I was working short-term issues for the commander when this was unfolding, and it was clear to me that Skip Davis was on his way out, and no one was grabbing it. So I said, “Let me take this thing on,” and he [Davis] was glad to give it to me. General McChrystal was told about it, but he didn’t really approve it, nor did he need to. I was comfortable moving into the role, and he needed someone to take it and get on with it. Prior to that, it was Skip Davis’s initiative. He contacted the pundits. He assigned OPRs [office of primary responsibility] for the working groups.<sup>6</sup>

The assessment now had two of its key players in place in Colonels Owens and Kolenda, and soon others would emerge. There was no time to waste. General McChrystal had been given 60 total days to write the assessment. Knowing that the



document would have to go through numerous edits and reviews up through the chain of command, the entire planning team knew that it really only had about 45 days to turn in a final draft, and many of those days had already been burned since the SecDef had given the verbal order. This rapid time line would stress the ISAF HQ staff to work at a tempo that was heretofore not seen by members who had been there during the previous commander's tenure. Colonel McGrath described the tempo of the CJ5 staff working in the various assessment working groups, "The plan was very fast . . . from flash to bang. We basically locked ourselves in a room until we were done."<sup>7</sup> Adding to the stress of the time line was the sheer enormity of the task. As Colonel Owens put it, "My personal level of anxiety was high from the beginning. The magnitude of the task . . . it's going to chart where we're going to go over the years. It's being read by every head of state and everyone who can get their hands on it. I'm not trying to overdramatize it, but it was a very important document."<sup>8</sup>

### **Early Organizational Difficulties and Cultural Clashes**

With only a few short weeks to complete the strategic assessment draft, get it to General McChrystal and the editors, and move it through the briefing trail and chain of command, several layers of team building and group bonding had to quickly occur, or the whole project might have floundered. First, there was the issue of a new commander and staff arriving after the previous commander was essentially relieved. The sacking of an operational commander by US leadership during a large conflict, although not unheard of, is highly uncommon in modern warfare. Thus, when General McKiernan was asked to step down, some of his staff members likely had the perception that they, too, were part of the overall failures that led to the change of commanders. Moreover, it was a US decision to relieve General McKiernan, and in his place came another US general with his own set of handpicked advisors who were coming into theater to assess what was going wrong and determine how it could be fixed. By all accounts, General McKiernan was well

liked by his staff. A natural reaction from the original staff might have been to be somewhat defensive of its former commander and his policies and perhaps resentful of this new advisory team coming to the headquarters to “fix” everything. General McChrystal, who professionally respected General McKiernan, said of him personally that “he could not have been a better friend.”

On the difficulty of having to come to Afghanistan with his advisors after General McKiernan’s firing, General McChrystal added, “When I came over here, there was some scar tissue in the force—in the headquarters particularly—but also in the force. Maybe [there was] some resentment in the change [due to] personal loyalty, and that’s always going to happen.”<sup>9</sup> Colonel Owens, too, immediately recognized this awkward transition and its potentially hazardous consequences, stating that “the ‘old team’ felt like it was part of the problem. There was also this perception that that this ‘A team’ of handpicked guys was here to take over. I’ve never considered myself a ‘hand-picked’ guy. Plus, it was a US-only team. This created a palpable resentment when we came on board, and, frankly, we probably reinforced it at times, whether consciously or otherwise.”<sup>10</sup>

Colonel Grigsby was also very well aware of the potential backlash from the holdover staff, saying,

I was concerned about it. . . . There were some good things going on here, and there were a lot of members from a lot of nations that were busting their butts. The first day I walked into USFOR-A, I had a colonel come up to me and say, “Who got fired? Whose place are you taking?” I said, “Hey, look, I just came in here to row like the rest of you and be part of the team.” No one was trying to come in here and say “I, me, and my.” No. It’s “we, ours, and us.” It was a big deal though.<sup>11</sup>

Like Colonel Owens, Colonel Grigsby also felt the new team members did, whether consciously or not, exacerbate the situation.<sup>12</sup>

Adding to the frustration of General McKiernan’s staff adjusting to the new command team was the sense that many of the COIN principles and ideas that were being presented as new were actually part of General McKiernan’s previous guidance. General McKiernan did ask for more resources several times, but with Iraq still drawing the overwhelming attention of US political and military leadership, he was mostly unsuccessful.

ful until President Obama approved the additional 21,000 new forces in February 2009. McKiernan was relieved before most of these forces had arrived and could be integrated into the counterinsurgency effort. General McChrystal, while acknowledging he had compassion for General McKiernan and the way in which he was relieved, also saw opportunity knocking. He stated,

There were lots of things that General McKiernan wanted to do that he couldn't get done because he couldn't get resources, couldn't get people's attention. The decision by the secretary of defense to make that change actually opened up opportunities for me that could not have existed for General McKiernan. Just the nature of doing that, painful though it was, sent a message to everybody across the coalition, the Afghans, and others about how serious the US was. I think it enabled me to have opportunities for me to push a few things that I don't think would have been possible otherwise. So in a perverse way, I benefited from the severity of the way that was handled, although you know he's a fellow Soldier, and I definitely feel for him.<sup>13</sup>

One example of the tension between the "old" ISAF headquarters staff and the new one came during one large strategic assessment in-progress review. The issue of civilian casualties was being discussed, and a set of potential recommendations was suggested. The ISAF deputy commander (DCOM), British Royal Marine lieutenant general Jim Dutton, who was also General McKiernan's deputy, said in a mildly irritated tone, "You know, these are not new ideas. We actually put out guidance to this effect several months ago."<sup>14</sup> This was awkward for several reasons. First, it demonstrated some of that defensiveness and resentment discussed above, but it was also true. General McKiernan did put out his own tactical directive that, in principle, was very similar to the one issued by General McChrystal on 1 July. However, by making one point in defense of the old boss, the DCOM inadvertently lent credence to the apparent conclusion that there were serious C2 problems at ISAF under General McKiernan, because after his directive there had been no reduction of CIVCAS events. In fact, these events actually increased, with some garnering massive negative media coverage toward the coalition. This was an example of guidance being put out at the ISAF HQ that was not getting effectively implemented down to the platoon and squad levels

or, alternatively, was being largely ignored with apparently no repercussions from above.

Another big issue that had to be reconciled by the staff as it began the assessment was the differences in approach and tempo between the US and the NATO planners. Many of the US officers had assisted in implementing successful COIN strategy in Iraq based on the Army and Marine Corps COIN doctrine outlined in Army Field Manual 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. The principles in 3-24 had become the US “bible” on defeating a counterinsurgency, whereas NATO did not even have a COIN doctrine. These nations were still operating under a security, stability, and reconstruction framework. US assessment planners realized that because Iraq and Afghanistan were different, a cookie-cutter strategy could not be applied from one to the other. However, the overarching COIN principles that many of these officers had used in Iraq were viewed as flexible enough to be adapted successfully in Afghanistan. But COIN is not simply a stability operation, and these US planners had to convince NATO’s planners and leadership in Europe as well that this was no longer simply a stability operation, if it ever was, but instead was a fight against insurgents. Colonel McGrath put it this way:

“Defeat” scared the hell out of NATO. Defeat was not defined in their doctrine. We had to explain what that meant to them. There were some national frictions, but Brunssum [NATO joint force command responsible for ISAF] had to approve it. They had 101 issues with it, but we stood firm on the key principles. We were not going to take out our lines of operation that say “neutralize malign actors and foreign fighters and narco traffickers.” It was a tall order to get our NATO brothers to understand that we’re going to call a spade a spade and, frankly, be very American about it. They might say, “It smells foul,” whereas we’ll just say, “It smells like [expletive].” That was an affront to the NATO sensibilities, but it helped us get through this faster.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the differences in strategic approach just described, there was also a perception that the NATO operational tempo was not on par with what US officers coming out of Iraq were used to. This was likely related to the issue previously described regarding performing stability ops versus fighting a war against insurgent foes. Perhaps, when doing stability ops, one could operate at a more “normal” peacetime pace, but fight-

ing a counterinsurgency requires greater urgency. To be fair, it is unjust to generalize motives and actions of an alliance and each individual nation and officer. Certainly the United Kingdom, for example, stood side by side with the United States in Iraq for more than five years. Arguably, most UK officers wholly bought into the American view on COIN operations and were more accustomed to the up-tempo pace. That said, the differences the Americans perceived between the United States and NATO—whether accurate or otherwise—existed. Colonel McGrath once again provided a straightforward observation on this issue: “There was a degree of friction. The staff was used to a NATO time line: 10 o’clock tea . . . we’ll follow the NATO standard; nice measured pace, etc. This was different. It was along the US ‘fast food’ pace. ‘We want it now. Let’s get it done. We’re going to work like dogs.’ That’s not the way NATO operates.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, a culture shift had to take place at ISAF HQ, and it was not just the US coalition partners who had to make it. The US officers from General McKiernan’s command also were forced to shift into high gear to meet the new standard required by General McChrystal, his new team, and the short time line of the strategic assessment. The caveat should be made that there were obviously individual officers under General McKiernan, along with the general himself, who worked extremely hard to accomplish the ISAF mission. However, there is little doubt that the overall organization had to shift dramatically to meet the increasing operational tempo brought about by the change of leadership and tasking for a 60-day assessment. All of this was fittingly summed up by Colonel McGrath, who was relatively new but not part of the new team brought in by General McChrystal.

It definitely did not begin in the most positive manner. . . . All these colonels and special operators showed up and basically said “your plan is broken.” It wasn’t communicated in the optimum way. I’ll caveat that by saying that at the same time it was a good thing because what it did was it shook up the malaise that I think this headquarters was in. . . . It had some ugliness to it, but some goodness as well because it reinvigorated the staff. No, it wasn’t going to be business as usual. We just changed US commanders and not much else is supposed to change? *No! We came not to lose, but to win this thing!*<sup>17</sup>

## **The Team Comes Together and Moves Forward**

Notwithstanding all the team and organizational bonding issues that surfaced as the strategic assessment began, there was no time for a pity party or a series of “group therapy” sessions. As usually occurs with military professionals, once team members move toward a common purpose under steady leadership, personal differences and hurt feelings are put aside and team bonding is the typical result. The frenetic pace of the assessment process simply overrode these other issues. That is not to say the underlying issues did not affect the early days of the assessment, but there was simply no time to waste looking backward and attempting to resolve early difficulties. General McChrystal’s US officers did their best to be tactful and not antagonistic toward their new ISAF teammates and, for the most part, were successful. Similarly, most holdover ISAF members did their best to hide any disappointment or resentment and worked with the fervor of their new arrivals. To be frank, it was either jump on board or get out of the way because the train was moving, and it was not going to stop for stragglers.

Shortly after he assumed command on 15 June, General McChrystal met with his core advisors, including Colonels Chris Kolenda and Skip Davis, and the organizational structure of the strategic assessment was ironed out. An overall initial assessment narrative section would be followed by the special subject chapters, or annexes. At this point, Colonel Davis notified key ISAF and USFOR-A staff what the working groups would be and the early recommended composition. Some working group members were obvious. For example, the Military Plans Working Group would primarily be comprised of ISAF CJ5 planners, some CJ35 (current operations plans section) planners, and USFOR-A J5 (plans) Directorate representatives. These same staff sections also had natural tie-ins to the C2 Working Group. The Civ-Mil Campaign Working Group was immediately populated primarily by members of the already ongoing USG Civ-Mil Campaign Plan. Where the connections were not so obvious, the SAG recommended certain personnel or staff functional areas attend certain groups. Additionally, once the working group subject areas were communicated across the

ISAF and USFOR-A staff directorates, certain officers saw a role for themselves in the effort and simply signed themselves onto the team. As mentioned, the working groups were given official flag officer leaders, most of whom were more part-time figure-heads providing overarching direction and guidance rather than full-time participants. Admiral Smith, however, made it his top priority to assess the overall strategic communication effort and to attempt to fix what he saw early on as fundamental flaws in ISAF's communication process.

On 20 June, five days after General McChrystal assumed command, Colonel Owens called a meeting to finalize the logistical arrangements for picking up, housing, and transporting the initial assessment team of civilian scholars, most of whom would be arriving over the next few days. At this meeting, the schedule of the Initial Assessment Working Group was mapped out, with Colonel Kolenda leading members on a whirlwind theaterwide tour, interrupted by stops back at ISAF for periodic in-progress review (IPR) updates to General McChrystal every week or so. By 26 June, most of the outside scholars had arrived and, along with the rest of the strategic assessment working group members, were ready to get a formal inbrief by General McChrystal and Colonel Owens and a campaign plan brief by RAF group captain Jules Eaton. In the 11 days since the arrival of General McChrystal, all the working group teams were organized, had begun the team bonding challenges already mentioned, had been given a rapid time line to work with, and were off to the races.

Only 11 days had passed from General McChrystal's assumption of command to the first official strategic assessment kickoff meeting on 26 June. This was a rapid spin-up—given all the factors involved with the new commander and staff, as well as daunting challenges—and it came at a cost. The 60-day clock had already been ticking for these 11 days, which theoretically should have left 49 days for the assessment. However, the time line ran from assumption of command to the assessment's planned final turn-in to the SecDef. In reality, time would have to be allocated not only to first brief General Petraeus at CENTCOM, where the assessment might require his editing, but also for a likely review by the CJCS and potential others at the Pentagon prior to the deadline. More time would

be needed for General McChrystal's editing and review after the report's initial turn-in and prior to it being taken to CENTCOM. With all of these back-end time constraints considered, Colonel Owens, in consultation with General McChrystal and the rest of the SAG, mapped out a rough strategic assessment time line from the 26 June meeting. The working groups would take roughly three weeks to assess and one week to write, or approximately 30 days total. When added to the initial 11 days already passed, this left approximately 19 days for multiple edits, if necessary; commander review; and then taking the assessment up the chain of command for briefing, discussion, and potential revisions. Thus, in essence, the 60-day assessment had in reality been boiled down to a 30-day assessment.<sup>18</sup> Everyone involved clearly recognized that time was of the essence.

### **Initial Assessment Working Group**

The Initial Assessment Working Group officially kicked off with the 26 June inbrief. The schedule would be extremely busy for this group because it had to become intimately familiar with the current situation. Although the entire group had written and covered the situation in-country to one extent or another, no one was familiar with the midsummer 2009 situation for all regions of the country. The group's currency-building started at the initial meeting, where it received a detailed brief of the campaign plan, developed by the CJ5 staff under General McKiernan a few months earlier. The group also received briefings on ISAF's current stability operations plan as well as a current intelligence laydown, along with other key staff briefings. Group members took tours of each of the RCs as well, where they spent 24–48 hours getting briefings from the RC commanders and key staff, as well as meeting with one or two brigade combat team and provincial reconstruction team commanders. Time permitting, they talked with government officials and local leaders. But time was very short. After each RC visit, group members would fly back to ISAF HQ in Kabul to coalesce, take and compare notes, discuss what they observed, and sometimes attend one of the scheduled IPRs to General McChrystal.

The Initial Assessment Working Group basically consisted of Colonel Kolenda and the civilian scholars, plus a representa-



tive from the OSD and CENTCOM. General McChrystal, who would ultimately put his own stamp on the assessment, was making his own battlefield circulation, becoming familiar with his new command and the current situation in the country while the initial assessment team made its rounds. According to Colonel Kolenda, the civilians represented a “very broad spectrum of perspectives.”<sup>19</sup> When asked if he was the primary military representative in the overall assessment working group, Colonel Kolenda said that he was, but added,

[Col] Dino Pick worked a lot of the arrangements to get us from point A to point B, and he worked all the life support for the team, which was absolutely invaluable. Once we completed the draft, [Cdr] Jeff Eggers took over the editing piece of it. Plus, we would have briefings and interact with the rest of the staff, with UNAMA [United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan], with the Afghan government, and with local elders and NGOs [nongovernmental organization] who would give us their perspectives on a variety of issues. So we touched just about every demographic and population group: military, international, and political.<sup>20</sup>

Although Colonels Pick and Kolenda felt that the civilian scholars came in with some very diverse perspectives, they ended up forming a rough consensus on the way forward in Afghanistan. Colonel Owens also noted that the group members all seemed to agree on their final recommendations, which led him to a different perspective. He concluded that “the pundits could have been more diverse in thought; a better mix of opinion makers. Alternate points of view would have, if nothing else, helped us develop our arguments against their case.”<sup>21</sup> Why did Colonel Kolenda conclude that the pundit group brought some very different perspectives, and yet Colonel Owens seemed to disagree? One likely reason was that having been with the group virtually around the clock, Colonel Kolenda witnessed lively debates on many issues and challenges affecting Afghanistan and the coalition on a daily basis. Yes, the scholars ultimately came around to a synthesis of the situation in Afghanistan and on a set of recommendations for General McChrystal, but getting there was no picnic. While, admittedly, Colonel Owens witnessed a small sample of that debate in a few IPRs and other briefings that he watched with the group, he was not inundated with the daily disagreements in the guided discussions that Colonel Kolenda led and adjudi-

cated. In fact, Colonel Kolenda pointed out that “some of the members came in with the initial impression that a lighter-footprint counterterror approach was more feasible.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Colonel Pick invited some other vocal advocates of the counterterror approach, but these individuals declined because of scheduling conflicts or for other reasons. The evolution of the group from individual disagreements to overall consensus was complicated, and perhaps it is best understood through Colonel Kolenda’s own explanation of it:

It was interesting. I had expected, based on the very different perspectives—some liberal, some centrist, some conservative, and some international audience as well—that there would be considerable disagreements, especially given the force of the personalities involved. But as we did the travel and we began to discuss the nature of the conflict and what some of the core challenges were, as we formed an assessment of those from every perspective, and every perspective contributed something different to this analysis . . . the key solutions tended to come naturally from that understanding of the nature of the conflict and the assessment of the situation. . . . The various perspectives and arguments on the nature of the conflict and the recommended implementation strategy created a remarkable synthesis from the group rather than a milquetoast document that met a lowest bar of agreement.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that the overall director of the strategic assessment, Colonel Owens, saw the incoming perspective of the scholars differently than Colonel Kolenda perhaps raises a different critique. Colonel Kolenda and the scholars were somewhat isolated from the rest of the strategic assessment group, and although they updated General McChrystal and the rest of the group during the IPRs, the individual conclusions that each member may have had were not necessarily apparent to the rest of the group. Perhaps one final meeting should have been scheduled between the scholar group and the rest of the assessment team just prior to its departure, where all of the scholars could have had five to 10 minutes each to let the overall group know their own individual assessments of the situation. As it was, the final IPR was cancelled, as General McChrystal decided to close ranks with his assessment and to include just a small group of trusted advisors in the final revision effort.

Following their battlefield circulation and after receiving numerous briefings from ISAF, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), and other relevant parties, the

initial assessment team members went into their final phase of their working group, the writing stage. The team organized into working groups for detailed analysis. Then the academic scholars wrote their papers, highlighting key issues and insights. Following this, the team collaborated over the course of two days, and Colonel Kolenda then wrote the initial assessment draft. The draft was then refined by the group, with General McChrystal asking questions and providing feedback along the way. This process continued until the visiting civilian scholars departed Afghanistan. The scholars wrote much of their individual thoughts and conclusions throughout the process, so there was a large body of existing material. Plus, all had written on Afghanistan prior to their selection to the team. Since the group was comprised predominantly of professional writers, it was able to rapidly articulate the cogent takeaways from its analyses. Colonel Kolenda then used this product to write the initial draft. However, he was clear that “this was no ‘cut and paste’ drill.”<sup>24</sup> As Colonel Kolenda observed,

Some of these working groups focused on intelligence, others focused on governance, others on development, and another on the ANSF. So there was a large body of raw material. Our time line was accelerated a bit, to get an initial draft to General McChrystal. In our two-day session, we talked about how we were going to structure the assessment. What were the key components and features of it? As we got that together collaboratively, I essentially spent an all-nighter or two writing this all down . . . capturing it in an initial draft. The group would read it. We would churn on it, then provide feedback . . . iterate, iterate, iterate. We went through this multiple times until we had our first deliverable with General McChrystal, and then that process continued.<sup>25</sup>

One significant bone of contention within the group was governance. For the most part, everyone agreed on the need to protect the population, increase the size and competency of the ANSF, and have unity of command. But the governance issue was tricky. Weak and corrupt governance drives insurgency. This was true during the Vietnam conflict, and Colonel Kolenda’s team agreed that it was true in Afghanistan. However, the difficult part of the equation is how much can—and how much should—a military headquarters like ISAF attempt to actively attempt to fix a weak and arguably corrupt Afghan government. Should not that be the main effort of the USG civilian leader-

ship through the US Embassy? How much or how little should the strategic assessment tackle this tough issue? Colonel Kolenka certainly had an answer. “This was a revolutionary change in this document. We prioritized governance on par with security, not just ‘governance is someone else’s job.’ We’ve got a vested interest in this because it feeds into the security lane; it feeds into instability. We need to ensure that we play the appropriate roles in dealing with bad governance, with weak governance.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus, governance was addressed in the assessment. It accurately describes the crisis in confidence in the GIRoA, asserting that “the Afghan government has made progress, yet serious problems remain. The people’s lack of trust in their government results from two key factors. First, some GIRoA officials have given preferential treatment to certain individuals, tribes, and groups or, worse, abused their power at the expense of the people. Second, the Afghan government has been unable to provide sufficient security, justice, and basic services to the people.”<sup>27</sup> The assessment describes GIRoA state weaknesses, the tolerance of corruption and abuse of power, and Afghan power brokers and factional leaders, many of whom are current or former members of the GIRoA. Finally, the pillar “prioritize responsive and accountable governance” is one of four main principles on which the new recommended strategy is built.<sup>28</sup>

Having the civilian scholars involved in the Initial Assessment Working Group had some unintended consequences. After approximately one month, and after many of the back-and-forth iterations between General McChrystal and the Initial Assessment Working Group, most of the scholars returned to the United States on schedule. However, at this point General McChrystal and his SAG were still editing and finalizing the strategic assessment’s initial assessment portion. Upon their release, the civilian members of this working group agreed to three key principles. First, they were told not to discuss resourcing in regards to the assessment. About halfway through the process, General McChrystal decided to remove the resourcing discussion from the report and make that a separate follow-on document. The reasons for this are discussed later in this paper. Second, they were advised not to discuss the content of their many lively debates; the participants all agreed

that this should stay private. Third, the colleagues were told to make it clear in their public comments that they were speaking for themselves and not for ISAF or General McChrystal. As might be expected, many of the civilians wrote on the topic or, at the very least, were quoted in other articles.

On the one hand, the scholars' writing better informed public debate. They also seemed to support the counterinsurgency approach that was expressed in the Obama administration's strategy review earlier in the year. However, there is a subtle difference between *support* and *advocacy*. Some critics of the counterinsurgency approach perceived that General McChrystal was using these pundits as advocates, which was not his intent. General McChrystal said,

We got a little bit burned in the process because some of the pundits went out and talked and I think gave the impressions that they were either selling the assessment or they were spinning their versions of it. Live and learn. In the future, what I would fight to do is get more opposing viewpoints, although as Chris [Kolenda] said, we did try to do that. We had a pretty good spread. But I would be even more focused on telling people the rules of the game. Until this thing is out, you can't discuss this issue. If you can't agree to that before the assessment begins, you just can't be part of it.<sup>29</sup>

Over the summer and during the period of the assessment, US public opinion on the conflict, along with the opinion of many in Congress and within the Obama administration, began to shift toward a reduced US footprint in Afghanistan. Those within the administration who were advocating the counterterrorism approach were reportedly from within Vice Pres. Joe Biden's office. The counterterrorism approach was explored in detail during the administration's strategy review in February and March but was rejected by the principals—the National Security Council (NSC) and the president himself—in favor of counterinsurgency.<sup>30</sup> However, those advocating for it persisted throughout the spring and summer. They seemed to gain steam not only from the increasingly effective insurgency and the resultant rise in US casualties but also as a result of a US recession in the middle of rising war costs. While all this was occurring, General McChrystal, when asked by higher US authorities, delayed the turn-in of the strategic assessment until after the 20 August Afghan presidential elections. Then

the elections appeared to have been tainted by massive fraud, further strengthening those advocating a different approach in Afghanistan. The civilian scholars departed in late July, with some recommending more troops for Afghanistan, and “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment” was formally turned in on 30 August. Adding to this tension, the *Washington Post*’s Bob Woodward published an article on 20 September based on a leaked copy of the assessment. Following that, on 25 September, General McChrystal’s troop request was sent to US and NATO leadership.

Then, General McChrystal spoke at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London on 1 October and unintentionally added to the public debate. When asked about whether a counterterror strategy advocated by the vice president would work, he said, “The short answer is no.” He added that “you have to navigate from where you are, not from where you wish to be. A strategy that does not leave Afghanistan in a stable position is probably a shortsighted strategy.”<sup>31</sup> At this point, General McChrystal’s innocent comments set off a firestorm and were suddenly the focus of the debate on more forces for Afghanistan. As a result, the various articles and interviews that the civilian scholars had provided seemed to fade in the overall debate. With all of these events as a backdrop, President Obama ordered an exhaustive review of General McChrystal’s assessment and resource recommendations. General McChrystal began to recognize that public support for US military operations was falling and commented on this extremely difficult period:

We could see [the falling public support], but we were so focused that maybe we didn’t appreciate it as much. So what started as a straightforward assessment that was going to include whatever we thought [needed] for resources became a politically charged thing that we didn’t realize until close to the end. General Rodriguez and I did not come over here expecting to ask for more forces. Of course we spent so much time together in the Pentagon talking about it, prepping after the day they directed us to do it. We actually thought we didn’t need any more forces. It was only the analysis that pulled us toward that, and we were actually a little bit surprised by it. But we talked every day during that process, often just one-on-one. We let the analysis pull us where it did. We made decisions based on that. We didn’t just start with a preconceived notion.<sup>32</sup>

In summary, General McChrystal had concluded an assessment that strongly advocated a counterinsurgency strategy and now had sent in a force request asking for the course of action that called for approximately 40,000 more coalition forces to be sent to Afghanistan. At the same time, his commander in chief began reconsidering his strategy, with one of the new options being a drastically reduced “counterterror” footprint and another being a force structure somewhere between what the general wanted and the low-end option. At this juncture, General McChrystal had to be very careful about publicly advocating a way ahead that might run counter to the eventual decision of his commander in chief, particularly after the initial articles and interviews that the scholars gave and his London speech. Although just one factor among many, the “impartial” civilian pundits—advocating not only the desired strategy but also advocating more forces—left a negative impression with some that they were putting themselves out there as unofficial spokesmen for General McChrystal, even though by and large this was not the case. This raised concern about operational security, given the pundits’ intimate knowledge of current ISAF strategy and operational plans. Colonel Grigsby voiced some of this frustration but then also recognized some of the benefit when he said, “And then you had some of these guys [the pundits] go back and write about it. I thought they weren’t supposed to do that. One guy had a map out and was putting icons on it about where we were and where the enemy was. I said to myself, ‘*What?*’ That’s the danger. But on the positive side, you had a lot of perspectives, and you also co-opt these guys into advocating within their networks the new COIN strategy . . . becoming part of the team.”<sup>33</sup>

On 1 December, while speaking at the US Military Academy, President Obama laid out his new strategy in Afghanistan, which added 30,000 new US forces in 2010 and reaffirmed General McChrystal’s counterinsurgency approach. However, he did announce that the troops would begin to come home in 18 months, sending a message of urgency to US military and civilian leadership in Afghanistan as well as to President Karzai’s government.

## **General McChrystal Takes Ownership**

Despite all of the effort that went into producing the preliminary set of drafts that went into the key initial assessment section of the report, General McChrystal clearly owned the final product. He repeatedly sent the product back to be changed to more perfectly reflect his thoughts. General McChrystal has said publicly, “I stand by the assessment. It’s my words on that paper. Hold me accountable.”<sup>34</sup> Admiral Smith, describing the relationship between General McChrystal and the Initial Assessment Working Group, said,

He relied on the group to be a starting point for his own personal responsibility . . . to actually author the assessment. So it wasn’t perceived that he thought “I’ll turn this over to a staff function and let people just mill about and come up with something that I’ll put my signature on. . . .” In the end, it really became informed by all of our efforts, both inside and outside the organization in that iterative process, and then at some point he personalized it and made it his own.<sup>35</sup>

Colonel McGrath echoed Admiral Smith’s commentary, adding that since General McChrystal was in essence the leading expert in counterterrorism strategy and its successful implementation, this made his recommendation of a COIN strategy that much more telling. Colonel McGrath stated,

General McChrystal used the pundits to help shape his thoughts. You could tell about halfway through that he was formulating his strategy and he wanted this assessment to be his, not a group effort. He pushed off academia once he got their views because he had his own views, his own judgments. He had four years of combat in Iraq, and because he was a counterterror leader there and elsewhere, it’s very powerful that he thinks the COIN strategy is the way to go. Of all people, if *he* was a convert, then COIN must be the way to go. General McChrystal wanted this to be *his* assessment. He said, “This is my assessment,” and when it came out, it was.<sup>36</sup>

Although the initial assessment portion of the strategic assessment went through dozens of iterations, it was indeed General McChrystal’s assessment. Not only was he involved with the iterative process with his strategic assessment team, but with all the major players in Afghanistan during his first two months in command. He had met with all the key GIRoA officials, including President Karzai, and with many provincial and local leaders during his various battlefield circulations. He had



discussed Afghanistan's precarious situation with all of the RC commanders and different brigade commanders and with a myriad of Soldiers, Marines, and others whom he ran across while circulating the battlefield. General McChrystal also talked with many Afghan civilians from around the country, taking the local pulse wherever he went. He combined all of these new experiences in Afghanistan with all of his previous military experience elsewhere, including his four years in Iraq, to formulate and solidify his vision for Afghanistan. Thus, at the end of the assessment, it was *his* assessment, *his* words on "that paper." As has since been borne out, it is he who was judged one way or the other, just as he described.

It was precisely because of all the work that went into the strategic assessment and the professional military way it was conducted that General McChrystal was exasperated that it was leaked to the *Washington Post*. But, in hindsight, he acknowledged the one good thing was that the leak dispelled some myths that were floating around. He explained,

The leaking of the assessment was really frustrating for me personally because we had worked so hard over the summer and we had succeeded in keeping that thing so tight. To be honest, it was probably not a bad thing that it got leaked because had the information stayed in a secret report, people would have continued to opine with ignorance about what was in the report. It was probably better that it was out there. But that's not to excuse or condone the leak. I was very much disturbed about the leak because it undercut our credibility and our ability to operate, and again, I'll tell you, we didn't leak it.<sup>37</sup>

When finally published, the initial assessment section of "COMISAF's Initial Assessment" was a remarkable piece of analysis. Intense energy had gone into evaluating the incredibly complex environment that Afghanistan represented in the summer of 2009 and then articulating this evaluation in a manner that could be understood and, if necessary, defended to a large diverse audience of military and political leaders. As Colonel Koldenda summed up, "For the first time in eight years there was a sound articulation of the nature of the conflict. It detailed an implementation strategy that linked NATO and US policy guidance and formed the basis for a new campaign plan. While some could argue that many of the ideas were not essentially 'new,' it was the articulation of them together into a coherent whole that

paved the way ahead for the conflict.”<sup>38</sup> The rigor and depth of the document and the resource implications that flowed from it withstood tremendous scrutiny from a detailed NSC review process. Ultimately, it enabled General McChrystal to secure the resourcing needed to implement the strategy.<sup>39</sup>

### **General McChrystal Takes Specific Troop Numbers out of the Assessment**

Approximately halfway through the assessment, General McChrystal told his team to delink any request for additional forces with the strategic assessment. He said that this was not his decision, indicating that it was made by superiors back in Washington.<sup>40</sup> Based on the growing public debate in the United States and Europe regarding what future US involvement should be amidst the increase in violence and apparent GIRoA corruption, many pundits and media members began to speculate on how many additional forces General McChrystal might request. Although it was pretty clear to most everyone involved in the assessment process that an approved counterinsurgency strategy would require more forces, US military leadership did not want the strategic assessment to be simplified down to just a numbers game. US military leaders, General McChrystal included, did not want commentators, and even US government stakeholders, simply flipping through the pages until they got to the numbers and skipping over all of the strategic analysis associated with dissecting the complex operational environment that was Afghanistan. By pushing the troop-to-task analysis to a separate study that would immediately follow the strategic assessment, he basically forced all of those involved to digest the analysis for awhile before seeing any troop increase options.

### **Strategic Assessment Annexes**

It was clear that the initial assessment had the most strategic consequences. General McChrystal was seeking external validation for his analysis of the operating environment in Afghanistan as well as approval for his COIN strategy recommendation, both contained in this section, from both the United

States and NATO. Although the seven annexes were also a vital part of the analysis and helped complete the picture for both US and NATO leadership, for the most part, they covered areas for which General McChrystal had direct authority to make decisions and changes. That being said, there are some areas in the annexes that went beyond General McChrystal's direct control, such as parts of C2 and the area of civ-mil operations. Generally, though, the annexes were supportive in nature to the overall strategy recommendations in the initial assessment. Each of the strategic assessment annexes are areas worthy of mention.

### **Annex A: Military Plans**

Even before the strategic assessment officially kicked off with its first meeting on 26 June, General McChrystal was briefed on the current operational plan (OPLAN) and on the operations order (OPORD) that flowed out of it. This plan had been completed in April to accept the 21,000 new forces that President Obama had approved in February. While ISAF holdovers had a stake in the old plan, they understood that with a new commander there would be changes. Although a specific commander's intent was not initially communicated, based on general direction provided by General McChrystal to the Military Plans Working Group, it was clear that changes would have to be made. Colonel McGrath said,

The new plan was a wholesale shift. The old plan said "population-centered strategy," but it didn't do population-centered strategy. It said "holistic," but it wasn't. It said it was "comprehensive," but it wasn't comprehensive. There was no meat; the lines of operation were very broad: security, governance, and development. What was missing was an operational design. It actually was focused on one line of operation: security. Governance and development were lip service. It was someone else's job.<sup>41</sup>

Just like the Initial Assessment Working Group, the Military Plans Working Group recognized that it could not ignore governance. The GIRoA could not reach all areas of Afghanistan, and where it did reach, it was often ineffective or corrupt. Even organizations like the UNAMA were not everywhere. ISAF is the one organization that could reach nearly everywhere and thus can assist governance and development in many ways that the

other actors could not. The old plan tended to focus on ISAF efforts in areas where everyone could go, including GIRoA, UNAMA, and other international and nongovernmental organizations. The new plan developed would shift that focus to protecting the population in areas where they were most threatened, in particular, many areas in the south and east, not where it was most convenient for ISAF.

The short time available to write a new campaign plan was unprecedented. The actual deliverable from the Military Plans Working Group was a written annex that was the result of an analysis of the current campaign plan, supporting plans, and orders to determine whether the strategy and means provided were adequate to accomplish the desired end state.<sup>42</sup> However, on 24 July, Colonel McGrath and the ISAF CJ5 shop official started the planning process to develop the new campaign plan. Thus, as the analysis of General McKiernan's previously approved plan was wrapping up, but five weeks before the "COMISAF's Initial Assessment" was turned in, the CJ5 began concurrent work on the new campaign plan. Officially, the work on this new plan was delinked from the strategic assessment because the time lines for developing a new campaign plan, even working at a frenetic pace, would stretch beyond the initially proposed assessment turn-in date. Remarkably, the CJ5-led planning team almost beat the actual turn-in of the assessment, getting General McChrystal's signature on the new campaign plan on 9 September, only 10 days after the written assessment turn-in. As Colonel McGrath had pointed out, they had to "work like dogs" to achieve these unprecedented time lines and also got daily "head-nods" from General McChrystal to insure they did not waste any time going down the wrong track.<sup>43</sup>

One of the big changes in structure that this new planning effort would have to deal with was the stand-up of the IJC. The new focus of ISAF HQ would be "up and out," while the IJC focus would be "down and in." ISAF's up-and-out focus includes coordinating with GIRoA, UNAMA, and the embassies, as well as the critically important neighboring nation of Pakistan. To assist the IJC, ISAF's new plan would have to provide direction to the IJC and then resource the IJC's new plan. The IJC would then deal with the day-to-day tactical guidance to

the regional commanders. Planners from the RCs were brought in to provide their regional focus to the working group.

General McKiernan's plan had a population-centric approach but did not prioritize the population centers. General McChrystal took General McKiernan's plan one step further and prioritized the population areas based on where the enemy was going after their objectives, primarily in the south and east. Additionally, technically General McChrystal's plan was not resource dependent. The more resources he received, the more population centers he could protect. The fewer he received, the fewer he could protect. But this population protection would start with the highest priority and then work down the list until ISAF ran out of forces. Clearly, the plan would likely take longer with fewer forces but could theoretically still be executed. In this manner, the plan was flexible enough to adjust to whatever decision President Obama made regarding additional forces. Still, more forces meant more Afghan citizens protected and greater likelihood of success, all other things being equal. Of course, given the incredibly complex political, diplomatic, informational, logistical, and other environmental factors of Afghanistan, Europe, and the United States during this period, "all other things" are rarely equal.

Colonel McGrath described ISAF's initial primary center of gravity as the cohesion of the coalition, but now that ISAF was prioritizing partnering with the Afghans, their friendly center of gravity became ISAF's center of gravity. The Afghan center of gravity—to support and protect the population—fit right in with US counterinsurgency doctrine and as a result became ISAF's primary center of gravity.<sup>44</sup> The previous plan had population-centered focus areas drawn up, but they were based on where all the players could safely operate. If an area was too dangerous, or if NGOs and the coalition civilian effort could not operate there, then it did not make the list of focus areas. Thus, in many cases, particularly in the south, many key population centers that were active Taliban threat areas were left unprotected, allowing insurgents to strengthen their grip in these areas. In General McKiernan's defense, there were not enough coalition forces during his tenure to protect many of the population centers. However, when President Obama approved 21,000 additional forces in February, General McKiernan's

plan sent many of these forces into Helmand based on where the enemy was, not necessarily where the critical population centers such as Kandahar were. General McChrystal arrived too late to change this plan, which already had gained momentum with infrastructure expansion and force deployment. The new plan, however, was designed to shift the focus of newly approved incoming forces to genuinely threatened population centers, thus putting General McChrystal's new COIN strategy to the test.

As previously stated, the biggest obstacle to effective planning was a lack of time. The new commander had arrived with a mandate to change direction quickly, but exactly in what direction was not exactly clear at the beginning, even to the commander. He needed time to familiarize himself with the environment, assess the situation, and make a decision on precisely what military strategy he would take for his planners to begin planning. In this case, given the time constraints of the assessment, planners did not have enough time to wait for General McChrystal's conclusion. They had to begin planning parallel to the commander's assessment right from the start and then get guidance from near-daily office visits. Additionally, given enough time, military planning staffs normally use formal planning procedures to take them through a planning process. Joint staffs will typically use the joint operation planning process. The Army uses the military decision-making process. ISAF, however, is a NATO-structured organization and thus uses NATO's *Guidelines for Operational Planning (GOP)* architecture. Many of the newer US officers in the ISAF CJ5 plans shop were unfamiliar with this process, causing some initial confusion as the planning began. Adding to the confusion was the fact that the *GOP* had to be condensed, with certain steps omitted or severely abridged to meet the short suspense. Colonel McGrath described the hybrid planning process this way:

We used the proper process, but we had to condense it to meet our time lines. The commander didn't sit down and give formal guidance. That's normally the first step. The commander is meant to step in at specific times and places and give guidance, but he didn't engage in that manner. He simply didn't have time. There are set process points where the commander normally steps in to make a decision—the mission analysis brief, the COA [course-of-action] development brief, the COA analy-

sis brief—but General McChrystal didn't do all of these steps. In fact, we didn't even get an initial "commander's intent." We wrote the first one, and it morphed, and it changed, so we had to circle back and make sure our original planning assumptions were still good.<sup>45</sup>

Reading Colonel McGrath's description of the planning process, it is worth remembering that during this time, General McChrystal was doing not only his initial battlefield circulation across five regions and dozens of forward operating bases but also his GIRoA leadership circulation. Furthermore, he was advising six other assessment working groups, along with the overall assessment group being led by Colonel Kolenda. General McChrystal was on a frenetic pace required to meet the initial time lines of the strategic assessment, in addition to the ongoing current fight. So if General McChrystal did not hit these formal benchmarks, how did he inject himself into the process? According to Colonel McGrath, it went like this:

He gave us feedback in small groups in his office among trusted advisors. We only gave him two formal briefs as part of the process. First, we gave him the mission analysis brief. We had to do it three times. General McChrystal did a rough-cut approval of COAs but then gave a directed COA. We just kept doing office visits to get rudder checks. General McChrystal was a little indecisive in the beginning, but very decisive near the end of the assessment. Once he decided, he was very directive.<sup>46</sup>

To put these comments in perspective, one has to remember that General McChrystal needed some time himself to decide on what course of action he wanted to take. It would have been unwise for him to land on the first day and begin issuing formal intent when he had not even had time to fully assess the situation. The cost of kicking off a parallel planning process running side by side with a commander's initial assessment was that the planners executing the formal planning process were forced to make numerous assumptions and not to be as structured as the process usually entailed.

In the end, the Military Plans Working Group decided to retain major elements of the previous operations plan, with the caveat that the operational design should be revised substantially to provide the benchmarks of progress to guide prioritization and synchronization of subordinate efforts.<sup>47</sup> However, General McKiernan's OPORD would need revision to incorporate the direction outlined in the new operational design. Ad-

ditionally, the development of the operational design must incorporate the new command relationships under which the order will be executed. Finally, the “Military Plans” annex in the “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment” recommends using the refined operational design as the basis to request additional resource capabilities that generate an overmatch of insurgent forces prior to the historical operational tempo increase of insurgent operations.<sup>48</sup>

### **Annex B: Command and Control, and Command Relationships**

One of the areas that General McChrystal was charged with improving was the C2 structure. The military C2 structure General McChrystal inherited was a convoluted system that made unity of command very difficult. The United States had initially come into Afghanistan with a clear counterterror goal, to eliminate safe havens for al-Qaeda elements within Afghanistan and also target with direct action those terrorists still within its borders. After removing the Taliban from power in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 and installing an interim government led by Hamid Karzai, US forces continued to target both al-Qaeda remnants remaining within Afghanistan and Taliban forces still present in many areas of the country. They did both of these mission sets under the OEF mandate. NATO forces began to move into the country in 2002 and, for nearly two years, primarily operated in the Kabul area. Then ISAF gradually expanded its area of operations throughout the country and, by the start of 2007, had tactical control of all areas of the country for stability assistance, not counterterror missions. US forces still had a unilateral counterterror mission with a US commander operating under the OEF mandate. By the fall of 2008, General McKiernan was dual-hatted as commander of both USFOR-A and COMISAF. Four of the five regional commands had a non-US NATO commander, with only RC-East and the 82nd Airborne Division under USFOR-A operational control.

The first thing that Secretary Gates, General Petraeus, and General McChrystal recognized, even prior to General McChrystal’s assumption of command, was that there needed to be an intermediate-level, corps-like command between the two-star



regional commands and the four-star multinational headquarters. The number of nations contributing forces was increasing along with the size of those coalition forces, which were nearly 100,000 strong and divided amongst five division-sized commands. This by itself certainly justified a three-star intermediate command. Added to this were the difficult nonmilitary issues that the ISAF commander was forced to deal with on a daily basis. First, the relationship with GIRoA was complex, with many perceiving Karzai's regime as corrupt. This was further exacerbated by the fraud-plagued Afghan presidential elections, making the relationship even more challenging. Secondly, General McChrystal had to worry about keeping the ISAF coalition strong in the face of increasingly uneasy nations pondering the increasing violence by strengthened insurgents. US leaders realized that no one commander could effectively deal with both the complex strategic "up and out" issues that faced ISAF, as just described, and also effectively tactically control nearly 100,000 forces in the operational area. The decision was made prior to General McChrystal's arrival to also send General Rodriguez to be the IJC commander-presumptive, prior even to US Senate confirmation and NATO approval. After his arrival in Afghanistan, General Rodriguez's official title was deputy commanding general, USFOR-A, with no ISAF role until the three-star IJC headquarters stood up in October.

When the Strategic Assessment C2 Working Group began, there was a lack of clarity as to who would lead it. As previously mentioned, the entire strategic assessment lacked a process leader at the beginning, and until Colonel Owens finally took over, individual working groups were not necessarily appointed leaders right from the start. The only thing that the C2 Working Group participants knew for sure going into the group was that there would be a new intermediate three-star headquarters, the IJC. Some thought that perhaps recently arrived officers sent to Afghanistan along with General Rodriguez to plan for the stand-up of the IJC should also be the ones to lead the C2 Working Group. Others recognized that many broader C2 issues also needed to be examined and that the CJ5 ought to lead it. In the end, Colonel McGrath led the group and wrote the draft annex. According to Colonel McGrath, the guidance to

the working group was simply “what’s the problem?” and “what can we do to fix it?”<sup>49</sup>

The C2 Working Group was quickly broken down to this: seek unity of command wherever possible and unity of effort in all other cases. Furthermore, the group tried to recommend bringing everything possible underneath the ISAF NATO mandate. OEF-only areas, like counterterrorism and detention operations, would have to be connected as smoothly as possible. Put a different way, the regional commanders needed to be given C2 of forces in their battlespace to the greatest extent possible. As Colonel Grigsby put it,

A key COIN principle is to have battlespace commanders own all the military things in their battlespace. As an example, in RC-West you’ve got a portion of 4/82 trainers that work for CSTC-A [Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan] instead of the RC-West commander because originally CSTC-A was an OEF force. That hasn’t been changed yet. Another example is SOF [special operations forces]. SOF, except counterterror forces, should work for the RC commanders, but there are a lot of rice bowls that we are trying to break here. Everyone is trying to coordinate, but it’s not the same.<sup>50</sup>

Although C2 is improving, it is likely that the RC commanders will never get full unity of command of all the forces operating in their operational areas, but there have been improvements.

Another glaring area where there was lack of coordination, not to mention integration, was the relationship between ISAF and the ANSF. This was the result of having a parallel command structure, with the dual-hatted General McChrystal reporting up through his US and NATO chain and with ANSF forces reporting up a completely separate Afghan chain of command to the minister of defense. Both military organizations were fighting the insurgents but in an uncoordinated manner. General McChrystal, in collaboration with the C2 Working Group and with GIRoA, decided to create a National Military Coordination Center for planning joint military operations. In conjunction with this, coalition and Afghan forces began partnering to a much greater extent. The two military organizations now routinely patrol together.

In addition to the IJC, General McChrystal decided to create the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) under a new three-star commander to unify both NATO and US training

forces previously operating under separate command relationship lines. This recommendation is an improvement in the C2 area, and it also falls in the area of the ANSF Growth and Acceleration Working Group. This new headquarters is now operational and is led by US Army lieutenant general William Caldwell, who is dual-hatted as the CSTC-A commander. Patience is wearing thin for the various NATO countries involved in Afghanistan, and, eventually—likely in the near future—ISAF forces will begin to off-ramp. Thus, an ISAF main effort is to build up ANSF forces as quickly as feasible so that when ISAF forces begin to draw down, ANSF forces stand up and keep the pressure on the insurgency.

### **Annex C: USG Civil-Military Campaign Plan**

As General McChrystal's strategic assessment began, the USG Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan (ICMCP) was already nearing its completion as an initiative that had been underway since early spring. In fact, on 15 August, the ICMCP was signed by General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry and forwarded to Amb. Richard Holbrooke, US special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, and General Petraeus. The ICMCP aligns USG efforts on a single objective: the people of Afghanistan. It focuses on both US civilian and military efforts in applying COIN efforts across the 11 transformative effects listed below:

- Population Security
- Claim the Information Initiative
- Access to Justice
- Expansion of Accountable and Transparent Governance
- Elections and Continuity of Governance
- Action against Irreconcilables
- Creating Sustainable Jobs
- Agricultural Opportunity and Market Access
- Countering the Nexus of Narcotics, Corruption, Insurgency, and Criminality
- Community and Government-led Reintegration
- Cross-Border Access for Commerce Not Insurgents<sup>51</sup>

According to Civ-Mil Working Group leader Colonel Briggs, General Petraeus, Ambassador Holbrooke, and the newly sworn-in Ambassador Eikenberry met at Fort McNair, Washington, DC, on 1 May and established the priorities for the civil effort in Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> Goals were established, a strategy was developed, and all of this turned into the 11 transformative effects listed above. One of the key enablers that needed to be in place for the civilian side of the civ-mil partnership to be effective was that more civilians had to be sent to Afghanistan. There were simply too few USG civilians to push outside of Kabul and into the provincial and district levels to make any difference. The problem was that the State Department and many other agencies simply aren't organized for rapid deployment of their members. As Colonel Briggs noted,

The long pole in the tent was definitely the interagency piece. Would interagency be able to resource this effort with subject-matter experts in sufficient numbers who could get here in sufficient time to have the effect we needed in 12 to 18 months, the time General McChrystal had to start having a positive impact? We've made strides, but the total number of USG civilians here by Christmas will only be around 250. We just haven't seen the numbers.<sup>53</sup>

The focus on the ICMCP was to get the US "house" in order and then worry about other nations and integrating their civilian efforts. However, planners interacted with the United Nations, different GIROA ministries, and other nations. Some of the civilian mentor teams that were planned to come in and assist the Afghans were engineers from Germany, Sweden, and India. Other international experts in areas such as agriculture were also called upon. Although the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is a big asset, it does not have a lot of foot soldiers and primarily uses contractors to help with the building of roads, schools, and other infrastructure projects. Expanding on his comments above regarding the difficulty in adding civilians to Afghanistan, Colonel Briggs elaborated that "the State Department just doesn't have the large force waiting to deploy. Their process was cumbersome . . . looking for the right skill sets willing to come to an austere environment and live under harsh conditions in an unsafe environment. It's easier to get volunteers to come to Kabul, but more are needed at the lower governmental levels throughout the country."<sup>54</sup>

Many leaders and experts from both the military and civilian camps have cited the civ-mil effort as one of the key ingredients to success in Afghanistan. However, meshing the military and civilian cultures to work together is not as easy as it sounds. In his seemingly endless hours attending meetings involving civ-mil integration, Colonel Briggs captures some of these cultural differences:

The military has really latched onto a PowerPoint-landscaped way of thinking, maybe to a fault. When you look at our products, they have lots of arrows and lots of objectives. We think very linearly, and that's the way we approach a problem. The other culture is more of a portrait. If you think of MS Word, [those users] take a problem and they write a 25-page document, and they'll talk about ideas and concepts. They're not as much action-, goal-, or results-oriented as the military.<sup>55</sup>

Along with the different ways of processing problems as noted above, the hierarchical culture of State Department personnel at the embassy also was different than the typical military organization. He noted that

[US Embassy civilian personnel] tend to take a more measured approach to things; they clearly don't like to put folks on the spot in terms of fixing responsibility and tasking people to do things. They tend to talk a lot about issues. . . . Some of them are great Americans, interested in moving ahead and getting things done. Others were more worried about things that did not matter as much. I saw a lot of power struggles occurring within the embassy structure. People that were at higher levels were resentful of action officers taking the initiative to try to get things done. . . . [It was] frustrating to watch. Some were more concerned with process and protocols than results.<sup>56</sup>

According to Colonel Briggs, Ambassador Eikenberry is trying to change some of these negatively perceived cultural attitudes at the US Embassy in Afghanistan, but it is a very tough challenge to change the culture of any large organization. There is ordinarily much resistance.

## **Annex D: Strategic Communication**

In one of the first briefings that General McChrystal took after arriving at ISAF HQ, strategic communications was shown as its own line of operation in the existing campaign plan. As soon as the slide went up, Admiral Smith, the newly arrived director of communications saw it and said, "That's not a line of opera-

tion. It's just flat not."<sup>57</sup> And that began the reexamination of ISAF's strategic communications process with General McChrystal's new team. Admiral Smith then explained that strategic communications is not a separate group of people or a separate headquarters function but, instead, was a part of all of the different staff functions and lines of operation. As he explained all of this, heads began nodding in agreement around the room, even amongst the holdovers from General McKiernan's team. Afterwards, some of them said, "Yes, sir, we had the same debate as we developed this thing, but your predecessor felt that to not emphasize this thing—StratCom—meant that it wasn't going to have value."<sup>58</sup> ISAF's next iteration of the campaign plan dropped strategic communication as its own line of operation. Thus, this initial discussion was really the first big input to General McChrystal that the StratCom Working Group leader made, even before the working began formally meeting.

One of the important concepts recognized right away, even before General McChrystal took over, was that StratCom was not just a US military issue, and not even just an ISAF issue, but a USG civilian and GIRoA issue as well. All of these players in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan needed to improve their efforts to effectively communicate with the Afghan people. Admiral Smith saw it this way:

We got here when there was just a four-star headquarters in existence in which there had been very little resources put into all the fields of communication, whether it be public affairs, information operations, or PSYOPS [psychological operations]. And we also had this USFOR-A thing sitting over here versus ISAF. So one of the first things we did was kluge the two things together as part of our assessment. Also, we recognized that there was an equally important assessment going on at the US Embassy with the civ-mil integration. We took advantage of working that piece, which had some traction back in the United States in terms of working groups that I was involved in prior to my departure. So, in effect, we were working communications strategy for Afghanistan as the US element [and] brought the NATO piece together as one assessment group as a partner with the US Embassy. Then we brought in other embassies on a case-by-case basis.<sup>59</sup>

Admiral Smith confirmed the somewhat informal, unstructured start to the overall assessment, and even within his own working group. He recounted a few months later, "I don't remember a specific starting point beyond some of the initial

meetings that we had—it was more of an iterative process.”<sup>60</sup> Because Admiral Smith had come in with the reputation of having helped fix StratCom in Iraq, and because he was personally involved with the StratCom Working Group, General McChrystal gave the group a very long leash. As Admiral Smith recalled, “He placed much, much more emphasis on the base document than he did on the annexes. He may have focused on one or two annexes, but in our case, annex D, I think that because of the trust and confidence that he had in myself as the expert in this area, I don’t recall any challenges to my assumptions in that area.”<sup>61</sup>

One of the areas that was of huge concern to both General McChrystal and Admiral Smith was the negative StratCom effect of CIVCAS incidents in general and large casualty-producing events in particular. Admiral Smith used the phrase “speed kills” to describe the critical importance of not allowing the insurgents time to get their story out to the public first. He described that if you can get there “first with the truth” you can kill the enemy’s ability to propagandize the event.<sup>62</sup> Admiral Smith and his working group realized that one of the ways to be there first with the truth is not just to wait until after an operation or event goes badly and then react, but to try to anticipate coalition operations or activities that might have a high potential to result in a StratCom event. And this ties right in with the fact that StratCom is not its own line of operation but must be a key component of all of the lines of operations, directorates, and unit activities. Then, when planning an operation, StratCom effects must be planned into it. Admiral Smith provided a telling example:

If I’m going to launch an operation at 0400 with SOF forces, that’s the beginning of our communication right there. How we do that op begins to send a message locally as to what our intent is. How we interface with the population sends a message. And then if I’m not right on the heels of that with some sort of contextual statement that says, “At four o’clock in the morning, we went into Village X because a bad guy lived there, and we came out . . .”—if I wait until noon to say that information because I have the position to do that because I wasn’t connected to that operation—chances are that somebody in that village will spin that out of control. Before I know it, I’ve lost it.<sup>63</sup>

However, sometimes events happen that cannot be fully anticipated. On 4 September, in Kunduz Province, Afghanistan, German forces called in an air strike on suspected insurgent forces standing around two stolen tanker trucks. In the aftermath, ISAF forces quickly realized that numerous civilians were likely in and around the tankers. This unfortunate incident was a big test case for the “speed kills” and “first with the truth” doctrine. In a similar incident that occurred in Farah, Afghanistan, under General McKiernan’s tenure, ISAF and local leaders got into a tit-for-tat argument on whether civilians were killed and then how many civilians were killed. In that case, ISAF was not first, and it unintentionally did not initially provide accurate information on the casualties. The 4 September Kunduz incident was similar in many respects but handled far differently. Admiral Smith described it this way:

When Kunduz hit that morning, we put the SOP [standard operating procedure—new StratCom postincident mitigation procedures published in annex D of “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment”] into play. I was out of here about three in the afternoon with a team that went up to Kunduz. I took a reporter with me. My goal is transparency in the first 48 hours because my sense is in the first 48 hours, pretty much everything that needs to be known, normally can be known. In the past, we would get into a cryptic denial type of situation, say we’re going to do an investigation, and lock it all down. We allowed the enemy to spin the incident out of control.<sup>64</sup>

Part of that open transparency in the Kunduz incident included General McChrystal presenting a taped message broadcast nationally acknowledging that the incident occurred, that he took it very seriously, and that he would do everything in his power to ensure it never happened again. He stated, “I take this possible loss of life or injury to innocent Afghans very seriously. . . . As commander, nothing is more important [to me] than the safety and protection of the Afghan people.”<sup>65</sup> He also went to Kunduz and was a very visible on-scene symbol of ISAF’s commitment to fix the problem. Because of the quick and effective ISAF reaction to this incident, remarkably, the story was out of the headlines within a few days. What could have been a huge StratCom victory for the insurgents actually turned into a long-term win for ISAF’s credibility.



Overall, this working group had no major group cohesion challenges, and it was better served than some of the other working groups in that it had an actively involved flag officer with the trust and confidence of General McChrystal leading it.

### **Annex E: Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force**

As has been alluded to, CIVCAS incidents were a major impediment in ISAF efforts to win over Afghan support in the attempt to defeat the Taliban and other insurgents. Several high-visibility CIVCAS events, along with dozens of other smaller escalation-of-force incidents over the past few years, damaged ISAF's credibility as it battled the Taliban for the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people. Putting an exclamation point on the urgency of this issue right before General McChrystal took command, ISAF airstrikes in Farah Province killed at least 20 to 30 civilians, with local Afghans believing the toll was much higher. This was a high-publicity incident and put the issue of CIVCAS on the front burner as General McChrystal began the strategic assessment.

As a major part of the effort to minimize civilian casualties, General McChrystal issued a tactical directive, dated 1 July 2009, that specified his commander's intent, fire control measures, battle damage assessment criteria, and other CIVCAS direction. As mentioned, General McKiernan also had published a tactical directive, but it did not improve CIVCAS problems, and it did not appear to have been properly followed down to the platoon and squad levels. General McChrystal released his directive with strong follow-up actions. In the first month after its release, he focused great attention in his morning staff updates on virtually every escalation-of-force incident that led to possible civilian casualties. In fact, there were other incidents that, while not resulting in civilian casualties, did not appear to follow the intent of the tactical directive. General McChrystal sternly reminded regional commanders of his intent with the directive. The word filtered down, and CIVCAS incidents were reduced.

The CIVCAS Working Group was officially headed by British air commodore Paddy Teakle and initially informally led by his

French air force deputy, Col Olivier Bertrand. It also had members, both ground and air, from multiple US services and many coalition nations. However, the working group was plagued by a slow start because of the inability of the group to agree on the actual intent and scope that it was supposed to study. Initially, the entire focus of the CIVCAS Working Group was on air-to-ground CIVCAS. However, the group quickly learned that most of the issues were escalation-of-force issues and not close air support (CAS)-related, even though CAS attacks received the bulk of the negative publicity. Thus, the focus then shifted more to escalation-of-force incidents. Invariably, the first two meetings turned into discussions of rules of engagement (ROE)—what they were, whether or not ISAF had any influence on them or they were national caveats, and even arguments regarding European versus US methods of engaging enemy forces.

At the height of this debate, one European officer heatedly implied that if under any kind of attack from insurgents, ISAF forces should first look for an escape route and only fight if there was no other choice. The response of an unnamed, newly arrived US Army colonel was to throw his hands up and practically shout, “We’re the friggin’ Army; whatever happened to ‘close with and destroy the enemy?’”<sup>66</sup> This argument was a microcosm of the larger issue that had been a source of frustration for years in Afghanistan, where US military leaders were hampered by the many national caveats that some nations’ military forces brought with them. In addition, it highlighted some of the tension between the new handpicked team that came in with General McChrystal and NATO members of the former commander’s ISAF HQ staff.

Additionally, this group was plagued by leadership problems. Colonel Bertrand was in Afghanistan on a five-month tour, had never done a nonflying staff job in his career before, and was not a fluent English speaker to boot. Colonel Bertrand initially focused on ROEs, but US members felt that the issue wasn’t with ROEs but with following the commander’s guidance. Early on, based on these various issues, Colonel Hann stepped in and became more of a partner with Colonel Bertrand to help lead the group. As far as ROEs went, it soon became a nonissue.

Colonel Hann described this, the view of SOF, and the early group interaction this way:

The cultural issues really peaked over people's personal venue. We had lawyers from three different entities present in the group who spoke great "lawyerese" and who were determined to go in certain directions. As it turns out, unbeknownst to us, ROE is a legal process . . . so our ability to amend or change that was quite limited. People from the SOF community seemed to feel that there should be no limitations on what they do, so no one should look, talk, or speak about what they do. But you had the commander's guidance that we had to limit to the greatest degree possible any kind of civilian casualty incidents. So yes, the debates were quite vigorous.<sup>67</sup>

One thing was clear to most in the group—ISAF Soldiers had become too reliant on fire support in their tactical fights with insurgents. Coalition airpower had complete air supremacy over Afghanistan, and generally if forces were in a troops-in-contact (TIC) situation and CAS was called, it arrived within 10 or 15 minutes. Thus, to minimize the risk to a Soldier's platoon or squad in a firefight, calling CAS right away became almost a knee-jerk reaction. This was occurring even when the forces were not exchanging fire. Colonel Hann observed that

if we saw two bad guys run into a house, the first reaction was to take a 500-pound bomb from an airplane or some great big artillery shell and quite accurately destroy the house and everyone inside the house. Well, if you were in Akron or Omaha or Miami or San Francisco and two bad guys ran into a house, your first reaction would not be to drop a 500-pound bomb on that house. And yet that was the first reaction here. There was a cultural piece that we need to recognize. We were guests in their country first, so there was a great deal of cultural ground to cover by all people involved in this.<sup>68</sup>

As Colonel Hann stated, behavior needed to be changed. General McChrystal's tactical directive was one measure taken. Another requirement was better training. Forces already in Afghanistan would have to be trained and, just as importantly, the various training institutions involved in predeployment training would also have to change. True COIN training requires a different mentality for the Soldiers and Marines on the ground, and thus both of the service training institutions need to shift their focus to a complete population-centric approach. Colonel Hann adds that "we've now stood up COIN training in country [in Afghanistan] to try to get some of that [new train-

ing]. We had a hard time convincing NATO to do COIN training because it did not do COIN. COIN was a nasty word. Not only do they do COIN operations in Afghanistan now, but General McChrystal persuaded Gen [Egon] Ramms [Bundeswehr, or Federal Defense Force, commander, Allied Joint Force Command, Brunssum] to teach COIN to NATO forces in Europe.<sup>69</sup>

General McChrystal knew he had to rapidly change the ISAF climate in regards to CIVCAS, and he could not wait even for an accelerated 60-day assessment to finish before providing guidance. Thus, much of his personal CIVCAS reduction guidance is provided in the 1 July tactical directive. As a result, annex E is relatively brief and to some extent corollary to the tactical directive, with an additional training recommendation, a clarification of TIC situations, a discussion of proportionality, and a few other items. Minimizing civilian casualties will continue to be an ISAF priority as long as it is combating insurgent forces. While it is likely impossible to completely eliminate ISAF-caused civilian casualties as long as insurgent forces are fighting in and around population areas, the tactical directive and other recommendations implemented from annex E of “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment” have gone a long way toward reducing these events.

### **Annex F: Detainee Operations, Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections**

Like the Civ-Mil Working Group, the Detainee Operations, Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections Working Group began with an existing major effort already under way. Army major general Douglas Stone was leading a team in Afghanistan studying detainee operations and rule of law with essentially the same charter as the strategic assessment working group covering the same effort. General Stone applied lessons-learned from his experience with detainee ops in Iraq. So as not to duplicate effort, the assessment team, led by Colonel Jeppson, essentially let General Stone’s group complete its analysis and then turned its report into the strategic assessment draft that went to General McChrystal. Instead of running their own separate meetings, Colonel Jeppson and a couple of others simply sat in the IPRs that General Stone’s group had with General McChrystal to follow the progress of their effort. Since this

strategic assessment working group did not meet and only took General Stone's study and folded its results into the assessment, there is really no "process" to cover in this paper. However, some of the outcomes of the effort are highlighted.

Detention operations have generated negative publicity for US and coalition efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world. With the projected closure of Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility, more international attention was being focused on the Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF) and its detainees. Even more important than just the negative publicity, which includes the perception that US detention ops are secretive and lacking in due process, detainee operations are crucial to the overall COIN fight in Afghanistan. Hard-core al-Qaeda insurgents in the Afghan Corrections System (ACS), now numbering more than 2,500, are radicalizing the other noninsurgent inmates who are indiscriminately mixed within overcrowded facilities. As annex F states, "In effect, insurgents use the ACS as a sanctuary and base to conduct lethal operations against GIRoA and coalition forces. . . . The U.S. came to Afghanistan vowing to deny these same enemies safe haven in 2001. They have gone from inaccessible mountain hideouts to recruiting and indoctrinating hiding in the open, in the ACS."<sup>70</sup>

Annex F proposes the formation of a new combined joint interagency task force to work toward the long-term goal of getting the United States out of the detention business, giving it to the GIRoA. This organization is nearing its operational point in its first version as Joint Task Force 435. The goal is, as quickly as possible, to include interagency and coalition partners. Ultimately, the concept will be developed based on three capabilities.

- Capability 1 – Assume the U.S. detention oversight and support responsibilities . . . to include the operation and management of the BTIF, to . . . focus on the operational fight. Once the JTF stands up and the commander and his staff are on the ground in Afghanistan, they can begin planning and further developing capabilities 2 and 3.
- Capability 2 – Conduct corrections and Rule of Law development within the Afghan National Defense Force (ANDF) detention facilities.
- Capability 3 – In close coordination and cooperation with the U.S. Embassy, conduct corrections and Rule of Law development within the Afghan CPD [Central Prisons Directorate] system of prisons.<sup>71</sup>

The end state or goal of this entire detainee operations effort is

the turnover of all detention operations in Afghanistan, to include the BTIF, to the Afghan government once they have developed the requisite sustainable capacity to run those detention systems in accordance with international and national law. This will empower the Afghan government, enable counterinsurgency operations, and restore the faith of the Afghan people in their government's ability to apply good governance and Rule of Law with respect to corrections, detention, and justice.<sup>72</sup>

### **Annex G: Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration**

There was initial confusion as to whether ANSF growth would just be part of the general discussion or have its own separate annex. Colonel Pick and, later, Colonel Owens both decided that ANSF growth would not be a separate annex in the beginning but just assumed that it would be discussed in the initial assessment section of the "COMISAF's Initial Assessment." However, when the CJCS and CENTCOM actually published the written order charging General McChrystal to conduct the assessment, two extra annexes were in it that were not part of the strategic assessment that had already begun in Kabul. As mentioned earlier, the assessment actually began on verbal guidance from Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen to General McChrystal, and then their staffs had to follow up with the written order. One of these two extra annexes was an ANSF growth annex, and the other was a review of the coordination measures with Pakistan to improve performance across the Afghanistan/Pakistan regional theater.

It was not until the third IPR on 18 July when General McChrystal asked about the progress of the ANSF growth that he realized there was not a separate annex for this subject. He then said that he wanted one. At this point, however, there was little time to draw together an official working group, given that there was only a week or more left to complete the analysis before writing the assessment. Thus, this working group was quickly formed from a few planners at CSTC-A who were already working ANSF growth strategies, along with General McChrystal's key advisors, to make some decisions on the way ahead. General McChrystal approved the specific growth goals

and time lines, and the annex was written. The tasking to review coordination measures with Pakistan did not become part of this assessment but was addressed by General McChrystal and his USFOR-A and ISAF staffs by other means.

The key findings of the ANSF growth annex were that US and coalition forces would need to accelerate the growth of ANSF forces in order to increase the overall size of friendly forces, both ISAF and Afghan, to quell the insurgency. This more rapidly growing force would also reduce the risk of failure should coalition forces begin pulling out of Afghanistan earlier than anticipated. Annex G calls for the Afghan National Army growth to 134,000 to be completed by October of 2010, instead of December 2011, with a further growth to 240,000 by an undetermined future date. Annex G recommends a growth of the Afghan National Police up to 160,000 “as soon as practicable with the right mix of capabilities that better satisfies the requirements of a counter-insurgency effort.”<sup>73</sup>

As mentioned in the C2 annex, NATO stood up a new organization to assist with the growth and development of the ANSF, called NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan or NTM-A. This annex calls for CSTC-A and NTM-A to coexist as a single headquarters with a fully integrated staff under a dual-hatted commander. This new coalition command became operational under the command of General Caldwell as of this writing.

## **Conclusion**

General McChrystal’s strategic assessment was a historic effort for US and NATO interests in Afghanistan and may mark a turning point in the conflict against Afghanistan’s insurgents. The assessment occurred during a very tumultuous transitional period and required a major effort by a large group of officers working at a breathtaking pace to complete. Notwithstanding this group effort, the strategic assessment reflects General McChrystal’s personal conclusions, and it is wholly owned by him. The assessment overcame many difficulties, including a difficult start due to the nature of General McKiernan’s departure and General McChrystal’s sudden arrival, along with rising public and political discontent with growing coalition casualties, Afghan government corruption, and rising

war costs in the midst of a US recession. In the face of these difficulties, the persuasive analytical work and well-argued conclusions in “COMISAF’s Initial Assessment” were key to General McChrystal and others persuading President Obama to reaffirm his counterinsurgency strategy and reinforce his Afghan campaign with 30,000 additional troops. The process that General McChrystal and his team used to complete the assessment, while not perfect, is an extremely useful tool for future US commanders and their staffs to use when tasked with a similar effort on another battlefield down the road.

### **Notes**

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2. Ibid.

3. Col Christopher Kolenda (US Army, contributing author, “Strategy Review,” January 2009, and “Strategic Assessment,” 30 August 2009), interview by the author, 22 October 2009.

4. Ibid.

5. Col Kevin Owens (US Army, lead, General McChrystal’s Strategic Advisory Group), interview by the author, 28 October 2009.

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7. Col James McGrath (US Marine Corps, ISAF, CJ5 Plans Directorate, deputy director), interview by the author, 10 November 2009.

8. Owens, interview.

9. McChrystal, interview.

10. Owens, interview.

11. Col Wayne Grigsby (US Army, key player, Command and Control Working Group), interview by the author, 10 November 2009.

12. Ibid.

13. McChrystal, interview.

14. Remark overheard by the author, who was at the in-progress review.

15. McGrath, interview.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Near the end of the assessment process, General McChrystal decided to delay the document turn-in until after the Afghan presidential elections on 20 Aug 2009.

19. Kolenda, interview.

20. Ibid.

21. Owens, interview.

22. Col Christopher Kolenda, to the author, e-mail, 12 February 2010.

23. Kolenda, interview.

24. Kolenda to the author, e-mail.



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28. Ibid., 1-3.
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34. Owens, interview.
35. Rear Adm Gregory Smith (US Navy, lead, Strategic Communication Working Group), interview by the author, 5 November 2009.
36. McGrath, interview.
37. McChrystal, interview.
38. Kolenda to the author, e-mail.
39. Ideas taken from Kolenda e-mail, 12 February 2010.
40. McChrystal, interview.
41. McGrath, interview.
42. Annex A, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," A-1.
43. McGrath, interview.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Annex C, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," A-4, A-5.
48. Ibid., A-5.
49. McGrath, interview.
50. Grigsby, interview.
51. Annex C, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," C-1.
52. Col Steven Briggs (US Army, lead, ICMCP Working Group), interview by the author, 23 October 2009.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
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57. Smith, interview.
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59. Ibid.
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64. Ibid.
65. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "NATO Probing Deadly Airstrike," *Washington Post*, 5 September 2009, 1.
66. Discussion witnessed by author.

67. Col Raymond Hann (US Army, coleader, Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force Strategic Assessment Working Group), interview by the author, 5 November 2009.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

70. Annex F, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," F-1.

71. Ibid., F-4.

72. Ibid., F-4–F-5.

73. Annex G, "COMISAF's Initial Assessment," G-3.



## Abbreviations

ACS	Afghan Corrections System
ANSF	Afghan National Security Force
BTIF	Bagram Theater Internment Facility
C2	command and control
CAS	close air support
CENTCOM	Central Command
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
CIVCAS	civilian casualties
civ-mil	civil-military
CJCS	chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
COA	course of action
COIN	counterinsurgency
COMISAF	commander of the (US-led) International Security Assistance Force
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan
DCOM	deputy commander
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GOP	<i>Guidelines for Operational Planning</i>
HQ	headquarters
ICMCP	Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
IPR	in-progress review
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JTF	joint task force
KAIA	Kabul International Airport
MNF-I	Multi-National Force-Iraq
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NKC	New Kabul Compound
NSC	National Security Council
NTM-A	NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OPLAN	operational plan
OPORD	operations order
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

RAF	Royal Air Force
RC	regional command
ROE	rule of engagement
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SecDef	secretary of defense
SOF	special operations forces
StratCom	strategic communication
TIC	troops in contact
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USFOR-A	United States Forces-Afghanistan
USG	US government

Appendix

**“COMISAF’s Initial Assessment”**

**30 August 2009**



## **Commander's Initial Assessment**

**30 August 2009**

Commander  
NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan  
U.S. Forces, Afghanistan



## **Table of Contents**

i Purpose

### *Initial Assessment*

1. Commander's Summary
2. Initial Assessment

### *Annexes*

- A. Military Plans
- B. Command and Control, and Command Relationships
- C. USG Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan
- D. Strategic Communication
- E. Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force
- F. Detainee Operations, Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections
- G. Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration
- H. Glossary
- I. References

## **Purpose**

On 26 June, 2009, the United States Secretary of Defense directed Commander, United States Central Command (CDRUSCENTCOM), to provide a multidisciplinary assessment of the situation in Afghanistan. On 02 July, 2009, Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) / U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A), received direction from CDRUSCENTCOM to complete the overall review.

On 01 July 2009, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and NATO Secretary General also issued a similar directive.

COMISAF subsequently issued an order to the ISAF staff and component commands to conduct a comprehensive review to assess the overall situation, review plans and ongoing efforts, and identify revisions to operational, tactical and strategic guidance.

The following assessment is a report of COMISAF's findings and conclusions. In summary, this assessment sought to answer the following questions:

- Can ISAF achieve the mission?
- If so, how should ISAF go about achieving the mission?
- What is required to achieve the mission?

The assessment draws on both internal ISAF components, to include Regional Commands, and external agencies such as GIROA ministries, International Governmental Organizations and Nongovernmental Organizations. It also draws on existing ISAF and USFOR-A plans and policy guidance, relevant reports and studies, and the consultation of external experts and advisors.



## Commander's Summary

The stakes in Afghanistan are high. NATO's Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan and President Obama's strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan have laid out a clear path of what we must do. Stability in Afghanistan is an imperative; if the Afghan government falls to the Taliban—or has insufficient capability to counter transnational terrorists—Afghanistan could again become a base for terrorism, with obvious implications for regional stability.

The situation in Afghanistan is serious; neither success nor failure can be taken for granted. Although considerable effort and sacrifice have resulted in some progress, many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating. We face not only a resilient and growing insurgency; there is also a crisis of confidence among Afghans—in both their government and the international community—that undermines our credibility and emboldens the insurgents. Further, a perception that our resolve is uncertain makes Afghans reluctant to align with us against the insurgents.

Success is achievable, but it will not be attained simply by trying harder or “doubling down” on the previous strategy. Additional resources are required, but focusing on force or resource requirements misses the point entirely. The key takeaway from this assessment is the urgent need for a significant change to our strategy and the way that we think and operate.

NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) requires a new strategy that is credible to, and sustainable by, the Afghans. This new strategy must also be properly resourced and executed through an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency campaign that earns the support of the Afghan people and provides them with a secure environment.

To execute the strategy, we must grow and improve the effectiveness of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and elevate the importance of governance. We must also prioritize resources to those areas where the population is threatened, gain the initiative from the insurgency, and signal unwavering commitment to see it through to success. Finally, we must redefine the nature of the fight, clearly understand the impacts and importance of time, and change our operational culture.

### **Redefining the Fight**

This is a different kind of fight. We must conduct classic counterinsurgency operations in an environment that is uniquely complex. Three regional insurgencies have intersected with a dynamic blend of local power struggles in a country damaged by 30 years of conflict. This makes for a situation that defies simple solutions or quick fixes. Success demands a comprehensive counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign.

Our strategy cannot be focused on seizing terrain or destroying insurgent forces; our objective must be the population. In the struggle to gain the support of the people, every action we take must enable this effort. The population also represents a powerful actor that can and must be leveraged in this complex system. Gaining their support

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will require a better understanding of the people's choices and needs. However, progress is hindered by the dual threat of a resilient insurgency and a crisis of confidence in the government and the international coalition. To win their support, we must protect the people from both of these threats.

Many describe the conflict in Afghanistan as a war of ideas, which I believe to be true. However, this is a "deeds-based" information environment where perceptions derive from actions, such as how we interact with the population and how quickly things improve. The key to changing perceptions lies in changing the underlying truths. We must never confuse the situation as it stands with the one we desire, lest we risk our credibility.

### **The Criticality of Time**

The impact of time on our effort in Afghanistan has been underappreciated and we require a new way of thinking about it.

First, the fight is not an annual cyclical campaign of kinetics driven by an insurgent "fighting season." Rather, it is a year-round struggle, often conducted with little apparent violence to win the support of the people. Protecting the population from insurgent coercion and intimidation demands a persistent presence and focus that cannot be interrupted without risking serious setback.

Second, and more importantly, we face both a short- and long-term fight. The long-term fight will require patience and commitment, but I believe the short-term fight will be decisive. Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term (next 12 months)—while Afghan security capacity matures—risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.

### **Change the Operational Culture**

As formidable as the threat may be, we make the problem harder. ISAF is a conventional force that is poorly configured for COIN, inexperienced in local languages and culture, and struggling with challenges inherent to coalition warfare. These intrinsic disadvantages are exacerbated by our current operational culture and how we operate.

Preoccupied with protection of our own forces, we have operated in a manner that distances us—physically and psychologically—from the people we seek to protect. In addition, we run the risk of strategic defeat by pursuing tactical wins that cause civilian casualties or unnecessary collateral damage. The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily; but we can defeat ourselves.

Accomplishing the mission demands a renewed emphasis on the basics through a dramatic change in how we operate, with specific focus in two principle areas:

- 1. Change the operational culture to connect with the people.** I believe we must interact more closely with the population and focus on operations that bring stability, while shielding them from insurgent violence, corruption, and coercion.

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- 2. Improve unity of effort and command.** We must significantly modify organizational structures to achieve better unity of effort. We will continue to realign relationships to improve coordination within ISAF and the international community.

### **The New Strategy: Focus on the Population**

Getting these basics right is necessary for success, but it is not enough. To accomplish the mission and defeat the insurgency we also require a properly resourced strategy built on four main pillars:

- 1. Improve effectiveness through greater partnering with ANSF.** We will increase the size and accelerate the growth of the ANSF, with a radically improved partnership at every level, to improve effectiveness and prepare them to take the lead in security operations.
- 2. Prioritize responsive and accountable governance.** We must assist in improving governance at all levels through both formal and traditional mechanisms.
- 3. Gain the Initiative.** Our first imperative, in a series of operational stages, is to gain the initiative and reverse the insurgency's momentum.
- 4. Focus Resources.** We will prioritize available resources to those critical areas where vulnerable populations are most threatened.

These concepts are not new. However, implemented aggressively, they will be revolutionary to our effectiveness. We must do things dramatically differently—even uncomfortably differently—to change how we operate, and also how we think. Our every action must reflect this change of mind-set: how we traverse the country, how we use force, and how we partner with the Afghans. Conventional wisdom is not sacred; security may not come from the barrel of a gun. Better force protection may be counter-intuitive; it might come from less armor and less distance from the population.

### **The Basis of Assessment: Analysis and Experience**

My conclusions were informed through a rigorous multidisciplinary assessment by a team of accomplished military personnel and civilians and my personal experience and core beliefs. Central to my analysis is a belief that we must respect the complexities of the operational environment and design our strategic approach accordingly. As we analyzed the situation, I became increasingly convinced of several themes: that the objective is the will of the people, our conventional warfare culture is part of the problem, the Afghans must ultimately defeat the insurgency, we cannot succeed without significantly improved unity of effort, and finally, that protecting the people means shielding them from *all* threats.

### **A Strategy for Success: Balancing Resources and Risk**

Our campaign in Afghanistan has been historically under-resourced and remains so today. Almost every aspect of our collective effort and associated resourcing has lagged a growing insurgency—historically a recipe for failure in COIN. Success will

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require a discrete “jump” to gain the initiative, demonstrate progress in the short term, and secure long-term support.

Resources will not win this war, but under-resourcing could lose it. Resourcing communicates commitment, but we must also balance force levels to enable effective ANSF partnering and provide population security, while avoiding perceptions of coalition dominance. Ideally, the ANSF must lead this fight, but they will not have enough capability in the near-term given the insurgency’s growth rate. In the interim, coalition forces must provide a bridge capability to protect critical segments of the population. The status quo will lead to failure if we wait for the ANSF to grow.

The new strategy will improve effectiveness through better application of existing assets, but it also requires additional resources. Broadly speaking, we require more civilian and military resources, more ANSF, and more ISR and other enablers. At the same time, we will find offsets as we reprogram other assets and improve efficiency. Overall, ISAF requires an increase in the total coalition force capability and end-strength. This “properly resourced” requirement will define the minimum force levels to accomplish the mission with an acceptable level of risk.

### Unique Moment in Time

This is an important—and likely decisive—period of this war. Afghans are frustrated and weary after eight years without evidence of the progress they anticipated. Patience is understandably short, both in Afghanistan and in our own countries. Time matters; we must act now to reverse the negative trends and demonstrate progress.

I do not underestimate the enormous challenges in executing this new strategy; however, we have a key advantage: the majority of Afghans do not want a return of the Taliban. During consultations with Afghan Defense Minister Wardak, I found some of his writings insightful:

*“Victory is within our grasp, provided that we recommit ourselves based on lessons learned and provided that we fulfill the requirements needed to make success inevitable.... I reject the myth advanced in the media that Afghanistan is a ‘graveyard of empires’ and that the U.S. and NATO effort is destined to fail. Afghans have never seen you as occupiers, even though this has been the major focus of the enemy’s propaganda campaign. Unlike the Russians, who imposed a government with an alien ideology, you enabled us to write a democratic constitution and choose our own government. Unlike the Russians, who destroyed our country, you came to rebuild.”*

Given that this conflict and country are his to win—not mine—Minister Wardak’s assessment was part of my calculus. While the situation is serious, success is still achievable. This starts with redefining both the fight itself and what we need for the fight. It is then sustained through a fundamentally new way of doing business. Finally, it will be realized when our new operational culture connects with the powerful will of the Afghan people.

## Initial Assessment

The situation in Afghanistan is serious. The mission is achievable, but success demands a fundamentally new approach—one that is properly resourced and supported by better unity of effort.

Important progress has been made, yet many indicators suggest the overall situation is deteriorating despite considerable effort by ISAF. The threat has grown steadily but subtly, and unchecked by commensurate counteraction, its severity now surpasses the capabilities of the current strategy. We cannot succeed simply by trying harder; ISAF must now adopt a fundamentally new approach. The entire culture—how ISAF understands the environment and defines the fight, how it interacts with the Afghan people and government, and how it operates both on the ground and within the coalition<sup>1</sup>—must change profoundly.

As announced by President Obama in his March 27, 2009 speech outlining the new U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, the mission in Afghanistan has been historically under-resourced, resulting in a culture of poverty that has plagued ISAF's efforts to date. ISAF requires a properly-resourced force and capability level to correct this deficiency. Success is not ensured by additional forces alone, but continued under-resourcing will likely cause failure.

Nonetheless, it must be made clear: new resources are not the crux. To succeed, ISAF requires a new approach—with a significant magnitude of change—in addition to a proper level of resourcing. ISAF must restore confidence in the near-term through renewed commitment, intellectual energy, and visible progress.

This assessment prescribes two fundamental changes. First, ISAF must improve execution and the understanding of the basics of COIN—those essential elements common to any counterinsurgency strategy. Second, ISAF requires a new strategy to counter a growing threat. Both of these reforms are required to reverse the negative trends in Afghanistan and achieve success.

ISAF is not adequately executing the basics of counterinsurgency warfare. In particular, there are two fundamental elements where ISAF must improve:

- change the operational culture of USAF to focus on protecting the Afghan people, understanding their environment, and building relationships with them, and;
- transform ISAF processes to be more operationally efficient and effective, creating more coherent unity of command within ISAF, and fostering stronger unity of effort across the international community.

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<sup>1</sup>"coalition" hereafter refers to ISAF's coalition of troop and resources contributing nations



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Simultaneous to improving on these basic principles, ISAF must also adopt a profoundly new strategy with four fundamental pillars:

- develop a significantly more effective and larger ANSF with radically expanded coalition force partnering at every echelon;
- prioritize responsive and accountable governance—that the Afghan people find acceptable—to be on par with, and integral to, delivering security;
- gain the initiative and reverse the insurgency’s momentum as the first imperative in a series of temporal stages, and;
- prioritize available resources to those critical areas where the population is most threatened.

There is nothing new about these principles of counterinsurgency and organizational efficacy. Rather, they represent profoundly renewed attention to pursuing the basic tenet of protecting the population specifically adapted for this diverse force and unique conflict, and targeted to work through the most challenging obstacles that have hindered previous efforts.

ISAF’s new strategy is consistent with the NATO Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan and supports the implementation of President Obama’s strategy to disrupt, dismantle, and eventually defeat al Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan. ISAF’s new approach will be nested within an integrated and properly-resourced civilian-military counterinsurgency strategy.

This will be enormously difficult. To execute this strategy, ISAF must use existing assets in innovative and unconventional ways, but ISAF will also require additional resources, forces and possibly even new authorities. All steps are imperative and time is of the essence. Patience will see the mission through; but to have that chance, real progress must be demonstrated in the near future.

## **I. Describing the Mission**

ISAF’s mission statement is: “ISAF, in support of GIRoA, conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development, in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.”

Accomplishing this mission requires defeating the insurgency, which this paper defines as a condition where the insurgency no longer threatens the viability of the state.

GIRoA must sufficiently control its territory to support regional stability and prevent its use for international terrorism. Accomplishing this mission also requires a better un-

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derstanding of the nature of the conflict, a change in the basic operational culture, concepts and tactics, and a corresponding change in strategy.

NATO source documents<sup>2</sup> have been consulted and the new strategy remains consistent with the NATO comprehensive approach. Existing UN mandates will continue to provide a framework for ISAF's effort. The international military forces, their civilian counterparts, and international organizations are a key component of ISAF's shared mission to support the people of Afghanistan. It is crucial that ISAF preserve, bolster, and help focus this diverse partnership.

## **II. Nature of the Conflict**

While not a war in the conventional sense, the conflict in Afghanistan demands a similar focus and an equal level of effort, and the consequences of failure are just as grave. The fight also demands an improved and evolved level of understanding.

The conflict in Afghanistan is often described as a war of ideas and perceptions; this is true and demands important consideration. However, perceptions are generally derived from actions and real conditions, for example by the provision or a lack of security, governance, and economic opportunity. Thus the key to changing perceptions is to change the fundamental underlying truths. To be effective, the counterinsurgent cannot risk credibility by substituting the situation they desire for reality.

### **Redefining the Fight**

The conflict in Afghanistan can be viewed as a set of related insurgencies, each of which is a complex system with multiple actors and a vast set of interconnecting relationships among those actors. The most important implication of this view is that no element of the conflict can be viewed in isolation—a change anywhere will affect everything else. This view implies that the system must be understood holistically, and while such understanding is not predictive, it will help to recognize general causal relationships.

The new strategy redefines the nature of the fight. It is not a cyclical, kinetic campaign based on a set "fighting season." Rather it is a continuous, year-long effort to help GIRoA win the support of the people and counter insurgent coercion and intimidation.

There are five principal actors in this conflict: the Afghan population, GIRoA, ISAF, the insurgency, and the external "players." It is important to begin with an understanding of each of these actors, starting with the most important: the people.

The people of Afghanistan represent many things in this conflict—an audience, an actor, and a source of leverage—but above all, they are the objective. The population can also be a source of strength and intelligence and provide resistance to the insur-

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<sup>2</sup>A list of references is included as Annex I.

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gency. Alternatively, they can often change sides and provide tacit or real support to the insurgents. Communities make deliberate choices to resist, support, or allow insurgent influence. The reasons for these choices must be better understood.

GIRoA and ISAF have both failed to focus on this objective. The weakness of state institutions, malign actions of power brokers, widespread corruption and abuse of power by various officials, and ISAF's own errors have given Afghans little reason to support their government. These problems have alienated large segments of the Afghan population. They do not trust GIRoA to provide their essential needs, such as security, justice, and basic services. This crisis of confidence, coupled with a distinct lack of economic and educational opportunity, has created fertile ground for the insurgency.

ISAF's center of gravity is the will and ability to provide for the needs of the population "by, with, and through" the Afghan government. A foreign army alone cannot beat an insurgency; the insurgency in Afghanistan requires an Afghan solution. This is their war and, in the end, ISAF's competency will prove less decisive than GIRoA's; eventual success requires capable Afghan governance capabilities and security forces. While these institutions are still developing, ISAF and the international community must provide substantial assistance to Afghanistan until the Afghan people make the decision to support their government and are capable of providing for their own security.

An isolating geography and a natural aversion to foreign intervention further works against ISAF. Historical grievances reinforce connections to tribal or ethnic identity and can diminish the appeal of a centralized state. All ethnicities, particularly the Pashtuns, have traditionally sought a degree of independence from the central government, particularly when it is not seen as acting in the best interests of the population. These and other factors result in elements of the population tolerating the insurgency and calling to push out foreigners.

Nonetheless, the Afghan people also expect appropriate governance, the delivery of basic services, and the provision of justice. The popular myth that Afghans do not want governance is overplayed—while Afghan society is rooted in tribal structures and ethnic identities, Afghans do have a sense of national identity.

However, these generalizations risk oversimplifying this uniquely complicated environment. The complex social landscape of Afghanistan is in many ways much more difficult to understand than Afghanistan's enemies. Insurgent groups have been the focus of U.S. and allied intelligence for many years; however, ISAF has not sufficiently studied Afghanistan's peoples, whose needs, identities and grievances vary from province to province and from valley to valley. This complex environment is challenging to understand, particularly for foreigners. For this strategy to succeed, ISAF leaders must redouble efforts to understand the social and political dynamics of areas in all regions of the country and take action that meets the needs of the people, and insist that GIRoA officials do the same.

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Finally, either side can succeed in this conflict: GIRoA by securing the support of the people and the insurgents by controlling them. While this multifaceted model of the fight is centered on the people, it is not symmetrical: the insurgents can also succeed more simply by preventing GIRoA from achieving their goals before the international community becomes exhausted.

### **Two Main Threats: Insurgency and Crisis in Confidence**

The ISAF mission faces two principal threats and is also subject to the influence of external actors.

The first threat is the existence of organized and determined insurgent groups working to expel international forces, separate the Afghan people from GIRoA, and gain control of the population.

The second threat, of a very different kind, is the crisis of popular confidence that springs from the weakness of GIRoA institutions, the unpunished abuse of power by corrupt officials and power brokers, a widespread sense of political disenfranchisement, and a longstanding lack of economic opportunity. ISAF errors have further compounded the problem. These factors generate recruits for the insurgent groups, elevate local conflicts and power-broker disputes to a national level, degrade the people's security and quality-of-life, and undermine international will.

Addressing the external actors will enable success; however, insufficiently addressing either principle threat will result in failure.

### **Insurgent Groups**

Most insurgent fighters are Afghans. They are directed by a small number of Afghan senior leaders based in Pakistan that work through an alternative political infrastructure in Afghanistan. They are aided by foreign fighters, elements of some intelligence agencies, and international funding, resources, and training. Foreign fighters provide materiel, expertise, and ideological commitment.

The insurgents wage a "silent war" of fear, intimidation, and persuasion throughout the year—not just during the warmer weather "fighting season"—to gain control over the population. These efforts make possible, in many places, a Taliban "shadow government" that actively seeks to control the population and displace the national government and traditional power structures. Insurgent military operations attract more attention than this silent war but are only a supporting effort. Violent attacks are designed to weaken the government by demonstrating its inability to provide security, to fuel recruiting and financing efforts, to provoke reactions from ISAF that further alienate the population, and also to undermine public and political support for the ISAF mission in coalition capitals.

The major insurgent groups in order of their threat to the mission are the Quetta Shura Taliban (QST), the Haqqani Network (HQN), and the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin (HIG).

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These groups coordinate activities loosely, often achieving significant unity of purpose and even some *unity of effort*, but they do not share a formal command-and-control structure. They also do not have a single overarching strategy or campaign plan. Each individual group, however, has a specific strategy, develops annual plans, and allocates resources accordingly. Each group has its own methods of developing and executing these plans and each has adapted over time. Despite the best efforts of GIRoA and ISAF, the insurgents currently have the initiative.

### **Insurgent Strategy and Campaign Design**

The insurgents have two primary objectives: controlling the Afghan people and breaking the coalition's will. Their aim is to expel international forces and influences and to supplant GIRoA. At the operational level, the Quetta Shura conducts a formal campaign review each winter, after which Mullah Omar announces his guidance and intent for the coming year. . . .

The key geographical objectives of the major insurgent groups are Kandahar City and Khowst Province. The QST has been working to control Kandahar and its approaches for several years and there are indications that their influence over the city and neighboring districts is significant and growing. HQN aims to regain eventually full control of its traditional base in Khowst, Paktia, and Paktika. HQN controls some of the key terrain around Khowst and can influence the population in the region. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's HiG maintains militant bases in Nangarhar, Nuristan, and Kunar, as well as Pakistan, but he also sustains political connections through HiG networks and aims to negotiate a major role in a future Taliban government. He does not currently have geographical objectives as is the case with the other groups.

All three insurgent groups require resources—mainly money and manpower. The QST derives funding from the narcotics trade and external donors. HQN similarly draws resources principally from Pakistan, Gulf Arab networks, and from its close association with al Qaeda and other Pakistan-based insurgent groups. HiG seeks control of mineral wealth and smuggling routes in the east.

### **Insurgent Lines of Operation**

The QST's main efforts focus on the governance line of operations. Security and information operations support these efforts. ISAF's tendency to measure the enemy predominantly by kinetic events masks the true extent of insurgent activity and prevents an accurate assessment of the insurgents' intentions, progress, and level of control of the population.

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*Governance.* The QST has a governing structure in Afghanistan under the rubric of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They appoint shadow governors for most provinces, review their performance, and replace them periodically. They established a body to receive complaints against their own “officials” and to act on them. They install “shari’a” courts to deliver swift and enforced justice in contested and controlled areas. They levy taxes and conscript fighters and laborers. They claim to provide security against a corrupt government, ISAF forces, criminality, and local power brokers. They also claim to protect Afghan and Muslim identity against foreign encroachment. In short, the QST provides major elements of governance and a national and religious narrative. HQN and HIG coexist with, but do not necessarily accept, the QST governing framework and have yet to develop competing governing structures.

*Information.* Major insurgent groups outperform GIRoA and ISAF at information operations. Information operations drive many insurgent operations as they work to shape the cultural and religious narrative. They have carefully analyzed their audience and target products accordingly. They use their Pashtun identity, physical proximity to the population, and violent intimidation to deliver immediate and enduring messages with which ISAF and GIRoA have been unable to compete. They leverage this advantage by projecting the inevitability of their victory, a key source of their strength.

*Security.* Major insurgent groups use violence, coercion and intimidation against civilians to control the population. They seek to inflict casualties on ISAF forces to break the will of individual ISAF countries and the coalition as a whole. They also use military activities to shape ISAF actions by denying freedom of movement, denying access to the population, and defending important terrain. The insurgents use the psychological effects of IEDs and the coalition force’s preoccupation with force protection to reinforce the garrison posture and mentality. The major insurgent groups target GIRoA and ANSF to dissuade cooperation with the government and to show that GIRoA is ineffective. The insurgents control or contest a significant portion of the country, although it is difficult to assess precisely how much is due to a lack of ISAF presence. . . .

*Social/Economic.* The QST and other insurgent groups have deliberate social strategies that exacerbate the breakdown in Afghan social cohesion. They empower radical mullahs to replace local leaders, undermine or eliminate local elders and mullahs who do not support them, and consistently support weaker, disenfranchised, or threatened tribes or groups. They erode traditional social structures and capitalize on vast unemployment by empowering the young and disenfranchised through cash payments, weapons, and prestige.

## **Insurgent Enablers and Vulnerabilities**

*Criminal networks.* Criminality creates a pool of manpower, resources, and capabilities for insurgents and contributes to a pervasive sense of insecurity among the people. Extensive smuggling diverts major revenue from GIRoA. Criminality exacerbates the fragmentation of Afghan society and increases its susceptibility to insurgent penetration. A number of Afghan government officials, at all levels, are reported to be complicit in these activities, further undermining GIRoA credibility.

*Narcotics and Financing.* The most significant aspect of the production and sale of opium and other narcotics is the corrosive and destabilizing impact on corruption within GIRoA. Narcotics activity also funds insurgent groups, however the importance of this funding must be understood within the overall context of insurgent financing, some of which comes from other sources. Insurgent groups also receive substantial income from foreign donors as well as from other criminal activities within Afghanistan such as smuggling and kidnapping for ransom. Some insurgent groups “tax” the local population through checkpoints, demanding protection money, and other methods. Eliminating insurgent access to narco-profits—even if possible, and while disruptive—would not destroy their ability to operate so long as other funding sources remained intact.

*Insurgent Vulnerabilities.* The insurgents have important and exploitable shortcomings; they are not invulnerable. Command and control frictions and divergent goals hamper insurgent planning and restrict coordination of operations. . . . Insurgent excesses can alienate the people. Moreover, the core elements of the insurgency have previously held power in Afghanistan and failed. Popular enthusiasm for them appears limited, as does their ability to spread viably beyond Pashtun areas. GIRoA and ISAF have an opportunity to exploit the insurgent’s inability to mobilize public support.

In summary, ISAF confronts a loose federation of insurgent groups that are sophisticated, organized, adaptive, determined, and nuanced across all lines of operations, with many enablers, but not without vulnerability. These groups are dangerous and, if not effectively countered, could exhaust the coalition and prevent GIRoA from being able to govern the state of Afghanistan.

## **Crisis of Confidence in GIRoA and ISAF Actions**

The Afghan government has made progress, yet serious problems remain. The people’s lack of trust in their government results from two key factors. First, some GIRoA officials have given preferential treatment to certain individuals, tribes, and groups or worse, abused their power at the expense of the people. Second, the Afghan government has been unable to provide sufficient security, justice, and basic services to the people. Although the capacity and integrity of some Afghan institutions have improved and the number of competent officials has grown, this progress has been insufficient to counter the issues that undermine legitimacy. These problems contribute to the Afghan government’s inability to gain the support of the Afghan population. ISAF errors also compound the problem.

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*GIRoA State Weakness.* There is little connection between the central government and the local populations, particularly in rural areas. The top-down approach to developing government capacity has failed to provide services that reach local communities. GIRoA has not developed the means to collect revenue and distribute resources. Subnational officials vary in competency and capability and most provincial and district governments are seriously undermanned and under-resourced.

The Afghan government has not integrated or supported traditional community governance structures—historically an important component of Afghan civil society—leaving communities vulnerable to being undermined by insurgent groups and power brokers. The breakdown of social cohesion at the community level has increased instability, made Afghans feel unsafe, and fueled the insurgency.

*Tolerance of Corruption and Abuse of Power.* Widespread corruption and abuse of power exacerbate the popular crisis of confidence in the government and reinforce a culture of impunity. Local Afghan communities are unable to hold local officials accountable through either direct elections or judicial processes, especially when those individuals are protected by senior government officials. Further, the public perceives that ISAF is complicit in these matters, and that there is no appetite or capacity—either among the internationals or within GIRoA—to correct the situation. The resulting public anger and alienation undermine ISAF's ability to accomplish its mission. The QST's establishment of ombudsmen to investigate abuse of power in its own cadres and remove those found guilty capitalizes on this GIRoA weakness and attracts popular support for their shadow government.

*Afghan power brokers and factional leaders.* Some local and regional power brokers were allies early in the conflict and now help control their own areas. Many are current or former members of GIRoA whose financial independence and loyal armed followers give them autonomy from GIRoA, further hindering efforts to build a coherent Afghan state. In most cases, their interests are not aligned with either the interests of the Afghan people or GIRoA, leading to conflicts that offer opportunities for insurgent groups to exploit. Finally, some of these power brokers hold positions in the ANSF, particularly the Afghan National Police (ANP), and have been major agents of corruption and illicit trafficking. ISAF's relationship with these individuals can be problematic. Some are forces of stability in certain areas, but many others are polarizing and predatory.

There are no clear lines separating insurgent groups, criminal networks (including the narcotics networks), and corrupt GIRoA officials. Malign actors within GIRoA support insurgent groups directly, support criminal networks that are linked to insurgents, and support corruption that helps feed the insurgency.

*ISAF Shortcomings.* Afghan social, political, economic, and cultural affairs are complex and poorly understood. ISAF does not sufficiently appreciate the dynamics in local communities, nor how the insurgency, corruption, incompetent officials, power brokers, and criminality all combine to affect the Afghan population. A focus by ISAF



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intelligence on kinetic targeting and a failure to bring together what is known about the political and social realm have hindered ISAF's comprehension of the critical aspects of Afghan society.

ISAF's attitudes and actions have reinforced the Afghan people's frustrations with the shortcomings of their government. Civilian casualties and collateral damage to homes and property resulting from an overreliance on firepower and force protection have severely damaged ISAF's legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people. Further, poor unity of effort among ISAF, UNAMA, and the rest of the international community undermines their collective effectiveness, while failure to deliver on promises further alienates the people. Problematic contracting processes and insufficient oversight also reinforce the perception of corruption within ISAF and the international community.

In summary, the absence of personal and economic security, along with the erosion of public confidence in the government, and a perceived lack of respect for Afghan culture pose as great a challenge to ISAF's success as the insurgent threat. Protecting the population is more than preventing insurgent violence and intimidation. It also means that ISAF can no longer ignore or tacitly accept abuse of power, corruption, or marginalization.

### **External Influences**

*Pakistan.* Afghanistan's insurgency is clearly supported from Pakistan. Senior leaders of the major Afghan insurgent groups are based in Pakistan, are linked with al Qaeda and other violent extremist groups, and are reportedly aided by some elements of Pakistan's ISI. Al Qaeda and associated movements (AQAM) based in Pakistan channel foreign fighters, suicide bombers, and technical assistance into Afghanistan, and offer ideological motivation, training, and financial support. Al Qaeda's links with HQN have grown, suggesting that expanded HQN control could create a favorable environment for AQAM to reestablish safe havens in Afghanistan. Additionally, the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is reliant on ground supply routes through Pakistan that remain vulnerable to these threats.

Stability in Pakistan is essential, not only in its own right, but also to enable progress in Afghanistan. While the existence of safe havens in Pakistan does not guarantee ISAF failure, Afghanistan does require Pakistani cooperation and action against violent militancy, particularly against those groups active in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, the insurgency in Afghanistan is predominantly Afghan. By defending the population, improving subnational governance, and giving disenfranchised rural communities a voice in their government, GIRoA—with support from ISAF—can strengthen Afghanistan against both domestic and foreign insurgent penetration. Reintegrating communities and individuals into the political system can help reduce the insurgency's virulence to a point where it is no longer an existential threat to GIRoA.

## UNCLASSIFIED

*India.* Indian political and economic influence is increasing in Afghanistan, including significant development efforts and financial investment. In addition, the current Afghan government is perceived by Islamabad to be pro-Indian. While Indian activities largely benefit the Afghan people, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and encourage Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India.

*Iran.* Iran plays an ambiguous role in Afghanistan, providing developmental assistance and political support to GIRoA while the Iranian Qods Force is reportedly training fighters for certain Taliban groups and providing other forms of military assistance to insurgents. Iran's current policies and actions do not pose a short-term threat to the mission, but Iran has the capability to threaten the mission in the future. Pakistan may see Iranian economic and political initiatives as threats to their strategic interests, and may continue to address these issues in ways that are counterproductive to the ISAF effort.

*Russia/Central Asia.* Afghanistan's northern neighbors have enduring interests in, and influence over, particular segments of Afghanistan. They pursue objectives that are not necessarily congruent to ISAF's mission. ISAF's Northern Distribution Network and logistical hubs are dependent upon support from Russian and Central Asian States, giving them the potential to act as either spoilers or positive influences.

### III. Getting the Basics Right

ISAF is not adequately executing the basics of COIN doctrine. Thus the first major recommendation of this assessment is to change and focus on that which ISAF has the most control of: ISAF. The coalition must hold itself accountable before it can attempt to do so with others. Specifically, ISAF will focus on two major changes to improve execution of COIN fundamentals and enhance organizational alignment and efficacy:

- ISAF will change its operating culture to pursue a counterinsurgency approach that puts the Afghan people first. While the insurgency can afford to lose fighters and leaders, it cannot afford to lose control of the population.
- ISAF will change the way it does business to improve unity of command within ISAF, seek to improve unity of effort with the international community, and to use resources more effectively.

#### **New Operational Culture: Population-Centric COIN**

ISAF must operate differently. Preoccupied with force protection, ISAF has operated in a manner that distances itself, both physically and psychologically, from the people they seek to protect. The Afghan people have paid the price, and the mission has been put at risk. ISAF, with the ANSF, must shift its approach to bring security and normalcy to the people and shield them from insurgent violence, corruption and coer-

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cion, ultimately enabling GIRoA to gain the trust and confidence of the people while reducing the influence of insurgents. Hard-earned credibility and face-to-face relationships, rather than close combat, will achieve success. This requires enabling Afghan counterparts to meet the needs of the people at the community level through dynamic partnership, engaged leadership, decentralized decision making, and a fundamental shift in priorities.

*Improve Understanding.* ISAF—military and civilian personnel alike—must acquire a far better understanding of Afghanistan and its people. ISAF personnel must be seen as guests of the Afghan people and their government, not an occupying army. Key personnel in ISAF must receive training in local languages. Tour lengths should be long enough to build continuity and ownership of success. All ISAF personnel must show respect for local cultures and customs and demonstrate intellectual curiosity about the people of Afghanistan. The United States should fully implement—and encourage other nations to emulate—the “Afghan Hands” program that recruits and maintains a cadre of military and civilian practitioners and outside experts with deep knowledge of Afghanistan.

*Build Relationships.* In order to be successful as counterinsurgents, ISAF must alter its operational culture to focus on building personal relationships with its Afghan partners and the protected population. To gain accurate information and intelligence about the local environment, ISAF must spend as much time as possible with the people and as little time as possible in armored vehicles or behind the walls of forward operating bases. ISAF personnel must seek out, understand, and act to address the needs and grievances of the people in their local environment. Strong personal relationships forged between security forces and local populations will be a key to success.

*Project Confidence.* Creating a perception of security is imperative if the local population is to “buy-in” and invest in the institutions of governance and step forward with local solutions. When ISAF forces travel through even the most secure areas of Afghanistan firmly ensconced in armored vehicles with body armor and turrets manned, they convey a sense of high risk and fear to the population. ISAF cannot expect unarmed Afghans to feel secure before heavily armed ISAF forces do. ISAF cannot succeed if it is unwilling to share risk, at least equally, with the people.

In fact, once the risk is shared, effective force protection will come from the people, and the overall risk can actually be reduced by operating differently. The more coalition forces are seen and known by the local population, the more their threat will be reduced. Adjusting force protection measures to local conditions sends a powerful message of confidence and normalcy to the population. Subordinate commanders must have greater freedom with respect to setting force protection measures they employ in order to help close the gap between security forces and the people they protect. Arguably, giving leaders greater flexibility to adjust force protection measures could expose military personnel and civilians to

## UNCLASSIFIED

greater risk in the near term; however, historical experiences in counterinsurgency warfare, coupled with the above mitigation, suggests that accepting some risk in the short term will ultimately save lives in the long run.

*Decentralize.* To be effective, commanders and their civilian partners must have authorities to use resources flexibly—and on their own initiative—as opportunities arise, while maintaining appropriate accountability measures. ISAF must strike the right balance between control and initiative, but err on the side of initiative. Mistakes will inevitably be made, but a culture of excessive bureaucracy designed with the best of intentions will be far more costly in blood and treasure.

*Reintegration and Reconciliation.* Insurgencies of this nature typically conclude through military operations and political efforts driving some degree of host-nation reconciliation with elements of the insurgency. In the Afghan conflict, reconciliation may involve GIRoA-led, high-level political settlements. This is not within the domain of ISAF's responsibilities, but ISAF must be in a position to support appropriate Afghan reconciliation policies.

Reintegration is a normal component of counterinsurgency warfare. It is qualitatively different from reconciliation and is a critical part of the new strategy. As coalition operations proceed, insurgents will have three choices: fight, flee, or reintegrate. ISAF must identify opportunities to reintegrate former mid- to low-level insurgent fighters into normal society by offering them a way out. To do so, ISAF requires a credible program to offer eligible insurgents reasonable incentives to stop fighting and return to normalcy, possibly including the provision of employment and protection. Such a program will require resources and focus, as appropriate, on people's future rather than past behavior. ISAF's soldiers will be required to think about COIN operations differently, in that there are now three outcomes instead of two: enemy may be killed, captured, or reintegrated.

In executing a reintegration program, ISAF will necessarily assume decentralized authorities, in coordination with GIRoA, for ISAF field commanders to support the reintegration of fighters and low-level leaders. Local leaders are critical figures in any reintegration efforts and must be free to make the decisions that bind their entire community.

*Economic Support to Counterinsurgency.* ISAF has an important asymmetric advantage; it can aid the local economy, along with its civilian counterparts, in ways that the insurgents cannot. Local development can change incentive structures and increase stability in communities. Economic opportunity, especially job creation, is a critical part of reintegrating the foot-soldier into normal life. Economic support to counterinsurgency is distinct from and cannot substitute for longer-term development initiatives. With some coordination it can lay the groundwork for, and complement, those longer-term efforts and show that the Afghan government is active at the local level. ISAF must increase the flexibility and responsive-

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ness of funding programs to enable commanders and their civilian partners to make immediate economic and quality of life improvements in accordance with Afghan priorities.

**Improve Unity of Effort and Command**

ISAF's subordinate headquarters must stop fighting separate campaigns. Under the existing structure, some components are not effectively organized and multiple headquarters fail to achieve either unity of command or unity of effort.

The establishment of an intermediate operational headquarters is the first step toward rectifying these problems. This new headquarters will enable the ISAF headquarters to focus on strategic and operational matters and enhance coordination with GIRoA, UNAMA, and the international community. The intermediate headquarters will synchronize operational activities and local civil-military coordination and ensure a shared understanding of the mission throughout the force. The intermediate headquarters must be supported with increased information collection and analysis capabilities to improve significantly ISAF's understanding of the political, cultural, social, and economic dynamics.

The intermediate headquarters will also provide command and control for all ANSF mentor teams, enabling CSTC-A and the new NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) to focus on ANSF institution-building, force generation, force sustainment, and leader development. Command relationships must be clarified so that battle space owners at every echelon can synchronize operations in accordance with ISAF priorities, with effective control of all operations in their area of operations, to include theaterwide forces, SOF, and mentoring teams. Mechanisms must be established at all echelons to integrate information from ISAF, ANSF, GIRoA, and other actors. Additional changes are required to address the myriad of other command and control challenges and parochial interests that have emerged over time. ISAF must continue to confront these challenges internally and in partnership with NATO and national capitals.

**IV. A Strategy for Success**

Success will be achieved when GIRoA has earned the support of the powerful Afghan people and effectively controls its own territory. This will not come easily or quickly. It is realistic to expect that Afghan and coalition casualties will increase until GIRoA and ISAF regain the initiative.

ISAF's strategy to defeat the insurgency and achieve this end state, based on an in-depth analysis of the nature of the conflict, includes four major pillars:

- ISAF will become radically more integrated and partnered with the ANSF to enable a more rapid expansion of their capacity and responsibility for security.
- ISAF will place support to responsive and accountable governance, including subnational and community governance, on par with security.

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- ISAF's operations will focus first on gaining the initiative and reversing the momentum of the insurgency.
- ISAF will prioritize available resources to those critical areas where the population is most threatened.

### **1. Increase partnership with the ANSF to increase size and capabilities**

*Radically Expanded and Embedded Partnering.* Success will require trust-based, expanded partnering with the ANSF with assigned relationships at all echelons to improve effectiveness of the ANSF. Neither the Afghan National Army (ANA) nor the ANP is sufficiently effective. ISAF must place far more emphasis on ANSF development in every aspect of daily operations. ISAF will integrate headquarters and enablers with ANA units to execute a full partnership, with the shared goal of working together to bring security to the Afghan people. ISAF units will physically collocate with the ANSF, establish the same battle rhythm, and plan and execute operations together. This initiative will increase ANSF force quality and accelerate their ownership of Afghanistan's security.

*Accelerated Growth.* The ANA must accelerate growth to the present target strength of 134,000 by Fall 2010, with the institutional flexibility to continue that growth to a new target ceiling of 240,000. The target strength of the ANP must be raised to 160,000. This will require additional mentors, trainers, partners and funds through an expanded participation by GIRoA, the support of ISAF, and the resources of troop contributing and donor nations.

The ANP suffers from a lack of training, leaders, resources, equipment, and mentoring. Effective policing is inhibited by the absence of a working system of justice or dispute resolution; poor pay has also encouraged corruption. Substantial reform with appropriate resources—and possibly even new authorities—are critically important and must not be delayed.

GIRoA and ISAF will evaluate the utility of using locally-based security initiatives such as the Afghan Public Protection Program (AP3), where appropriate conditions exist, to create village-level indigenous security in partnership with GIRoA and local shuras.

*Detainee Operations.* Effective detainee operations are essential to success. The ability to remove insurgents from the battlefield is critical to effective protection of the population. Further, the precision demanded in effective counterinsurgency operations must be intelligence-driven; detainee operations are a critical part of this. Getting the right information and evidence from those detained in military operations is also necessary to support rule of law and reintegration programs and help ensure that only insurgents are detained and civilians are not unduly affected.

Detainee operations are both complex and politically sensitive. There are strategic vulnerabilities in a non-Afghan system. By contrast, an Afghan system reinforces their sense of sovereignty and responsibility. As always, the detention process must be

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effective in providing key intelligence and avoid “catch and release” approaches that endanger coalition and ANSF forces. It is therefore imperative to evolve to a more holistic model centered on an Afghan-run system. This will require a comprehensive system that addresses the entire “life cycle” and extends from point of capture to eventual reintegration or prosecution.

ISAF has completed a full review of current detainee policies and practices with recommendations for substantial revisions to complement ISAF’s revised strategy. Key elements of a new detention policy should include transferring responsibility for long-term detention of insurgents to GIRoA, establishing procedures with GIRoA for ISAF access to detainees for interrogation within the bounds of national caveats, application of counter-radicalization and disengagement practices, and training of ISAF forces to better collect intelligence for continued operations and evidence for prosecution in the Afghan judicial system. Afghanistan must develop detention capabilities and operations that respect the Afghan people. A failure to address GIRoA incapacity in this area presents a serious risk to the mission.

## **2. Facilitating Afghan governance and mitigating the effects of malign actors**

Success requires a stronger Afghan government that is seen by the Afghan people as working in their interests. Success does not require perfection—an improvement in governance that addresses the worst of today’s high-level abuse of power, low-level corruption, and bureaucratic incapacity will suffice.

*Learning from and leveraging the elections.* The recent Presidential and Provincial Council elections were far from perfect. From a security standpoint, they were generally executed smoothly and without major physical disruption, although the credibility of the election results remains an open question. The country-wide spike in violence against ISAF and ANSF, with three to four times the average number of attacks, underscores the widespread reach of insurgent influence, particularly in the south and the east and in select areas of the north and west. However, the relatively low number of effective attacks against polling centers offers some evidence that insurgents were targeting ISAF and ANSF, not the voters. The Afghans’ ability to plan and execute the elections, along with the close partnering between ISAF and ANSF, and the mass deployment of security forces were notable achievements nonetheless. The elections were also an opportunity, and a forcing function, that will help to improve future coordination within the ANSF and expand ISAF’s partnership with GIRoA and the international community.

*Supporting local governance.* Elements of Afghan society, particularly rural populations, have been excluded from the political process. ISAF must support UNAMA and the international community in subnational governance reform by working directly with local communities, starting by assessing Afghan civilian needs by population center and developing partnerships to act on them. By empowering local communities, GIRoA, supported by ISAF, can encourage them to support the political system.

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District elections and the civilian resources deployed to Provincial Reconstruction Teams, District Support Teams, and ISAF task forces will also help build legitimate governance structures at the subnational levels.

Efforts are under way that may address some of these issues, including those that have been cultivated through the National Solidarity Program and the Afghan Social Outreach Program. These structures will enable improvements at the community level to link communities with the national government over time. In addition, GIRoA's proposed subnational governance policy aims to give greater authority and responsibility to the elected councils and to clarify their relationships with governors and individual line ministries. The U.S. Government Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan also provides a basis for improving subnational governance at every level—provided it is appropriately staffed and resourced. Similar coordinated action is also required from other partner governments. Similarly, the request for support from the Ministry of Finance for civilian technical assistance must be welcomed and met. Indeed, ISAF and the international community must support the acceleration of these efforts, while recognizing that additional legislative initiatives may be required.

*Negative Influencers.* ISAF must understand and address underlying factors that encourage malign behavior and undermine governance. The narco- and illicit economy and the extortion associated with large-scale developmental projects undermine the economy in Afghanistan. GIRoA cannot fund its operations because of its inability to raise revenue, a situation made worse by the illicit economy. Poorly paid officials may resort to petty corruption, contributing to the people's crisis in confidence. The international community must appropriately supplement revenues until these problems are addressed. ISAF must also change its concept of the "border fight" . . . to expanding GIRoA's revenue base through improved border control and customs collection.

*Discerning Support.* ISAF must develop a discerning approach that rewards competent Afghan governance and leadership, recognizes the distinction between incapacity and predatory behavior, and leverages ISAF's influence to address both challenges. ISAF and its partners must develop appropriate measures to reduce the incentives for corrupt actors that impede the mission, work around them if necessary, and develop actionable evidence of their malfeasance. Improving information collection and analysis will provide better understanding of the motivations, practices, and effects of corruption.

*Transparency and Accountability.* ISAF must work with UNAMA and the international community to build public finance mechanisms that enable GIRoA to create credible programs and allocate resources according to the needs of the Afghan people. The international community must address its own corrupt or counterproductive practices, including reducing the amount of development money that goes toward overhead and intermediaries rather than the Afghan people. A recent OXFAM report indicates that a significant percentage of such funding is diverted. ISAF must pay particular attention to how development projects are contracted and to whom. Too often these projects enrich power brokers, corrupt officials or international contractors, and serve only limited segments of the popula-



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tion. Improving ISAF's knowledge of the environment and sharing this information with UNAMA and the international community will help mitigate such harmful practices.

ISAF will provide economic support to counterinsurgency operations to help provide a bridge to critical developmental projects in priority areas that UN agencies and the international community cannot reach, while working closely with UNAMA to help set conditions for NGOs to enter stabilized areas.

*Rule of Law.* Finally, ISAF must work with its civilian and international counterparts to enable justice sector reform and locate resources for formal and informal justice systems that offer swift and fair resolution of disputes, particularly at the local level. The provision of local justice, to include such initiatives as mobile courts, will be a critical enhancement of Afghan capacity in the eyes of the people. ISAF must work with GIRoA to develop a clear mandate and boundaries for local informal justice systems.

### **3. Gain the initiative and evolve in stages**

ISAF's new strategy will include three stages. These stages will unfold at different rates and times in different geographic areas of Afghanistan. Most importantly, they will be led increasingly by the Afghan people and their government.

*Gain the Initiative.* First, ISAF must refocus its operations to gain the initiative in seriously threatened, populated areas by working directly with GIRoA institutions and people in local communities to gain their support and to diminish insurgent access and influence. This stage is clearly decisive to the overall effort. It will require sufficient resources to gain the initiative and definitively check the insurgency. A failure to reverse the momentum of the insurgency will not only preclude success in Afghanistan, it will result in a loss of public and political support outside Afghanistan.

In this stage, ISAF will take a new approach to integrate fully with the ANSF through extensive partnering. This will enable improved effectiveness and a more rapid growth of ANSF capability. Together with UNAMA and the international community, ISAF will work with all levels of GIRoA to expand substantially responsive and accountable governance that focuses on the needs of the people. Finally, there must be full international community support and commitment to the full range of civil-military capabilities concentrated in the priority areas.

*Strategic Consolidation.* As ISAF and ANSF capabilities grow over the next 12–24 months and the insurgency diminishes in critical areas, ISAF will begin a second stage—a strategic consolidation. As ANSF and GIRoA increasingly take the lead for security operations and as new civilian and military capacity arrives, security operations will expand to wider areas while consolidating initial gains. These efforts will increase the space in which the population feels protected and served by their government, and insulate them from a return of insurgent influence. Meanwhile, ANSF and

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ISAF must have the capability to respond flexibly to insurgent adaptation and retain the initiative.

*Sustained Security.* When the insurgent groups no longer pose an existential threat to GIRoA, ISAF will move into a third stage of sustained security to ensure achieved gains are durable as ISAF forces begin to draw down. As ANSF demonstrate the capability to defeat remaining pockets of insurgents on their own, ISAF will transition to a train, advise, and assist role. UNAMA and the international community will have increased freedom of action to continue to help develop the Afghan state and meet the needs of the Afghan people.

In all of these stages, the insurgents will adapt, possibly moving their operations to different areas. This risk is mitigated by the fact that the insurgents are weakened when forced to relocate from their traditional areas; the burden of migration, renewed recruiting, and reestablishing a stronghold will incur a cost to the insurgents. ISAF must have the capability to respond to these adaptations.

**4. Prioritize allocation of resources to threatened populations**

In a country as large and complex as Afghanistan, ISAF cannot be strong everywhere. ISAF must focus its full range of civilian and military resources where they will have the greatest effect on the people. This will generally be in those specific geographical areas that represent key terrain. For the counterinsurgent, the key terrain is generally where the population lives and works. This is also where the insurgents are typically focused; thus, it is here where the population is threatened by the enemy and that the two sides inevitably meet. ISAF will initially focus on critical high-population areas that are contested or controlled by insurgents, not because the enemy is present, but because it is here that the population is threatened by the insurgency.

The geographical deployment of forces may not be static; ISAF must retain the operational flexibility to adapt to changes in the environment. Based on current assessments, ISAF prioritizes the effort in Afghanistan into three categories to guide the allocation of resources. These priorities will evolve over time as conditions on the ground change. . . .

**V. Assessments: Measuring Progress**

ISAF must develop effective assessment architectures, in concert with civilian partners and home nations, to measure the effects of the strategy, assess progress toward key objectives, and make necessary adjustments. ISAF must identify and refine appropriate indicators to assess progress, clarifying the difference between operational measures of effectiveness critical to practitioners on the ground and strategic measures more appropriate to national capitals. Because the mission depends on GIRoA, ISAF must also develop clear metrics to assess progress in governance.

## VI. Resources and Risk

Proper resourcing will be critical. The campaign in Afghanistan has been historically under-resourced and remains so today—ISAF is operating in a culture of poverty.

Consequently, ISAF requires more forces. This increase partially reflects previously validated, yet unsourced, requirements. This also stems from the new mix of capabilities essential to execute the new strategy. Some efficiency will be gained through better use of ISAF's existing resources, eliminating redundancy, and the leveraging of ANSF growth, increases in GIRoA capacity, international community resources, and the population itself. Nonetheless, ISAF requires capabilities and resources well in excess of these efficiency gains. The greater resources will not be sufficient to achieve success, but will enable implementation of the new strategy. Conversely, inadequate resources will likely result in failure. However, without a new strategy, the mission should not be resourced.

A "properly-resourced" strategy provides the means deemed necessary to accomplish the mission with *appropriate and acceptable risk*. In the case of Afghanistan, this level of resourcing is less than the amount that is required to secure the whole country. By comparison, a "fully-resourced" strategy could achieve *low risk*, but this would be excessive in the final analysis. Some areas are more consequential for the survival of GIRoA than others.

The determination of what constitutes "properly-resourced" will be based on force-density doctrine applied with best military judgment of factors such as terrain, location and accessibility of the population, intensity of the threats, the effects of ISR capabilities and other enablers, logistical constraints, and historical experience. As always, assessment of risk will necessarily include subjective professional judgment. Under-resourcing COIN is perilous because the insurgent has the advantage of mobility whereas security forces become relatively fixed after securing an area. Force density doctrine is based in historical analysis and suggests that a certain presence of security forces is required to achieve a critical threshold that overmatches the insurgents' ability to leverage their mobility. In short, a "properly-resourced" strategy places enough things, in enough places, for enough time. All three are mandatory.

A "properly-resourced" strategy is imperative. Resourcing coalition forces below this level will leave critical areas of Afghanistan open to insurgent influence while the ANSF grows. Thus, the first stage of the strategy will be unachievable, leaving GIRoA and ISAF unable to execute the decisive second stage. In addition, the international community is unlikely to have the access necessary to facilitate effective Afghan governance in contested areas. Failure to provide adequate resources also risks a longer conflict, greater casualties, higher overall costs, and, ultimately, a critical loss of political support. Any of these risks, in turn, are likely to result in mission failure.

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*Civilian Capacity.* ISAF cannot succeed without a corresponding cadre of civilian experts to support the change in strategy and capitalize on the expansion and acceleration of counterinsurgency efforts. Effective civilian capabilities and resourcing mechanisms are critical to achieving demonstrable progress. The relative level of civilian resources must be balanced with security forces, lest gains in security outpace civilian capacity for governance and economic improvements. In particular, ensuring alignment of resources for immediate and rapid expansion into newly secured areas will require integrated civil-military planning teams that establish mechanisms for rapid response. In addition, extensive work is required to ensure international and host nation partners are engaged and fully integrated.

ISAF's efforts in Afghanistan must be directed through its Afghan counterparts to enable them to succeed in the long term. Working within Afghan constructs, fostering Afghan solutions, and building Afghan capacity are essential. Particular focus is required at the community level where the insurgency draws its strength through coercion and exploitation of the people's dissatisfaction with their government and local conditions. Focusing on the community can drive a wedge between the insurgents and the people, giving them the freedom and incentive to support the Afghan government.

Some of the additional civilian experts will partner with ISAF task forces or serve on Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Others will work with new District Support Teams as necessary to support this strategy. As necessary, ISAF must facilitate performance of civil-military functions wherever civilian capacity is lacking, the arrival of the civilians is delayed, or the authorities that the civilians bring prove insufficient. ISAF will welcome the introduction of any new civilian funding streams, but must be prepared to make up the difference using military funding as necessary.

*Risks.* No strategy can guarantee success. A number of risks outside of ISAF's control could undermine the mission, to include a loss of coalition political will, insufficient ability and political will on GIRoA's part to win the support of its people and to control its territory, failure to provide effective civilian capabilities by ISAF's partners, significant improvements or adaptations by insurgent groups, and actions of external actors such as Pakistan and Iran.

## VII. Conclusion

The situation in Afghanistan is serious. The mission can be accomplished, but this will require two fundamental changes. First, ISAF must focus on getting the basics right to achieve a new, population-centric operational culture and better unity of effort. Second, ISAF must also adopt a new strategy, one that is properly resourced, to radically increase partnership with the ANSF, emphasize governance, prioritize resources where the population is threatened, and gain the initiative from the insurgency. This will entail significant near-term cost and risk; however, the long-term risk

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of not executing this strategy is greater. The U.S. Strategy and NATO mission for Afghanistan both call for a committed and comprehensive approach to the strategic threat of an unsecure and unstable Afghanistan. Through proper resourcing, rigorous implementation, and sustained political will, this refocused strategy offers ISAF the best prospect for success in this important mission.

## Annex A: Military Plans

### **Background**

ISAF CJ5, Plans and Strategy, conducted an analysis of the current campaign plan . . . , supporting plans, and orders to determine whether the strategy and means provided are adequate to accomplish the desired endstate. Many elements . . . are deemed to be adequate; however, there are gaps in the operational design.

### **Scope**

A multidisciplinary Joint Operational Planning Group (JOPG) was formed to conduct a thorough assessment of the ISAF counterinsurgency campaign strategy. The JOPG conducted a detailed analysis of both the ISAF OPLAN and OPORD. . . . Previous versions of these orders were also analyzed to ascertain the rationale for successive versions. Analysis was also conducted . . . to confirm that the ISAF OPLAN and OPORD followed the guiding principles contained in the higher headquarters frameworks. The JOPG also reviewed the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the UNAMA mandate. Other documents were also consulted and analyzed, including the draft U.S. Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan. These efforts were complemented by an analysis of the seasonal, agricultural, and narcotic cycles as they relate to the historic operational cycle of insurgent forces to ensure that the subsequent recommendations were situated within a real world timeline. There was significant linkage to three other work efforts being conducted under the Initial Assessment:

1. The “Troops to Task” Working Group determining the resource requirements and allocation of forces and capabilities.
2. The Initial Assessment Working Group tasked with examining the overarching strategy.
3. The ANSF Expansion Working Group tasked with determining the feasibility for rapid growth of GIRoA security capacity.

### **Key Findings**

a. . . . This OPLAN explicitly states that it serves as the campaign plan for ISAF. Contained within this OPLAN is a clear mission and intent, supported by four Lines of Operation (LoO): Security (lead responsibility), Governance (supporting effort), Development (supporting effort), and Strategic Communication (supporting effort). Associated with these LoO are ten effects. These effects are broadly phrased and are not linked with Decisive Points (DP)/Decisive Conditions (DC). This missing element of operational design is crucial, as it should be used to generate associated actions (tasks and purposes) for the OPORD. Similarly, Measures of Effectiveness (MOE)/Measures of Performance (MOP) should

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inform assessments, demonstrating progress along the various LoO. Without this linkage, it is exceptionally difficult to provide accurate advice to the commander to inform optimal decisions on forces, resources, and tasks to continue on the projected path to achieve the desired endstate.

b. . . . The OPORD contains much detail but does not explicitly link the Regional Commands (RC) operations under a coherent, single, nationwide strategy. This is one of the critical deficiencies of the existing OPORD. The following observations are provided:

i. The mission and intent contained in the OPORD are broadly phrased, covering all lines of operation contained in the OPLAN, but it provides insufficient guidance for Regional Commanders to achieve unity of effort.

ii. The Shape/Clear/Hold/Build construct . . . provides the rudimentary elements of an operational framework that forms the basis for the tasks contained in the OPORD.

iii. The OPORD is exceptionally detailed and complex. Within the Main Body alone, 47 tasks are directed toward the Regional Commands and ISAF Special Operations Forces (SOF). There are an additional 50 tasks found throughout the OPORD annexes. There is no clear prioritization of the tasks within the OPORD.

c. OPLAN and OPORD Development. Analysis of the successive versions of . . . the OPORD indicate that each refinement sought to generate increased synchronization and clarity of tasks. The various staffs that generated these modifications were attempting to refine inherited products to produce improved linkages. Viewed independently, both the OPLAN and the OPORD are good products; however, the linkage from higher strategy down to specific tasks remains tenuous. Specifically, prioritization and synchronization have become unclear. Substance exists in both the OPLAN and the OPORD; however, they are now overly complex, necessitating revision and alignment.

d. Prioritization. The lack of clear prioritization of tasks in the OPORD has allowed each of the five subordinate RCs to develop OPORDs with a slightly different emphasis. Some flexibility appears to be a key part of the OPORD design, allowing for sufficient variance between RCs to align toward the specific threats faced in their region. While minor variations were anticipated, a deeper examination shows a lack of coherence within the Security LoO between RCs. The OPORD allows RCs to determine their prioritization and focus within this "lead effort" LoO, with emphasis on protecting the population, growing security capacity, and/or combating insurgents (or other Enemies of Afghanistan). The diversity of Troop Contributing Nations (TCN) further increases variance and differences of interpretation across the force. The multiplicity of priorities (e.g., Focus Areas, Action Districts, Priority Action

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Districts, and Focused District Development) seemingly makes “everything” important.

e. Synchronization. Although the OPORD attempts to generate synchronization, the variation in interpretation and prioritization of effort hinders development of the necessary synergy. Synchronization across the theater should provide a greater opportunity for the generation of collective effects across all LoO, but is not currently achieved. The lack of prioritization makes synchronization exceptionally difficult.

f. Assessments. The campaign assessment construct uses a methodology to measure effectiveness of operations along the LoO described in the OPLAN. The current assessment provides a broad measure of progress that requires substantial interpretation to determine interrelationships among the various aspects within the LoO. The current campaign design does not utilize decisive points or milestones within the broad effects; accordingly, it is difficult to assess progress along a LoO. This does not assist the Commander in evaluating where changes in strategy or main effort may be required.

g. Supporting Plans and Annexes

i. Counternarcotics (CN). It is clear that CN efforts were not fully integrated into the counterinsurgency campaign; efforts were collaborative but not centrally coordinated. Substantial intelligence points directly at the Afghanistan narcotics industry as a significant economic enabler for the insurgency. The ISAF mandate, with its clear security focus and individual TCN caveats, coupled with the ubiquitous nature of the narcotics problem, clearly limited CN efforts by ISAF forces. CN engagement has increased significantly since the Budapest Summit which called upon NATO and TCN to grant sufficient legal authority to increase ISAF assistance to GIRoA to execute the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy. With the clarification of legal authorities, Annex RR–Counter Narcotics was integrated. . . . The RCs are currently developing supporting plans to address the 2010 opium poppy season. Though CN efforts are improving, they must be fully integrated into the overall plan.

ii. ISAF and ANSF Partnering and Mentoring. Partnering continues to evolve. Efforts to formalize the partnership between ISAF and ANSF can be traced to June 2008. It took until Nov 2008 to develop the framework for the plan and issue the fragmentary order (FRAGO) . . . directing this effort. The FRAGO sought to create a baseline for both partnering operations and reporting requirements; RCs continue to progress toward the objectives described in

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the FRAGO; however, they are hampered by the lack of clarity expressed in the operational design.

h. Operational Environment. Elements of the operational environment dictate the operational cycle of the insurgency. It is critical to consider the seasonal, agricultural, and narcotic cycles, as well as the religious calendar and external events like Pakistani military operations in the border area, in order to refine the campaign design. Traditionally, insurgents have used the winter months to reorganize and prepare for the “fighting” season which coincides with improving weather. Generally, ISAF forces have matched the insurgent’s operational cycle each year. Without a significant change, ISAF will remain in consonance with this cycle. This winter, there is an opportunity to break our inadvertent operational synchronicity with the insurgents. The new operational design must be linked to “real world” event cycles rather than being considered in abstract and place greater emphasis on nonkinetic operations, noting that the insurgency remains active within the population even when kinetic operations are greatly reduced during the winter.

i. Command Relationships. Although indirectly related to the analysis of the campaign design, command relationships are a key element to synchronization of efforts under the lines of operation provided in the ISAF OPOD and OPLAN. Within campaign design, the link between operational design and operational management is provided by operational command; accordingly a review of operational plans should also consider the relevant command relationships. The ISAF upper command and control arrangements are undergoing restructuring concurrently with the Initial Assessment. Clarification of the relationship between the evolving four-star ISAF HQ and the new three-star ISAF Joint Command (IJC) will assist significantly in the synchronization of efforts across the campaign. The transition of CSTC-A/ DATES to NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) in the same timeframe as the formation of the IJC brings an opportunity to achieve a fully coordinated new operational level command structure with associated realignment of subordinate elements (e.g., Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams [OMLTs] and Embedded Training Teams [ETTs]). Realignment of these relationships necessitates an operational design that considers the new command lines provided to COMISAF. Efficient command and control alignment will enhance execution of the revised operational design.

### **Recommendations**

a. OPLAN 38302. Retain major elements of the OPLAN as the base document that frames the ISAF Campaign Plan. The document is sufficient to complement the efforts of external agencies (e.g., GIRoA and UNAMA) along the supporting LoO of Governance and Development. Significant change may be counterproductive in the short term; specifically, the Comprehensive and Integrated Approach described in Annex W of the OPLAN is procedurally understood by critical stakeholders. The OPLAN provides the framework for the “lead effort” Security LoO to guide development of the operational design. Within

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the OPLAN framework, the operational design should be revised substantially to provide the benchmarks of progress to guide prioritization and synchronization of subordinate efforts.

b. Revise the OPORD. Given both the refined command relationships and anticipated direction to develop an operational design, the OPORD will require substantial revision to prioritize and synchronize the efforts across all COMISAF subordinates. The current OPORD contains elements that can be prioritized and synchronized in the short term through fragmentary orders until a new OPORD is developed and published.

c. Command Relationships. The development of the operational design must incorporate the anticipated command relationships under which the order will be executed.

d. Resourcing. Use the refined operational design as the basis to request additional resource capabilities that generate overmatch of insurgent forces prior to the historical operational tempo increase of insurgent operations.



## **Annex B: Command and Control, and Command Relationships**

ISAF analysed the command relationships between military forces and civilian organizations operating in the Afghanistan Theater of Operations. To date, various initiatives have either been planned or are underway in order to improve unity of command and unity of effort within the Afghanistan Area of Operations (AoO).

### **Status Update**

- On August 4th, NATO's North Atlantic Council officially approved the creation of an intermediate three-star command between COMISAF and the RCs. This new headquarters is on pace to reach Initial Operational Capability (IOC) by 12 October 09 and Full Operational Capability by 12 November 09.
- Along with the creation of the ISAF Joint Command (IJC), the decision was made to create NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) to unify both NATO and U.S. forces previously operating under separate command relationship lines (Directorate for Afghan National Army Training and Equipment [NATO] and Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan [U.S.]) conducting advisory roles with the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) throughout Afghanistan. This new headquarters will reach IOC by 10 September 09.
- Related to the creation of NTM-A is a proposal to move all of the advisory elements that reside in the Afghanistan AOO—OMLTs, POMLTs, PMTs, ETTs, OCCs, etc.—under the operational control of the Regional Commands (RC) and battlespace owners (BSO). A portion of the . . . staff will migrate to the IJC to manage various resourcing functions related to the support of these advisory elements.
- HQ ISAF issued FRAGO 408-2009 directing the establishment, in coordination with GIRoA, of a National Military Coordination Center (NMCC) for the coordination and planning of joint military operations.
- The RCs have been directed to partner with the ANSF at every level within their RC AOOs in order to gain synergy of operations and improve the capability and capacity of the ANSF.
- The RCs were also tasked with further developing Operations Coordination Centers at the Regional and Provincial levels to enable a comprehensive approach to planning and operating down to the tactical level and to monitor and report partner ANSF unit readiness to COMISAF.
- USFOR-A has been tasked with the following:

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- o Direct CSTC-A to focus on force generation and institutional and ministerial development.
  - o Transfer OEF units OPCON to COMISAF and place them on the ISAF Combined Joint Statement of Requirements.
- Draft C2 guidance for command and control of special operations forces will be issued soon. This FRAGO will direct the realignment of all SOF . . . OPCON to COMISAF. OEF and ISAF SOF will be directed to enhance the coordination of their operations through the provision of SOF operations and planning staff, SOF advisors, and liaison officers to the RC HQs.
  - In cooperation with JFC-Brunssum, Allied Transformation Command (ATC), Joint Warfare Center, the Joint Warfighting Center (USJFCOM), and V Corps, a training plan has been developed to support the stand up of the IJC.

**Remaining Challenges**

- . . . Other challenges to unity of command lie in the variations of each troop contributing nation's Order of Battle Transfer of Authority (ORBATTOA) report. Since there is such variation in the ORBATTOA reports, it is difficult to achieve a common command authority structure throughout the theater.
- Another challenge comes from U.S. sponsored, non-NATO nations that deploy forces using U.S. Global-War-on-Terrorism (GWOT) funding under U.S. Code Title X. These nations include Georgia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Mongolia, Bahrain, and others. The unique challenge created under this process specifies that Title X funding is tied to a direct command relationship with a U.S. commander.
- Even if unity of effort is achieved with all international military forces in full partnership with the ANSF, unity of command remains a significant challenge because of the many international community and nongovernmental organizations that make significant unilateral contributions in the Governance and Development Lines of Operation. In order to address this, the BSO must be fully engaged with GIRoA, UNAMA, ANSF and any civilian capacity building entities or International Organization. Engagement and coordination is critical; deconfliction by itself is insufficient. It is important that BSOs develop relationships with these organizations that help to achieve the desired end state.
- One issue to be resolved is whether COMISAF has the authority to move personnel assigned to ISAF HQ under CE 13.0 over to the new Intermediate HQ CE 1.0. Current planning is based on the assumption that he has this authority; however, this issue must be resolved in writing from SHAPE prior to any personnel migration.

## Annex C: USG Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan

The Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan (ICMCP) represents the collaborative planning efforts of the United States Government (USG) operating in Afghanistan. It was signed by the United States Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry and General Stanley McChrystal, Commander, United States Forces Afghanistan, on 15 August 2009 and forwarded to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and General David Petraeus, Commander, United States Central Command. The USG will execute this plan from a “whole-of-government” approach in coordination with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), United Nations Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA).

The ICMCP aligns USG efforts on a single objective: the people of Afghanistan. It specifies that every action must focus on securing and enabling the Afghan people to resist the insurgents and engage with GIROA and the international community to develop effective governance. Shifting focus to deliver results for the population requires comprehensive integration and synchronization of USG and ISAF civilian-military teams working across the Security, Development, and Governance Lines of Operation. The ICMCP details how this new integrated approach will be applied across 11 Counterinsurgency (COIN) Transformative Effects (see table opposite). These effects will enable tangible progress in fighting the insurgency and building stability at the local community, provincial, and national levels.

ICMCP implementation is supported by two significant civilian initiatives. First, U.S. Senior Civilian Representative positions have been established in RC(E) and RC(S) at each sub-regional U.S. Brigade Task Force, and in each province and district support team to coordinate activities of civilians operating under Chief of Mission authority to execute US policy and guidance, serve as the civilian counterpart to the military commander, and integrate and coordinate civ-mil efforts. The second civilian initiative, the USG Civilian Uplift, will deploy additional USG civilians throughout Afghanistan at the regional, brigade task force, provincial, and district levels.

In summary, the ICMCP describes target activities and initiatives for our personnel on the ground. By mandating an integrated, multilevel civilian chain of command for the best partnership possible with military forces, U.S. personnel will have a sound construct within which to determine what areas of the plan to implement in their respective areas.

### 11 Transformative Effects:

- Population Security
- Claim the Information Initiative
- Access to Justice
- Expansion of Accountable and Transparent Governance
- Elections and Continuity of Governance
- Action Against Irreconcilables
- Creating Sustainable Jobs
- Agricultural Opportunity and Market Access
- Countering the Nexus of Narcotics, Corruption, Insurgency and Criminality
- Community and Government led Reintegration
- Cross-Border Access for Commerce Not Insurgents



## **Annex D: Strategic Communication**

### **Background**

The information domain is a battlespace, and it is one in which ISAF must take aggressive actions to win the important battle of perception. Strategic Communication (StratCom) makes a vital contribution to the overall effort, and more specifically, to the operational center of gravity: the continued support of the Afghan population. In order to achieve success we must make better use of existing assets and bolster these with new capabilities to meet the challenges ahead. To date, the Insurgents (INS) have undermined the credibility of ISAF, the International Community (IC), and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) through effective use of the information environment, albeit without a commensurate increase in their own credibility. Whilst this is a critical problem for ISAF, the consequences for GIROA are even starker. GIROA and the IC need to wrest the Information Initiative from the INS.

### **Scope**

ISAF has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of StratCom objectives, policies, and capability requirements, which has resulted in several key recommendations in order to achieve the mission. The command also developed a StratCom Action Plan which details those tasks and activities which must be implemented in order to put the recommendations into effect. This plan is not focused on ISAF in isolation but has been derived from a variety of other planning efforts which have set the framework for this assessment. While the primary focus was on the Afghan environment, some of the actions outlined may have a wider effect in the regional context. The planning process benefitted from the participation of StratCom experts in the "community of interest," including HQ NATO, SHAPE, and JFC-B as well as the visiting Initial Assessment Team.

### **Key Findings**

#### **DEVELOPING CAPACITY**

Apart from improving its own performance, ISAF needs to help ensure that GIROA receives the necessary partnering, assistance, training and equipment to further develop their own capacity and improve performance. In so doing, we need to be careful that we do not continue to overpromise and underdeliver across the lines of operation. ISAF needs to be able to support both the NATO strategic centre of gravity (the maintenance of Alliance cohesion as specified in the ISAF OPLAN), as well as ensure that GIROA is placed at the forefront of all possible endeavors with its credibility enhanced. Over the years a consistent set of problems have been identified but not adequately addressed, primarily as a result of insufficient coordination and a lack of resources. The key for StratCom is to implement a plan based on these lessons learned. ISAF is not the sole player in the StratCom area. Success also depends on improving the currently inadequate capabilities of other nonmilitary critical players, especially in areas outside security such as the governance, reconstruction, and development arenas.



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### NEW OBJECTIVES

For success, the following StratCom objectives need to be accomplished in partnership with other key stakeholders:

- Discredit and diminish insurgents and their extremist allies' capability to influence attitudes and behaviour in AFG.
- In partnership, assist GIRoA and the populace in developing a sense of ownership and responsibility for countering violent extremism in order to advance their own security, stability, and development.
- Increase effectiveness of international and GIRoA communications with the Afghan people and the IC.
- Increase AFG political and popular will to counter violent extremism and protect the operational centre of gravity, namely the support of the Afghan people.
- Enhance StratCom coordination with Higher Headquarters (HHQ) and, through them, the troop contributing nations (TCN) in order to support SACEUR's strategic center of gravity, which is the maintenance of Alliance cohesion.
- Promote the capability of, and confidence in, the Afghan National Security Forces as a force for good in the country.
- Maintain and increase international and public support for ISAF goals and policies in AFG.

### MAIN EFFORT

The StratCom main effort is to maintain and strengthen the Afghan population's positive perception of, and support for, GIRoA institutions and the constructive supporting role played by ISAF and the IC.

### Recommendations

#### Change of culture

There must be a fundamental change of culture in how ISAF approaches operations. StratCom should not be a separate Line of Operation, but rather an integral and fully embedded part of policy development, planning processes, and the execution of operations. Analyzing and maximizing StratCom effects must be central to the formulation of schemes of maneuver and during the execution of operations. In order to affect this paradigm shift, ISAF HQ must synchronize all StratCom stakeholders. Implicit in this change of culture is the clear recognition that modern strategic communication is about credible dialogue, not a monologue where we design our systems and resources to deliver messages to target audiences in the most effective manner. This is now a population centric campaign and no effort should be spared to ensure that the Afghan people are part of the conversation. Receiving, understand-

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ing, and amending behavior as a result of messages received from audiences can be an effective method of gaining genuine trust and credibility. This would improve the likelihood of the population accepting ISAF messages and changing their behavior as a result.

**Win the battle of perceptions**

ISAF must act to assist GIRoA in the battle of perceptions through gaining and maintaining the Afghan population's trust and confidence in GIRoA institutions. This will help establish GIRoA as a credible government. For GIRoA and ISAF to win the battle of perceptions we must demonstrably change behavior and actions on the ground—our policies and actions must reflect this reality. StratCom should take every opportunity to highlight the protection of civilians in accordance with the revised Tactical Directive dated 1 July 2009, which is a key StratCom tool.

**Build AFG capacity and capability**

Additional emphasis must be placed on assisting and building AFG capacity and capability so that they are better able to take the lead in StratCom related issues. Better linkages and a robust partnership must be forged with MOD and MOI spokespersons, allowing a supportive and complementary network to be developed. Increasing capacity requires an improved understanding of the environment, better procedures, and additional required equipment and training. The Government Media and Information Centre needs to be expanded to include regional nodes able to disseminate government briefings and releases throughout the region.

**Postelection engagement**

ISAF's engagement with senior GIRoA members should be reassessed following the Presidential Elections, in order to promote the effective coordination of messaging.

**Expand reach of messaging**

ISAF must extend both the reach and propagation of its message delivery, together with determining the effectiveness of that message. Focus should be on identifying the optimum medium for propagation rather than just on the message alone. The following means will be evaluated:

- Commercial communications systems and systems operated by ISAF and GIRoA must be further developed with the necessary protection for communications infrastructure. ISAF should partner more effectively with the Afghan commercial

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sector to enhance COIN effects by empowering the population through access to telecommunications and information via TV and radio.

- The use of traditional communications to disseminate messages must be better exploited using both modern technology and more orthodox methods such as word of mouth. These messages should be delivered by authoritative figures within the AFG community, both rural and urban, so that they are credible. This will include religious leaders, maliks, and tribal elders.
- There must be development and use of indigenous narratives to tap into the wider cultural pulse of Afghanistan.
- Increased cultural expertise is required in order to enhance the development and use of StratCom messaging.
- A more comprehensive and reliable system of developing metrics for Communication Measurement of Effectiveness must be developed to inform ISAF of the perceptions and atmospherics within AFG communities.

### **Offensive information operations (IO)**

Offensive IO must be used to target INS networks in order to disrupt and degrade their operational effectiveness, while also offering opportunities for lower level insurgent reintegration. ISAF should continue to develop and implement a robust and proactive capability to counter hostile information activities and propaganda. A more forceful and offensive StratCom approach must be devised whereby INS are exposed continually for their cultural and religious violations, anti-Islamic and indiscriminate use of violence and terror, and by concentrating on their vulnerabilities. These include their causing of the majority of civilian casualties, attacks on education, development projects, and government institutions, and flagrant contravention of the principles of the Koran. These vulnerabilities must be expressed in a manner that exploits the cultural and ideological separation of the INS from the vast majority of the Afghan population.

### **Agile response to incidents**

ISAF, in conjunction with GIRoA, must enhance its responsiveness to incidents. Subordinate echelons must have the authority and freedom to act within an agile, transparent, and unified environment. Information must be widely shared, horizontally and vertically, including with GIRoA and the IC. New Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) must be produced to reflect a flatter command philosophy whereby subordinates are expected to act in accordance with the Commander's intent to ensure a swift, effective response to achieve the information initiative against the enemy. In particular, risk mitigation measures in the event of CIVCAS must be widely understood and practiced before the incident and accomplished in a timely manner so that we are "first with the truth."

### **Counter-IED IO focus**

The C-IED IO efforts must be fully integrated into the overall StratCom strategy and structures. StratCom must focus on encouraging the population to assist in countering the scourge of IEDs. Effective messaging and offensive Information Operations (IO) are critical to this effort.

### **StratCom capacity**

Throughout the ISAF chain of command StratCom elements must be structured and resourced appropriately, and manned at the requisite levels of expertise to achieve the desired effects. Some of these elements are known to be relatively weak in RC(N), RC(W) and RC(C) and will need augmenting. The inclusion of the critical capabilities provided by Information Operation Task Force (IOTF), Information Operation Advisory Task Force (IOATF), Media Monitoring, STRATCOM Information Fusion Network, and CAPSTONE contracts within the StratCom structure should be supported as these will significantly enhance the Directorate's enabling, monitoring, and assessment efforts.

### **Unity of command—unity of effort**

ISAF and USFOR-A StratCom IO and Public Affairs (PA) components must be fully integrated in order to provide unity of command and effort and enable coherent and rapid messaging. It will be necessary to promote the single ISAF "brand" to multiple internal and external stakeholders.

### **Refocus media efforts**

ISAF must refocus its media efforts in the following specific areas:

- Migrate to a 24/7 StratCom operation
- Delegate Public Affairs (PA) release authority to the appropriate level
- Create opportunities for Afghans to communicate as opposed to attempting to always control the message
- Link regional stories back to national Afghan ones
- Concentrate on the youth and those pursuing further education<sup>1</sup>
- Orientate the message from a struggle for the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan population to one of giving them "trust and confidence"
- Seek ways to reach the INS in Pakistan

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<sup>1</sup>70% of the Afghan population is under 22 years old.

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- Focus media operations and subsequent analysis on context, characterization, and accuracy
- Reprioritize the policies governing practical support for media in terms of military airlift, credentialing, and embeds

### **Declassification authority for ISR/WSV**

There has been consistent recognition of problems in using visual imagery, particularly ISR and weapons' system video, and other operational information for StratCom purposes. Every effort must be made to identify, declassify, and exploit such material in a timely manner.

### **StratCom links**

StratCom links to intelligence organizations must be strengthened. This will enable more effective countermeasures to hostile propaganda and provide more detailed network analysis in support of IO targeting.

### **New media**

HQ ISAF must understand and adapt to the immediacy of the contemporary information environment through the employment of new/social media as well as cell phones, TV, and radio in order to promote interactive communication between Afghan and international audiences. This will involve a significant investment in technical architecture.

### **StratCom messengers and partners**

ISAF must develop a more widely understood internal communication strategy that enables every member of ISAF to be able to clearly articulate a short narrative of what ISAF wants to achieve in Afghanistan and how it is going to do it. Every soldier must be empowered to be a StratCom messenger for ISAF.

ISAF must strengthen its partnership with relevant IC stakeholders, both within the NATO system and internationally, to improve the flow of information and cooperation both horizontally and vertically. Specifically, in-theater communication efforts to coordinate between TCNs must involve the office of the Senior Civilian Representative and HHQs in order to maximize the propagation of COMISAF's intent and help protect NATO/SHAPE's strategic center of gravity in national capitals.

NATO has had consistent problems producing trained personnel in all information disciplines. Significant investment is required to solve both a short-term problem and generate a longer term solution to producing the necessary fully-qualified personnel.

## **Annex E: Civilian Casualties, Collateral Damage, and Escalation of Force**

### **Background**

Civilian casualties (CIVCAS) and damage to public and private property (collateral damage), no matter how they are caused, undermine support for GIRoA, ISAF, and the international community in the eyes of the Afghan population. Although the majority of CIVCAS incidents are caused by insurgents, the Afghan people hold ISAF to a higher standard. Strict comparisons of amount of damage caused by either side are unhelpful. To protect the population from harm, ISAF must take every practical precaution to avoid CIVCAS and collateral damage.

ISAF established a CIVCAS Tracking Cell in August 2008. This step was reinforced by a revised Tactical Directive (TD) issued to all troops in theatre on 1 July 2009, which, inter alia, clearly described how and when lethal force should be used. All subordinate commanders were explicitly instructed to brief their troops (to include civilian contractors) on the TD. Further, a thorough review of ISAF and USFOR-A operating procedures and processes has been ordered.

### **Scope**

The TD, in conjunction with COMISAF's COIN guidance and other supporting directives, describes how ISAF will both mitigate CIVCAS incidents and change its approach to COIN and stability operations. These measures will improve the ability of ISAF to protect the population from harm.

This paper proposed recommendations to enhance the direction given in the TD.

### **Key Findings**

#### **Training**

Though it is not possible to prescribe the appropriate use of force for every situation on a complex battlefield, all troops must know, understand, comply, and train with the direction outlined in the TD. This implies a change in culture across the force. ISAF units and soldiers must be fully prepared to operate within the guidelines of the TD and other directives prior to deployment. Home-station training events must be nested within these directives. Training must continue in-theater to ensure the guidance is being implemented correctly.

**Recommendation:** ISAF must utilize expertise resident at the Counterinsurgency Training Center–Afghanistan (“COIN Academy”) and within ISAF organizations to ensure all units in theater understand and are able to apply the TD, COIN Guidance, and standing ROE. ISAF must also work together with home-station training centers and professional development schools to ensure units are properly prepared through education and predeployment training.

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The TD and COIN Guidance will be disseminated rapidly to U.S. Combat Training Centers and to NATO and ISAF Troop Contributing Nations (TCNs) for inclusion in scenario development and programs of instruction.

### **Troops in contact (TIC)**

The TD stresses the necessity to avoid winning tactical victories while suffering strategic defeats. Ground commanders must fully understand the delicate balance between strategic intent and tactical necessity. Commanders must prioritize operational effectiveness within their operating areas by considering the effects of their actions on the Afghan population at every stage.

**Recommendation:** Under the direction of Task Force Commanders, subunit ground commanders must plan for and rehearse a full range of tactical options to include application of force in unpopulated areas, deescalation of force within populated ones, or even breaking contact as appropriate to accomplish the mission.

### **Proportionality**

In order to minimize the risk of alienating the Afghan population, and in accordance with International law, ISAF operations must be conducted in a manner that is both proportionate and reasonable.

**Recommendation:** When requesting Close Air Support (CAS) ground commanders and Joint Tactical Air Controllers (JTAC) must use appropriate munitions or capabilities to achieve desired effects while minimizing the risk to the Afghan people and their property. Ground commanders must exercise similar judgment in the employment of indirect fires.

### **Shaping the environment and preconditions**

The importance of cultural awareness during the conduct of operations is highlighted in the TD. Specifically, it notes that a significant amount of CIVCAS occur during Escalation of Force (EoF) procedures (14% of people killed and 22% of those wounded during the last recorded 6 months). These incidents tend to occur in units with less training experience and lower unit cohesion. Fear and uncertainty among ISAF soldiers contributes to escalation of force incidents. Furthermore, although ISAF has refined and enhanced the warnings that are issued, many Afghans do not understand them and consequently fail to comply. Low literacy levels and cultural differences may explain a misunderstanding of EoF procedures and the actions that ISAF troop expect them to take.

**Recommendation:** Effective predeployment training and the development of unit cohesion are essential in honing the tactical judgment of soldiers and small unit leaders. Training scenarios at home station and combat training centers must improve. As

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ISAF reviews and modifies its escalation of force procedures to better fit the Afghan context, ISAF and GIRoA must communicate those procedures more effectively to the Afghan people in appropriate media.

### **Press release / public information**

The TD also stresses the requirement to acknowledge any CIVCAS incident in the media expeditiously and accurately; timely engagement with key leaders is also a critical element. The aim is to be “first with the known truth,” based on the information available at the time. ISAF competes with insurgents’ (INS) information operations (IO), and the INS IO is not hampered by the need to be truthful; moreover, any statements made by the INS are rapidly disseminated and can be persuasive to the Afghan population. As the TD notes, it is far more effective to release a factual statement with the known details early, and then a follow-on statement with additional clarification at a later stage. This procedure is more effective than simply issuing a rebuttal of an INS version of the account. Furthermore, debating the number of people killed or injured misses the point. The fact that civilians were harmed or property was damaged needs to be acknowledged and investigated, and measures must be taken for redress.

**Recommendation:** First, ISAF and GIRoA must aim for a consistent rather than conflicting message through appropriate media, to include word of mouth in affected local communities. Be first with the known truth; be transparent in the investigation. Second, ISAF and GIRoA should follow-up on any incident with periodic press updates regarding the progress of the investigation, procedures for redress, and measures taken to ensure appropriate accountability.

### **Aircraft video release procedures**

The advantage of photographic imagery to support any Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) is covered in the TD. This can be expanded to include aircraft weapon system imagery. The NATO Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan (CSPMP) for Afghanistan requires nations to establish agreed procedures for declassifying and making use of national operational imagery to reinforce NATO messages. Presently, national caveats apply to the release of aircraft BDA and weapon release imagery, and these caveats have different procedures and timelines for release. Some nations do not comply with the CSPMP.

**Recommendation:** Establish a standard procedure for all nations and services to attain the necessary release approval and delivery of the footage.

### **Honor and “assistance”**

Under the terms of the Military Technical Agreement between ISAF and GIRoA (dated 4 Jan 02), ISAF is not required to make compensation payments for any damage to civilian or governmental property. Contributing nations are responsible for damages caused by their soldiers. Some nations contribute to individual or



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collective compensation, a number do not, whilst others contribute in different ways. This creates an extremely unhelpful imbalance and undermines COIN Strategy. To address this, the NATO CSPMP for Afghanistan encourages nations to fund the NATO Post Operations Emergency Relief Fund (POERF) to compensate or assist individuals and communities.

CIVCAS payments and compensation must be carefully considered against a large number of different factors. Whilst being sensitive to the affected families and communities, improper procedures and poor investigations and accountability may encourage subsequent exaggerated claims.

**Recommendation:** Develop and implement an equitable system of compensation for damages, whether individual or community based. ISAF TCNs must develop a common policy for compensation and redress due to injury, loss of life, and damage to property. Although compensation can never make up for such loss, appropriate measures to ensure accountability and recognition of the importance of Afghan life and property can help mitigate public anger over the incident.

## **Annex F: Detainee Operations, Rule of Law, and Afghan Corrections**

### **Background**

Detention operations, while critical to successful counterinsurgency operations, also have the potential to become a strategic liability for the U.S. and ISAF. With the drawdown in Iraq and the closing of Guantanamo Bay, the focus on U.S. detention operations will turn to the U.S. Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF). Because of the classification level of the BTIF and the lack of public transparency, the Afghan people see U.S. detention operations as secretive and lacking in due process. It is critical that we continue to develop and build capacity to empower the Afghan government to conduct all detentions operations in this country in accordance with international and national law. The desired endstate must be the eventual turnover of all detention operations in Afghanistan, to include the BTIF, to the Afghan government once they have developed the requisite sustainable capacity to run those systems properly.

Currently, Taliban and Al Qaeda insurgents represent more than 2,500 of the 14,500 inmates in the increasingly overcrowded Afghan Corrections System (ACS). These detainees are currently radicalizing non-insurgent inmates and worsening an already overcrowded prison system. Hardened, committed Islamists are indiscriminately mixed with petty criminals and sex offenders, and they are using the opportunity to radicalize and indoctrinate them. In effect, insurgents use the ACS as a sanctuary and base to conduct lethal operations against GIRoA and coalition forces (e.g., Serena Hotel bombing, GIRoA assassinations, governmental facility bombings).

The U.S. came to Afghanistan vowing to deny these same enemies safe haven in 2001. They have gone from inaccessible mountain hideouts to recruiting, indoctrinating, and hiding in the open in the ACS. There are more insurgents per square foot in corrections facilities than anywhere else in Afghanistan. Unchecked, Taliban/AI Qaeda leaders patiently coordinate and plan, unconcerned with interference from prison personnel or the military.

Multiple national facilities are firmly under the control of the Taliban. The Central Prisons Directorate (CPD) accepts a lack of offensive violence there as a half-win. Within the U.S. Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF), due to a lack of capacity and capability, productive interrogations and detainee intelligence collection have been reduced. As a result, hundreds are held without charge or without a defined way-ahead. This allows the enemy to radicalize them far beyond their precapture orientation. This problem can no longer be ignored.

### **Scope**

In order to transform detention and corrections operations in theater, U.S. Forces–Afghanistan (USFOR-A) proposes the formation of a new Combined Joint Interagency Task Force, CJIATF . . . to work toward the long-term goal of getting the U.S. out of the detention business. The priority for the CJIATF . . . in cooperation with the U.S. Embassy

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and our interagency and international partners, will be to build the capacity of the Afghan government to take over responsibility for detention in its own country as soon as possible, to include the BTIF. The CJIATF will provide two primary functions:

- Assume oversight responsibilities and Title 10 support for detention and interrogation operations of all U.S.-held detainees in Afghanistan; and
- Conduct Rule of law (Corrections) operations, in coordination with the U.S. Embassy, working with and advising the Ministry of Defense, the Afghan Central Prison Directorate (CPO), and associated Afghan Ministries.

The CJIATF will train and apply sound corrections management techniques and Rule of Law principles in all detention systems in Afghanistan, whether currently run by the U.S. government or the Afghan government. These sound corrections management techniques (“best practices”) and Rule of Law principles, applicable to all detention facilities, include: adherence to international humanitarian law; due process; vocational and technical training; deradicalization; rehabilitation; education; and classifying and segregating detainee populations (segregating hard-core insurgents from low level fighters, juveniles from adults, women from men, common criminals from insurgents, etc.).

### **Systemic Challenges in Detention and Corrections**

The CJIATF . . . will address 10 systemic challenges in the current U.S., Afghan military, and CPO detention and prison systems. These include:

- Need for a countrywide, coalition-supported corrections and detention plan to help establish unity of effort.
- Need for all detainees and prisoners to be correctly classified and separated accordingly.
- Need for a GIRoA and International community supported Rule of Law program which allows for and codifies alternatives to incarceration.
- Within U.S. Detention and Afghanistan Prison systems alike, take immediate measures to counter insurgent actions and minimize the religious radicalization process of inmates.
- Need to plan and provide for Afghanistan corrections infrastructure multiyear sustainment.
- Need to ensure meaningful corrections reform in both U.S. and Afghanistan detention/prison systems. These reforms include changing punishment from retribution to rehabilitation, purposeful and effective staff training, equity of pay, and improved alignment with law enforcement and legal systems, both formal and informal.

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- Need to review and ensure the intelligence policy and procedures match the exigencies of the Government of Afghanistan and Coalition counterinsurgent activity.
- Need to address the current and projected overcrowding situation.
- Need to address the current shortage of knowledgeable, competent, and committed leadership within both U.S. and Afghanistan corrections systems and advisory groups.
- Need to address the command and control and unity of command over both U.S. detention and Afghan advisory efforts.

**Recommendations**

**Establish a CJIATF**

Establish a CJIATF commanded by a General Officer, with a civilian deputy at the Ambassador level, to lead an organization of approximately 120 personnel (70 civilian, 50 military). The CJIATF will be a Major Subordinate Command under USFOR-A with a coordination relationship reporting to the U.S. Ambassador Afghanistan. The CJIATF will have a Command/Control Headquarters Element and the following six Lines of Operation:

- The U.S. Detention Operations Brigade will provide safe, secure, legal, and humane custody, care, and control of detainees at the BTIF.
- The Intelligence Group will support the Task Force's mission to identify and defeat the insurgency through intelligence collection and analysis, and improve interrogations intelligence collection through operations at the Joint Interrogation Debriefing Center and Strategic Debriefing Center, including input from field detention sites after capture.
- The Detention and Prisons Common Program Support Group will establish and conduct a series of programs designed to move detention/corrections operations from retribution to rehabilitation. A deradicalization process will attack the enemy ethos center of gravity and enable successful reintegration of inmates back to the Afghan (or home origin) population.
- The Engagement and Outreach Group will formulate and implement strategic communication and outreach as a proactive tool to protect and defend the truth of U.S. detention and interrogation practices to further assist in the development of the Rule of Law within Afghanistan.
- The Legal Group will identify gaps in the Rule of Law framework that are inhibiting U.S. and Afghan detention/corrections operations from completing their mission and will develop solutions through consistent engagement with GIRoA elements and the International Community.
- The Afghanistan Prison Engagement Group will assist GIRoA in reforming the Central Prisons Directorate (CPD) so it can defeat the insurgency within its walls.

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The reformed CPD National Prison System will meet international standards, employ best correctional practices, comply with Afghan laws, and be capable of sustaining deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs.

### **Capabilities**

The CJIATF Concept will be developed based on three capabilities (or phases):

- Capability 1—Assume the U.S. detention oversight and support responsibilities . . . to include the operation and management of the BTIF, to allow . . . focus on the operational fight. Once the JTF stands up, and the commander and his staff are on the ground in Afghanistan, they can begin planning and further developing Capabilities 2 and 3.
- Capability 2—Conduct corrections and Rule of Law development within the Afghan National Defense Force (ANDF) detention facilities.
- Capability 3—In close coordination and cooperation with the U.S. Embassy, conduct corrections and Rule of Law development within the Afghan CPD system of prisons.

### **Endstate**

The desired endstate is the turnover of all detention operations in Afghanistan, to include the BTIF, to the Afghan government once they have developed the requisite sustainable capacity to run those detention systems in accordance with international and national law. This will empower the Afghan government, enable counterinsurgency operations, and restore the faith of the Afghan people in their government's ability to apply good governance and Rule of Law with respect to corrections, detention, and justice.

## **Annex G: Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) Growth and Acceleration**

### **Background**

The ANSF is currently not large enough to cope with the demands of fighting the resilient insurgency in Afghanistan. Accelerating the growth and development of both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) is a vital part of the strategy to create the conditions for sustainable security and stability in Afghanistan. Demonstrable progress by the Afghan government and its security forces in countering the insurgency over the next 12 to 18 months is critical in order to preserve the sustained commitment and support of the international community. A key component of success will be the ability of the ANSF to assume progressively greater responsibility for security operations from the deployed international forces. The requirement to expand the ANSF (both ANA and ANP) rapidly to address the challenges of the insurgency will require ISAF to provide enhanced partnering, mentoring, and enabling capabilities until parallel capabilities are developed within the ANSF.

### **Key Findings**

#### **ANA**

The ANA has a force structure of nearly 92k and, while still nascent and dependent on enablers provided by international forces, is increasingly capable of leading or conducting independent operations; however, more COIN capable Afghan Army forces are required in order to conduct sustained COIN operations in key areas of the country.

Over the past several years, the ANA has grown in capacity and capability. Late last year a decision to increase the size of the ANA to 134k was followed by a plan from the Afghan Ministry of Defense (supported by CSTC-A) to accelerate the training of 8 Kandaks in order to enhance security in key areas, mainly in Southern Afghanistan. That acceleration is currently ongoing.

The growth of the ANA to 134k needs to be brought forward from December 2011 to October 2010 in order to create sufficient ANA capacity to create conditions for rapid and sustainable progress in the current campaign; however, there is a requirement for further substantial growth (to an estimated endstrength of 240k) of COIN capable ANA troops in order to increase pressure on the insurgency in all threatened areas in the country. Current plans provide for a start date of Oct 2009 to commence an acceleration in growth through a combination of overmanning and rapid force generation of ANA infantry and combat service support units. In order to generate the required numbers of "boots on the ground," the emphasis will be on the development of maneuver units rather than enabler capabilities. The generation of previously planned and programmed enablers such as corps engineers, artillery, motorized quick reaction forces, and large support battalions will be deferred to enable a more rapid generation of maneuver forces that provide the operational capabilities required now. The forces generated during this phase will have sufficient training, capability and equipment to conduct effective COIN operations and to generate momentum. Tighter, re-

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structured training programs will deliver an infantry-based, COIN-capable force in a shorter period of time with the capability of conducting “hold” operations with some “clear” capability while closely partnered with coalition forces. These forces will be equipped at a “minimally combat essential” level as determined by the Ministry of Defense, ISAF’s operational requirements, and CSTC-A’s ability to generate forces. Initially, facilities will be austere and temporary (including tented camps at the outset) in order to reduce construction timelines and cost.

Risks inherent in this approach such as inadequate training and a lack of organic enablers will be mitigated through close partnering and mentoring by Regional Commanders delivered through the ISAF Joint Command. More inexperienced leaders will be accepted into the junior officer and NCO ranks and the risk will be balanced by closely partnering ANSF with coalition forces. In time, a “rebalancing” and generation of enabling capabilities must occur as part of subsequent ANA growth to ensure that the ANA can achieve a degree of self-sufficiency, sustainable capability, and capacity. The growth of the ANA beyond 134k will be tailored to meet operational conditions on the ground and to create the required effects desired in the regions.

Finally, the Afghan National Army Air Corps will continue to grow and develop at a measured pace, given the long lead times required for the acquisition of aircraft and development of technical skills to operate and maintain the aircraft in the inventory. In the short term, the accelerated acquisition of additional Mi-17 airframes will enable greater lift capacity for the ANSF. In parallel, dedicated training of Mi-35 aircrews will add a rotary wing attack capability in the fall of 2009. Deliveries of the first C-27 aircraft in November 2009 will dramatically increase operational capability as the first crews are trained in March 2010.

### **ANP**

The Afghan National Police has grown to a current force structure of approximately 84k and is several years behind the ANA in its development. Due to a lack of overall strategic coherence and insufficient resources, the ANP has not been organized, trained, and equipped to operate effectively as a counterinsurgency force. Promising programs to reform and train police have proceeded too slowly due to a lack of training teams. To enhance the ANP’s capacity and capabilities, the Focused District Development (FDO) program must be accelerated to organize, train, equip, and reform police that have not yet completed a formal program of instruction, and new police forces such as the elite Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) must be generated to prepare the ANP properly to operate in this challenging COIN environment.

The ANP must increase in size in order to provide sufficient police needed to hold areas that have been cleared of insurgents, and to increase the capacity to secure the population. This assessment recommends further growth of the ANP to a total of 160k as soon as practicable with the right mix of capabilities that better satisfies the requirements of a counterinsurgency effort. This larger number of policemen also needs to be trained more quickly in order to “thicken” security forces in the districts, provinces, and regions. The numbers of Afghan Border Police (ABP) and Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) should also be considerably increased, and consider-

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ation should be given to expanding the Afghan Public Protection Force or other similar initiatives where appropriate.

In April 2009, a decision was made to grow the ANP by 4.8K to provide security for Kabul in advance of the Afghan National elections. This action was followed by a second decision to further grow the police by 10K in order to enhance security in 14 key provinces for the upcoming elections. This 14.8K police growth is proceeding and will increase the ANP authorized strength to 96.8K while improving accountability of “non and above tashkiel” police.

Subsequent ANP growth to 160k will include doubling ANP strength at the District and Provincial levels, significantly increasing the police-to-population ratio. The growth of ANCOP will be accelerated by generating 5 national battalions in FY '10 followed by the generation of 34 new provincial battalions and 6 new regional battalions. While the number of ABP companies will remain the same, each ABP company will increase in strength by 65% to 150 men per company. Finally, the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF) personnel will be absorbed into the ANP as it expands.

Over the 4 year program, special police growth will provide important niche capabilities. The national Crisis Response Unit (CRU) will provide Assault, Surveillance, and Support squadrons. Counternarcotics Aviation is projected to grow by over 100%. Afghan Special Narcotics forces grow by 25%. Security forces will also be provided to ensure international and nongovernmental organizations' freedom of movement.

### **NATO training mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A)**

On 12 June, 2009 the North Atlantic Council endorsed the creation of NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan (NTM-A) to oversee higher level training for the ANA and for development of the ANP. CSTC-A and NTM-A will coexist as a single HQ with fully integrated staff sections under a dual-hatted commander. As approved by the North Atlantic Council, the NTM-A will stand up in mid-September to generate forces and provide institutional training for the ANA and ANP. Once the IJC is operational, the three NATO tasks assigned to NTM-A associated directly with providing NATO OMLTs and POMLTs to the ANA and ANP will migrate to the IJC. At that time, NATO/ISAF will redirect responsibilities for developing fielded ANSF to the IJC. NTM-A will retain responsibility for ANSF institutional training, education, and professional development activities. CJTF Phoenix and its two subordinate Brigades will be transferred to the IJC when it establishes Initial Operating Capability.

### **Key stakeholder engagement**

This assessment recommends that the United States Government develop an engagement strategy to garner the international support and the multilateral approval required for the continued growth of the ANSF to the 400k target (240K ANA, 160K ANP). This includes the actions necessary to secure greater international funding to pay a fair share of the growth and sustainment costs of the ANSF, as well as generating the training teams required to support ANSF development. As a point of reference,



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the international community contributed \$25M (~7%) of the cost of the expansion of the ANP by 14.8k earlier this summer. Furthermore, the European Commission requested a parallel study to recommend the character and end strength of ANP. When the EC study is completed, the findings will be reconciled to gain consensus in the international community about the way ahead.

### **A more cost-effective way to procure capabilities for the ANSF**

This initial assessment recommends that the OSD Comptroller fund CSTC-A directly, and allow CSTC-A to work directly with the appropriate contracting agency to procure required capabilities for the ANSF. The current system of executing Afghan Security Forces Funding (ASFF) must become more agile in the face of the requirement to adapt this program quickly. All procurement actions for the ANSF are handled as “pseudo” Foreign Military Sales Cases by the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) and the United States Army Security Assistance Command (USASAC), each of which charge considerable fees for an “Above Standard Level of Service.” These fees and the direct involvement of the DSCA apply to the procurement of most capabilities, including those that are executed by local contracting authorities as well as other actions not directly related to Foreign Military Sales such as construction. Direct authority to obligate ASFF without passing actions through the DSCA or USASAC will shorten timelines and preserve more money for the specific purpose of supporting the growth and sustainment of the ANSF.

### **Strengthen ANSF development through realigned C2**

CSTC-A is responsible for three lines of operation: ministerial and institutional development; generation of the force; and develop the fielded force. This assessment concludes that the IJC should assume responsibility for developing the fielded force. The transfer of this mission will require the reassignment of CJTF Phoenix and its subordinate elements to the IJC. CSTC-A will retain the responsibility to train, advise, and educate personnel in the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior, as well as those in the institutional elements of the Army and Police (national logistics, medical, facilities management, detainee operations, etc.). CSTC-A will also retain responsibility to resource the fielded ANSF.

### **Unity of effort and coherence in police development**

In an effort to streamline police development efforts and to create greater unity of effort in the development of COIN capable police, the responsibility and authority for all police training should be placed under the commander CSTC-A/NTM-A. The Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) should transfer responsibility for police training to CSTC-A. Since 2005, OSD has transferred funding to INL for developmental efforts of the ANP. CSTC-A will execute this mission and contract as appropriate for trainers with law enforcement experience to augment

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efforts by the IJC to develop fielded police, and to assist CSTC-A's actions for ministerial and institutional training.

### **Build and leverage Afghan ministerial capacity**

CSTC-A should take every opportunity to build and leverage ministerial capacity to shift the responsibility for the long-term sustainability of a larger ANSF to the Afghan Government. One opportunity is to find an appropriate legal and accountable way to allow the Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior to contract for the construction of their own facilities. Today, more than 70% of all major construction projects in support of the ANA are at least 10% behind schedule. In response to this situation, CSTC-A and the Army Corps of Engineers have already standardized and reduced the scope of future projects to mitigate costs and delays. Additionally, CSTC-A will investigate the feasibility and practicality of providing discreet funding for Afghan Ministries to contract for the construction of their own facilities to drive lower costs and improve project timeliness. This process will also provide an opportunity to develop Afghan ministerial capacity. There are inherent risks in this approach but CSTC-A will develop a construct for this proposal with CENTCOM and OSD to ensure proper program management and the required oversight of funding provided to the Afghan ministries.

### **Recommendations**

1. Grow the ANA to a target authorization of 240k. Accelerate the growth of the currently approved COIN focused infantry force of 134k by late 2010 and generate more counterinsurgency forces consistent with operational requirements.
2. Grow and develop the ANP to a total of 160k as soon as practicable to "thicken and harden" security in the districts, provinces, and regions. This total will also more than double the size of Afghan Border Police, considerably grow ANCOP, and allow for expansion of the Afghan Public Protection Force where appropriate.
3. Realign and streamline the responsibilities for ANSF generation and development:
  - a. CSTC-A/NATO Training Mission Afghanistan (NTM-A) focuses on ANSF force generation consistent with operational requirements, develops Afghan ministerial and institutional capabilities, and resources the fielded forces.
  - b. Shift responsibility for development of fielded ANSF to the IJC.
  - c. Employ enhanced partnering and mentoring to more rapidly develop Afghan forces.
4. Provide CSTC-A direct authority to obligate Afghan Security Forces Funding (ASFF) without passing actions through the Defense Security Cooperation Agency to shorten capabilities procurement timelines and avoid unnecessary fees.
5. Shift the responsibility and authority for execution of all police training from the Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) to CSTC-A to enhance unity of effort in police development. CSTC-A will assume

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operational control of INL contracted trainers as soon as possible until January 2010 when a new contract managed by CSTC-A can begin.

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**Annex H: Glossary**

**A**

ABP	Afghan Border Police
ACS	Afghan Corrections System
AFCENT	Air Forces Central Command
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOO	Area of Operations
AP3	Afghan Public Protection Program
APPF	Afghan Public Protection Force
AQAM	Al Qaeda and associated movements
ASFF	Afghan Security Forces Funding
ATC	Allied Transformation Command

**B**

BDA	Battle Damage Assessment
BSO	Battlespace Owner
BTIF	Bagram Theater Internment Facility

**C**

C2	Command and Control
CAS	Close Air Support
CE	Crisis Establishment
CENTCOM	Central Command
CFACC	Combined Forces Air Component Commander
CFSOCC-A	Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command–Afghanistan
CIS	Communications Infrastructure
CIVCAS	Civilian Casualties
CJIATF	Combined Joint Interagency Task Force
CJOC	Coalition Joint Operations Center
CN	Counternarcotics
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COIN TE	Counterinsurgency Transformative Effects
COMISAF	Commander ISAF
CPD	Central Prison Directorate
CRU	Crisis Response Unit
CSPMP	Comprehensive Strategic Political Military Plan
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan

**D**

DC	Decisive Conditions
DCOS	Deputy Chief of Staff
DoD	Department of Defense (US)

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DP Decisive Points  
DSCA Defense Security Cooperation Agency

**E**

EoF Escalation of Force  
ETT Embedded Training Team

**F**

FDD Focused District Development  
FID Foreign Internal Defense  
FOC Fully Operational Capability  
FRAGO Fragmentary Order

**G**

GIRoA Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

**H**

HiG Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin  
HHQ Higher Headquarters  
HQN Haqqani Network

**I**

IC International Community  
ICMCP Integrated Civil-Military Campaign Plan  
IED Improvised Explosive Device  
IJC ISAF Joint Command  
INL International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (US Dept. of State)  
INS Insurgents  
IO Information Operations  
IOATF Information Operation Advisory Task Force  
IOTF Information Operation Task Force  
ISAF International Security Assistance Force  
ISI Interservices Intelligence  
ISR Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

**J**

JFC-B Joint Force Command–Brunssum  
JIDC Joint Interrogation Detention Center  
JOPG Joint Operational Planning Group  
JOPS Joint Operations  
JTAC Joint Tactical Air Controllers

**K**

KAIA Kabul International Airport

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**L**

LoO Lines of Operation

**M**

MARCENT Marine Corps Central Command

MOE Measures of Effectiveness

MOP Measures of Performance

**N**

NAC North Atlantic Council

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCO Noncommissioned Officer

NGO Nongovernmental organization

NSC National Security Council (US)

NSE National Support Element

NTM-A NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan

**O**

OEF Operation Enduring Freedom

OMLF Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team

OPCOM Operational Command

OPCON Operational Control

OPLAN Operational Plan

OPORD Operational Order

OSD Office of the Secretary of Defense (US)

**P**

PA Public Affairs

POERF Post Operations Emergency Fund Relief

POMLT Police Operational Mentoring liaison Team

PRT Provincial Reconstruction Team

**Q**

QST Quetta Shura Taliban

**R**

RC Regional Command

RLS Real Life Support

ROE Rules of Engagement

**S**

S/CRS State Department Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (US)

SACEUR Supreme Allied Commander Europe

SDC Strategic Debriefing Center

SHAPE Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

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SOCCENT	Special Operations Command–Central Command
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
StratCom	Strategic Communication

**T**

TACOM	Tactical Command
TACON	Tactical Control
TCN	Troop Contributing Nation
TD	Tactical Directive
TTPs	Tactics, Techniques, Procedures

**U**

UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
USASAC	United States Army Security Assistance Command
ASFOR-A	US Forces–Afghanistan
USG	United States Government
USMC	US Marine Corps

**W**

WSV	Weapons System Video
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**Annex I: References**

1. Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Reestablishment of Permanent Government Institutions (Bonn Agreement), 5 Dec 01
2. Military Technical Agreement (MTA) Between the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Interim Administration of Afghanistan (31 Dec 01), 4 Jan 02; Amendment 2, 14 Mar 03
4. . . . The Bonn Agreement 2004
5. The Afghan Compact 2006
10. . . . COMISAF Commander's Initial Guidance dated 13 June 2009
11. COMISAF Tactical Directive dated 01 July 2009
13. . . . Bucharest Summit Declaration Apr 08
14. United Nations Security Council Resolutions
  - a. Resolution 1383 (2001) of 6 December—endorses the Bonn Agreement as a first step towards the establishment of a broad-based, gender sensitive, multiethnic and fully representative government in Afghanistan.
  - b. Resolution 1386 (2001) of 20 December—authorizes the deployment for six months of an International Security Assistance Force for Afghanistan (ISAF).
  - c. Resolution 1401 (2002) of 28 March—establishes for an initial period of 12 months a United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).
  - d. Resolution 1413 (2002) of 23 May—extends the authorization of ISAF for an additional 6 months.
  - e. Resolution 1419 (2002) of 26 June—welcomes the results of the Emergency Loya Jirga and commends the role of UNAMA and ISAF.
  - f. Resolution 1444 (2002) of 27 November—extends the authorization of ISAF for one year beyond 20 Dec 02.
  - g. Resolution 1453 (2002) of 24 December—recognizes the Transitional Administration (TA) as the sole legitimate government of Afghanistan and welcomes the Kabul Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations signed by the TA and the States neighbouring Afghanistan.
  - h. Resolution 1471 (2003) of 28 March—extends UNAMA for another 12 months.



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- i. Resolution 1510 (2003) of 13 October—authorizes expansion of the ISAF mandate outside of Kabul and its environs.
- j. Resolution 1776 (2007) of 19 September—extends the mandate of ISAF for 12 months beyond 13 Oct 07.
- k. Resolution 1806 (2008) of 20 March—extends UNAMA for another 12 months and designates it as the IC lead in AFG.
- l. Resolution 1817 (2008) of 11 June—adopts a declaration on the global effort to combat drug trafficking.
- m. Resolution 1833 (2008) of 22 September—extends the mandate of ISAF for 12 months beyond 13 Oct 08.

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# General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment

Evaluating the Operating Environment  
in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009

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