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Abstract

Conducting an effective counterinsurgency operation in the country of Afghanistan is paramount to the success of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). Until recently, military operations have been led and conducted mainly by the US and other willing coalition forces to drastically reduce crime and the effectiveness of the insurgency. A massive effort put on select coalition forces has produced an effective Afghan Army, not in the image of Russian Soldiers but in their own image. The development of the Afghan Army has been ongoing since 2004 and has developed into a force greater than 100,000 Soldiers, and continues to grow today. In an effort to exhibit the development and effectiveness of that force a small team has been created, The Validation & Training Team (VTT). I was a part of that team.

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I. Chapter 1: Context

A. Personal Background

My first real experience with Counterinsurgency (COIN) started in 2003. I was deployed with the 1st Squadron 10th US Cavalry in Iraq as a First Sergeant with Bravo Company. Having been predominantly a Light or Airborne Soldier throughout my career the learning curve was high. I did gain some experience as I was assigned to 1-10 CAV a year or so earlier than the deployment. Though I never studied COIN prior to 2003, my commanders had. We conducted security operations while getting to know the people first. Then, we began to conduct quick fix projects as we started to develop border patrol and Police programs while recruiting for those programs in the two cities and village in our footprint. Following that, we began the training for the above programs while focusing on infrastructure development and repair. I personally oversaw the development of many schools, a courthouse, police station, fire station, bank, border patrol stations and lookouts, and a few other projects. We held city/village council meetings with the Sunni and Shia Arab local leaders along with the Kurdish leaders. We barely began to build their capacity to govern, manage, build, educate, etc. when we were moved from the region.

Following my promotion to sergeant major in November of 2007 I was stationed in Afghanistan as an Embedded Transition Team (ETT) member. I, along with 46 or so others, were selected to be a part of the Validation Training Team (VTT) whose purpose was to assist regional commanders in Afghanistan with the facilitation of formal evaluations of the Afghan National Army (ANA) for the submission of those findings to higher HQs. I served on the team that covered down on the ANA command and doctrinal side of the Afghan Ministry of Defense. As our teams' efforts were slowing due to Afghan bureaucracy, I took on the role of COIN Academy Sergeant Major to assist in the development of the Academy. I taught week long courses in strategic and operational COIN to small groups of all International Security and Assistance Forces (ISAF) along with Afghan Security Forces. My focus was the Central Region, in and around Kabul AO. I taught at the Kabul Military Academy, the Afghan National Police (ANP) Headquarters, as well as the Afghan Army version of the Officer Candidate School (OCS). I continued to assist the VTT on local and regional area evaluations when needed.

B. Unit and Organizational Background

The VTT is a select group of professional Soldiers made up of staff personnel from staff sergeant to sergeant major and from captain to colonel. The VTT mission is to embed with local ETTs and facilitate both the formal in informal evaluation and assessment of the ANA. The teams collect, analyses, packages, and reports data through the Combined Security Transition Command- Afghanistan (CSTC-A) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The data is gained by being embedded on the ground during real world missions conducted solely by the ANA. The data collected is based on US and ANA Doctrine.

C. Operation and Operational Situation

The request came from the 201st ANA Corps ETT Commander to conduct a Commander and Staff Assessment and Evaluation of the 2nd Brigade ANA Commander and his Staff. Also, we were to visit subordinate ANA Kandaks, Afghan battalions, to perform assessments as we deemed necessary. The team consisted of SGM Martin Roy- the Team Chief, me, MSG Marc Jensen, SSG Albert Hannum, and our interpreter (TERP) Waheed. We were assigned one up-armored HMMWV with a caliber 50 machine gun, plenty of ammunition to support an hour or so heavy fire fight for all weapons and plenty of water and chow.

II. Chapter 2: Preparation for the trip

Upon notification of the trip the team rallied on Camp Phoenix in Kabul put our plan together. The plan was very flexible as far as the timeline so we had plenty of room for any issues that arise. We gathered our VTT required assessments and validation paperwork, computers with digital copies of that paperwork and all the requisite doctrinal references and established a timeline for our movement. We were to SP Camp Phoenix on the 5th of September 2008 to begin our movement towards Jalalabad Afghanistan.

In addition to the VTT assessment I was to conduct a COIN assessment of the areas/commands I visited. This was a limited assessment that answered some very basic questions.

My mission upon return to the COIN Training Center was to develop a more comprehensive list of questions (see Appendix A) to determine the validity and effectiveness of COIN operations in that particular AO. I sat with the CTC-A Director and Asst Dir., COL John Agoglia (USA) and LTC Trent Scott (AUS), to capture their directives and end state of this mission. I'm ready to go!

III. Chapter 3: The initial movement

SSG Hannum and I both lived on a small compound, Camp Julien, of 24 people on the southwest side of Kabul. This is the location of the COIN Training Center located on the Darulaman Afghan Army base near the old King's and Queen Palaces. So a convoy was assembled on the 4th of September to move SSG Hannum and me to Camp Phoenix, located on the eastern side of Kabul. Once we arrived and loaded up our gear on our HMMWV we convoyed with the CTC-A convoy to Camp Blackhorse, further on the eastern side of Kabul to spend the night. Once there we linked up with the 2nd ANA BDE ETT logistics element to stage for the following morning. On the 5th of September at approximately 0800 we began our convoy east on the main road towards Jalalabad. Along the way we had a logistics stopover on the lower side of the Sarobi Dam where a small group of ETT Soldiers have a Combat Outpost (COP) established. After lunch, we fuelled up our vehicles and made our way stopping about halfway to inspect and assess an area of a brand new COP, COP China, along the main highway. We arrived in Jalalabad at about 1830 that same evening experiencing no any enemy contact. Our resting place was Camp Hughie.

IV. Chapter 4: Getting to and Establishing Operations in Jalalabad

We started our in-processing by reporting the Camp Mayor's office run by the US Navy. Yes, that's right... the US Navy! A Lieutenant Commander and a Senior Chief Petty Officer were in charge of the camp security, logistics, housing, and operations all together, and they performed their mission very well. They were very organized.

Camp Hughie is the home to a good number of logistics Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines most of which whom are assigned either directly to the ETT or the Brigade Staff and Support for the ETT that is assigned to the 2nd BDE ANA HQs. 2nd BDE HQs is located just outside the Camp Hughie Compound in walking distance, all on a secure compound. The following morning after breakfast we proceeded to the ANA BDE HQs to introduce ourselves to both the ETT Staff and then the ANA Command and Staff. My impression of the ANA BDE Commander Mentor, Marine LtCol Terlizzi, they were well in control of the staff effort to support the 2nd ANA BDE and its operations in their AO. Their AO was huge! The ANA BDE CSM was being mentored by two US Army CSMs both whom were National Guard and doing very well. As I understand it, if you are to be a kandak, brigade, corps, or higher CSM you had to be able to speak some English and have had some formal schooling.

From the seventh to the 12th of September we painstakingly conducted our formal interviews of the entire ANA 2nd BDE Command & Staff, and after talking at length with the ETT Staff came to some very disturbing conclusions. The most disturbing was that the ANA BDE Commander was not the professional commander some thought. None the less, the information we gathered from him and the staff was discussed directly with the ETT Team Leader, LtCol Terlizzi, who already suspected as much and was happy for the outside observation. We consolidated our initial assessment and prepared for another trip out to Asadabad to visit the 1st Kandak in their AO. We would return to this headquarters to ask a few more questions that came up from members of higher commands as to the conduct of said ANA commander.

The results of that assessment would be rolled up into the overall brigade assessment and dispatched directly to the ANA 201st Corps ETT Commander and the VTT Team Leader. While there in Jalalabad we had the opportunity to visit the US Airfield in Jalalabad as well as one of the keys meeting places for the missing Osama Bin Laden.

V. Chapter 5: Movement to and Settling In Asadabad

The BDE ETT Team Leader and CSM were eager to get out to the Asadabad AO so we convoyed with them on the 13th of September to Camp Fiaz, right on the mouth of the Pech and Kunar Rivers and Pech Valley- a beautiful and dangerous place often referred to as “Enemy Central”. Camp Fiaz is the Log base for Maintenance and Medical support for the ANA. Of course, there were US personnel there too. The only location away from Kabul, at that time, that had Dental service for ANA. Camp Fiaz rests in the heart of Asadabad in the Kunar Province, one of the Provinces bordering the country of Pakistan. We got acquainted with the site and refueled at another undisclosed US location and moved onto our final eastern destination, Camp Joyce. Camp Joyce is the home for the 2nd BDE, 1st ANA Kandak minus. Meaning, that one of the kandak’s companies is forward deployed. And they were! An ANA company was forward deployed with a platoon from D Co 1-26th IN, who was also stationed there at the Camp Joyce. D Co secured the Forward Operating Base (FOB) and partnered with the 1st Kandak in planning and conducting Missions in their AO.

We met with the ANA Kandak Commander, CSM, and their Staff and were quite impressed with their knowledge of COIN and their conduct of commanding and operating in that AO. The ANA commander was by far, the best Afghan commander I met throughout my tenure in Afghanistan. We sat through a few of his meetings and witnessed a few formations where he demonstrated that he truly cared for the Soldiers and was a competent infantry commander. We also met with the Delta Company Commander, CPT Davis and his first sergeant.

I spent just short of a week with D 1/26 IN, 13-17 September 2008, in which I developed a good rapport with the CPT Davis and his ISG. Their unit was collocated with the 1st Kandak ETT there on the FOB. I found a mutually supportive professional working relationship between these two elements and the ANA Kandak. CPT Davis made a great effort to conduct COIN Operations but had been more engaged in kinetic operations on a daily basis. His unit was separated by some distance as two platoons and another platoon occupy their own separate Combat Out-Posts (COPs). CPT Davis was educated in COIN doctrine and wants to be more methodical in his execution. The unit’s mission was to seek out individuals through company size groups of insurgent fighters within his vast AO, and they were very busy doing just that.

Occasionally he had the opportunity to conduct Information Operations (IO) and Humanitarian Assistance (HA) operations to build rapport and gather intelligence and had been mildly successful. Mildly successful meaning, the conduct of these missions weren't bringing in any great information to produce intelligence to operate off of.

CPT Davis also had the mission to somewhat overwatch the Afghan Border Patrol (ABP) in his AO. In doing so he discovered there was a border dispute between the ABP and the Pakistani Frontier Corps. A few attempts had failed at bringing the situation to a close when it was decided that he and the S3 from the 1-26 IN, accompanied by me and a few others to provide security, would address this issue personally at the border. The location was the Afghan Pakistan border crossing at Nawa Pass. While there, the ABP and the Pakistani Military (Pak Mil) commanders got together with the 1-26 IN S3 and CPT Davis and surveyed the site in question. Once finished, they agreed to a line on the ground to where they each may erect their border patrol stations without conflict. After the weather cleared a bit we all flew back to Camp Joyce and had dinner. During the time we spent at Camp Joyce we received rockets into and around the FOB two times, totaling five rockets, from a long distance away up in the mountains near the border of Pakistan. No injuries... luckily!

The realization hit me, 1st Kandak was much further along in their developmental process than most others due to their eagerness to perform well, along with the quality mentorship provided by the local ETT. Three other reasons they were successful in their development; one, the local coalition Company Commander leads his unit to understand, plan, prepare, and execute Combat operations with the ANA/ANP/ABP. Two, it's a hotbed of insurgent and criminal activity which has become a forcing function to perform. And three, the Kandak CDR has been a CDR for about five years.

Following our interviews with the Kandak Commander, his staff, and two of his commanders we compiled a very positive report recommending a very high rating.

VI. Chapter 6: The Return to Jalalabad and the Assessment

We moved from Asadabad back to Jalalabad on the 18th of September to finish our assessment of the brigade headquarters. Upon review, I had made some assessments of my own: ANA Commanders at all levels are aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining relations with the local populace and providing needed infrastructure upgrades and development. They also understand the need to kill or capture insurgents. There was little organic emphasis on gathering information for intelligence operations. When information was gathered it was passed to the S2 where there was NO analysis conducted and what little info gathered was passed to the S3 or the Operations Officer to determine its value. The majority of the operations in the Kunar Province are kinetic in nature with HA missions used to bolster local ANA/ANP/ABP confidence. ANA Sergeants Major across the board have a limited understanding of COIN doctrine and are primarily focused on training, FOB, and kinetic operations. They are, to Afghan standards, fairly well educated and maintain a very good rapport with their Commanders. ANA Sergeants take orders from senior officers and make good attempts at taking responsibility in light of the fact that their execution is neither wholly accepted and appreciated nor not trusted at all. Regarding the latter, those officers who predominantly had been trained by or served under the Soviets, more often than not, do NOT trust NCOs and see them as a threat to their position and authority. On the other hand, young recently trained or recently promoted officers see the value of their presence and have learned to empower their NCOs. Sergeants understand little about the conduct of full spectrum COIN Operations and are purely, offensively, kinetically focused. Soldiers, as a whole, are minions and are sheer executors of higher HQ's orders.

VII. Chapter 7: Returning to Kabul

From the 18th to the 25th of September we completed our assessment of the BDE HQs and prepared our equipment for our return back to Camp Julien. On the morning of the 26th of September we made our way back to Kabul stopping only to fuel and eat at COP China. Upon our return we briefed the VTT Team Chief, COL Baer, on our findings and arranged for our convoy back to Camp Julien. Once back, I reflected on some Observations, Insights, and Lessons Learned (OILLS).

A. Coalition Forces in the provinces I visited were executing the tasks that Commanders directed. The Anti-Afghan Forces (AAF) and insurgents occupied only the areas that the ANA and Coalition Forces allowed. In most areas in the Kunar province, anti-afghan/anti-coalition forces are struggling to gain, much less maintain, ground- save the high and extremely difficult to traverse terrain.

B. VTT validation at the brigade and kandak level is a grand opportunity to get the pulse of the unit with respect to COIN Operations. The VTT Validation and Assessment Checklists are divided-up amongst the assessment crew and the evaluation gets underway. One has as much time as he needs to accomplish the requisite tasks at hand. Once the interviews are complete the assessment team chief on the ground compiles the data on a master checklist and rough-final draft is reviewed and critiqued by the VTT Assessment team chief and the ETT team chief. If there are discrepancies, they are worked out on the spot and the Assessment is finalized. The final assessment is completed and the assessed unit commander is formally briefed by the assessment Team and the ETT Team Chief.

C. After using the VTT Assessment and Validation Checklist on those units, it's apparent that the motive of the assessment is to take a look at the unit as a whole and determine if the unit is capable of very general garrison, logistical, and basic military operations within the capability of the Afghan National Army. Very, very little of the assessment is dedicated to a counterinsurgency mission focus. The checklist subsequently was massaged to reflect the overall conduct of what should be their primary mission- to conduct counterinsurgent operations- both lethal and non-lethal. I believe their COIN focus could be observed through their commander's mission and intent statement. We may also begin to understand how their conducting COIN operations through the operations orders written by the S3 or Operations Officer. These portholes into the construct of their missions at the planning level will cast the necessary light to make assumptions about the focus of the units' effort toward COIN operations.

D. In the initial development of the "COIN Interview & Questionnaire" for Regional Instructors at CTC-A I failed to realize some critical points that must be asked when interviewing both Coalition units and ANSF i.e. "What is the Units Mission and the Commanders' Intent?" These are prime indicators of the direction the unit commander will take their units with respect to COIN.

E. Make contact with the Human Terrain Team (HTT) in the area of responsibility to gain fidelity of the population and their issues. They are a wealth of knowledge.

F. When I inquired about an ASCOPE to the different unit commanders and staffs not one had a completed, much less started, a detailed ASCOPE of their respective AO.

G. The push for a better counterinsurgency understanding is lacking. From my perspective, many US Army NCOs have never read FM 3-24 and have little understanding of the operational environment with respect to counterinsurgency doctrine. NCOs across the board from Corporal to Sergeant Major are still stuck in the cold war mindset. This mindset allows for NCO's to disengage from the local populace and ignore the very fundamentals of COIN. This is disconcerting. NCO's are the tip of the spear in this type of warfare. It's absolutely imperative that, at the very least, US NCOs are trained during their attendance to our NCOES. Other Coalition force NCOs notwithstanding! Then, theater COIN Training Centers in both Iraq and Afghanistan must be made available for SGTs and above to gain the regional perspective needed to be successful in their COIN endeavors.

Reference

FM 3-24.2, Tactics in Counterinsurgency. 15 December, 2006

Appendix A: COIN Operations Interview and Questionnaire

COIN Operations Interview and Questionnaire

1. Coalition Forces:

- a. What is your Mission?
- b. What is the Coalition Mission statement at the company, battalion, and Brigade level?
- c. What is the ANA Mission statement at the Kandak and BDE level?
- d. What missions have been conducted in accordance with the overall counterinsurgency operational plan?
- e. Have those missions been successful, how and why?
- f. What is the general enemy situation?
- g. What types of patrols are conducted by CF/ANA/ANP/ABP? For what purpose? Duration?
- h. What ratio of CF/ANA/ANP/ABP is on patrol at any one time?
- i. How often does CF/ANA/ANP/ABP stay out over night? For what purpose?
- j. What cities/towns/villages have been deliberately cleared and are being held by both the ANA and the ANP/ABP?
- k. If so, is there a deliberate operation planned to conduct intense infrastructure development and deliberate Build operations to build GIRoA capacity?
- l. Do the ANA conduct operations in conjunction with the ANP and vice versa?
- m. Do the CF partner with ANA on operations?
- n. Do their leaders get along professionally?
- o. Do they plan operations together?
- p. Who is the primary effort in the city/town/village, the ANA or the ANP?
- q. Are we successful in gathering intelligence in this AO?
- r. What are the lessons learned from gathering intelligence?
- s. Have the leaders of the insurgent organizations been identified and located?
- t. Who is/are the formal/informal power broker(s) in the AO?
- u. What are their political, insurgent, business, and/or criminal affiliations?
- v. Is there a deliberate ISAF coalition, ANA, ANP, ABP IO campaign?
- w. Is there a deliberate Insurgent, Criminal IO campaign?
- x. What is the focus of each IO campaign, and are they effective?
- y. How is the IO campaign is communicated, (Night letter, word of mouth, physical intimidation/acts)?
- z. How frequently does the CF interact with the local populace?
- aa. Does the CF/ANA/ANP/ABP have a long term plan for their AO?
- bb. Are either of these forces seen or perceived as corrupt?
- cc. Is there a drug problem inside the units/forces of the ANA/ANP/ABP?
- dd. Has an ASCOPE been done for the area of operation?
- ee. What is the province?
- ff. What are the districts, cities, towns, and villages in your AO?

Appendix A: COIN Operations Interview and Questionnaire, cont...

- gg. What are the considerations along the following lines of operations:
 - i. Political:
 - ii. Military
 - iii. Economic:
 - iv. Social:
 - v. Infrastructure:
 - vi. Information:
- hh. What are the economic conditions in this AO?
- ii. Have you conducted a Needs Assessment for your AO?
- jj. What other Government leaders or Government presence is in this AO?
- kk. How is the GIROA received in this area?
- ll. Are there efforts to build up the local government in the area?
- mm. Have Shura's or Jirga's been held to foster a positive relationship with the communities/villages in your AO?
- nn. What is the accepted local rule of law?
- oo. Is it being enforced?
- pp. What's the ethnic, tribal, religious breakdown in the AO?
- qq. Are there any ethnic, religious, or tribal tensions?

2. Afghan National Security Force (ANSF):

- a. What is your Mission?
- b. What is the ANA Mission statement at the Kandak and BDE level?
- c. What missions have been conducted in accordance with the overall counterinsurgency operational plan?
- d. Have those missions been successful, how and why?
- e. What is the general enemy situation?
- f. What types of patrols are conducted by CF/ANA/ANP/ABP? For what purpose? Duration?
- g. What ratio of CF/ANA/ANP/ABP is on patrol at any one time?
- h. How often does CF/ANA/ANP/ABP stay out over night? For what purpose?
- i. What cities/towns/villages have been deliberately cleared and are being held by both the ANA and the ANP/ABP?
- j. If so, is there a deliberate operation planned to conduct intense infrastructure development and deliberate Build operations to build GIROA capacity?
- k. Do the ANA conduct operations in conjunction with the ANP and vice versa?
- l. Do the CF partner with ANA on operations?
- m. Do they plan operations together?
- n. Who is the primary effort in the city/town/village, the ANA or the ANP?
- o. Are we successful in gathering intelligence in this AO?
- p. What are the lessons learned from gathering intelligence?
- q. Have the leaders of the insurgent organizations been identified and located?
- r. Who is/are the formal/informal power broker(s) in the AO?
- s. What are their political, insurgent, business, and/or criminal affiliations?

Appendix A: COIN Operations Interview and Questionnaire, cont...

- t. Is there a deliberate ISAF coalition, ANA, ANP, ABP IO campaign?
- u. Is there a deliberate Insurgent, Criminal IO campaign?
- v. What is the focus of each IO campaign, and are they effective?
- w. How is the IO campaign is communicated, (Night letter, word of mouth, physical intimidation/acts)?
- x. Does the CF/ANA/ANP/ABP have a long term plan for their AO?
- y. Has an ASCOPE been done for the area of operation?
- z. What are the considerations along the following lines of operations:
 - i. Political:
 - ii. Military
 - iii. Economic:
 - iv. Social:
 - v. Infrastructure:
 - vi. Information:
- aa. What are the economic conditions in this AO?
- bb. What other Government leaders or Government presence is in this AO?
- cc. How is the GIRoA received in this area?
- dd. Are there efforts to build up the local government in the area?
- ee. Have Shura's or Jirga's been held to foster a positive relationship with the communities/villages in your AO?
- ff. What is the accepted local rule of law?
- gg. Is it being enforced?
- hh. What's the ethnic, tribal, religious breakdown in the AO?
- ii. Are there any ethnic, religious, or tribal tensions?

3. GIRoA:

- a. What missions have been conducted in accordance with the overall counterinsurgency operational plan?
- b. Have those missions been successful, how and why?
- c. Who are the Governors of these areas?
- d. What other Government leaders or Government presence is in this AO?
- e. How is the GIRoA received in this area?
- f. Is there a deliberate operation planned to conduct intense infrastructure development and deliberate Build operations to build GIRoA capacity?
- g. Who is the primary effort in the city/town/village, the ANA or the ANP?
- h. Are either of these forces seen or perceived as corrupt?
- i. Are there efforts to build up the local government in the area?
- j. Have Shura's or Jirga's been held to foster a positive relationship with the communities/villages in your AO?
- k. Who is/are the formal/informal power broker(s) in the AO?
- l. What are their political, insurgent, business, and/or criminal affiliations?
- m. What is the accepted local rule of law?
- n. Is it being enforced?

Appendix A: COIN Operations Interview and Questionnaire, cont...

- o. What's the ethnic, tribal, religious breakdown in the AO?
- p. Are there any ethnic, religious, or tribal tensions?
- q. Have you conducted a Needs Assessment for your AO?

4. International Community/ NGO:

- a. What is your Mission?
- b. PRT's: What is their plan?
- c. What are the economic conditions in this AO?
- d. Is there an NGO/IGO presence in the AO?
- e. Who are the NGO's & IGO's in your AO?
- f. What is their plan for development?
- g. How do they relate, if at all, to the other GIRoA ministries such as IDLG, MRRD, etc.?
- h. How is it synchronized with CF/ANA/ANP/ABP?
- i. What are the considerations along the following lines of operations:
 - i. Political:
 - ii. Military
 - iii. Economic:
 - iv. Social:
 - v. Infrastructure:
 - vi. Information:
- j. How is the GIRoA received in this area?
- k. What Government leaders or Government presence is in this AO?
- l. Is there a deliberate operation planned to conduct intense infrastructure development and deliberate Build operations to build GIRoA capacity?
- m. Have Shura's or Jirga's been held to foster a positive relationship with the communities/villages in your AO?
- n. Who is/are the formal/informal power broker(s) in the AO?
- o. What are their political, insurgent, business, and/or criminal affiliations?
- p. What's the ethnic, tribal, religious breakdown in the AO?
- q. Are there any ethnic, religious, or tribal tensions?
- r. Have you conducted a Needs Assessment for your AO?