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Providing military support to post-conflict elections is a key task in stability operations. However, there is very little doctrine available to guide commanders and staffs in developing plans and operations to support the post-conflict election process. Using a case study on the successful 2004 Afghan presidential election as the basis, this paper examines the threats to the election process, proposes a conceptual framework for approaching the post-conflict election process, and examines operational lessons learned. The election process is presented as a series of seven stages and the role of coalition military forces in each stage is discussed.

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MILITARY SUPPORT TO POST-CONFLICT ELECTIONS:
APPLYING THE LESSONS OF THE
2004 AFGHAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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13 February 2006

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Abstract

Providing military support to post-conflict elections is a key task in stability operations. However, there is very little doctrine available to guide commanders and staffs in developing plans and operations to support the post-conflict election process. Using a case study on the successful 2004 Afghan presidential election as the basis, this paper examines the threats to the election process, proposes a conceptual framework for approaching the post-conflict election process, and examines operational lessons learned. The election process is presented as a series of seven stages and the role of coalition military forces in each stage is discussed.

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MILITARY SUPPORT TO POST-CONFLICT ELECTIONS:
APPLYING THE LESSONS OF THE 2004 AFGHAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

> *No major security incidents occurred during the Afghan presidential elections on 9 October 2004. This achievement was the result of intensified and coordinated efforts by the government and the international community to strengthen national police and armed forces. It also depended heavily on the contribution of the 18,000 strong multinational forces of the US-led Coalition present in Afghanistan.*[1]
>
> --United Nations Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit

The 2004 Afghan presidential election provides a successful case study for examining the role of military forces in post-conflict elections. Recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq highlight the significance of elections in transitioning governance to democratic institutions after conflict. "Elections are a key benchmark in any nation-building project, allowing failed states and divided societies to reconstitute a source of commonly accepted authority."[2] Yet, despite the important role of elections in stability operations, joint doctrine fails to provide commanders with an effective operational framework for planning and conducting election support missions. Providing effective support to an election process is a complex endeavor with unique challenges for the military. Future joint force commanders tasked with supporting election missions will require doctrine that can be used as a guide in defining their contribution to the election process. Utilizing the 2004 Afghan presidential election as a case study, this paper examines the major threats faced during the election process, recommends for inclusion in joint doctrine an operational framework for post-conflict elections, and discusses some of the key operational lessons learned for future election support missions.

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[1] United Nations, Peacekeeping Best Practices Section, The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned (New York: 2005), 5.
[2] James Dobbins, "Elections and Nation-building," (RAND Corporation Commentary) International Herald Tribune, 20 October 2004.

THREATS TO THE ELECTION PROCESS

For any military operation, understanding the enemy threat is essential. In election support missions, this principle is no less important. Threats to the election process can be diverse. They can range from threats posed by terrorists and insurgents to threats from discontented political and ethnic groups. The complex political environment that is characteristic of post-conflict scenarios can be a powder keg that an ill-timed or poorly run election can set off. It is, therefore, imperative that military forces conducting security operations, in addition to focusing on the terrorist and insurgent threats, stay closely tuned to political developments so forces can rapidly adjust to emergent crises as they develop. The situation in Afghanistan in 2004 provides an excellent case study for examining the diverse threats faced during post-conflict elections.

The threats to the success of the 2004 Afghan presidential election were primarily from two sources: (1) terrorist and insurgent groups, and (2) rogue Afghan militias and commanders.

The first category, terrorist and insurgent groups, threatened the election process through a range of violent activity. This activity included car bombings, firing of rockets, employment of roadside improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnapping, assassination, and intimidation. In Afghanistan in 2004, such terrorist action was conducted predominantly by Taliban loyalists, though al Qaeda foreign fighters and agents of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami (HIG) were also active. While these three comprised the main threat, there were also splinter radical groups sympathetic to their causes, such as Jaish-e Muslimeen

which kidnapped, and after four weeks released, three UN international staff members in

Kabul shortly after the presidential election in October 2004.[3]

While such groups did not pose a significant military threat to the Afghan

government and Coalition forces in a physical sense, their continued terrorist actions created

the perception, in the minds of the Afghan populace and the international community, of a

lack of security. Such a perception, over time, eroded support for the government and the

Coalition and caused frustration to build. In countrywide surveys conducted in 2004, most

Afghans considered security to be the number one problem facing the country.[4]

For international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs),

the perception of a failed security environment in Afghanistan was a grave concern and

threatened to bring the election process to a halt. For example, the killing of five *Medecins*

Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) workers in Badghis Province in June 2004, led to

that organization's withdrawal from Afghanistan a month later.[5] Their withdrawal had the

potential to precipitate a retreat of NGOs and IOs from Afghanistan. Consequently, with the

election logistics and operations riding predominantly on UN infrastructure, the UN's

perception of security was a primary concern for Coalition commanders throughout the

election time period. As a result, cooperation between the UN, the Coalition and the NATO-

led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) increased with the implementation of

confidence building measures to improve the security of UN facilities and personnel. Such

measures included increased liaison, more closely coordinated security efforts, and refined

quick response procedures for crisis situations. These efforts to bolster the will of the

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[3] Seth Jones and others, <u>Establishing Law and Order After Conflict</u> (USA: RAND Corporation, 2005), 91.
[4] Jones, 93.
[5] Jones, 94.

international community were coupled with offensive counterinsurgency efforts to disrupt terrorist and insurgent leadership and reduce their effectiveness.

In 2004, however, the threat to Afghanistan's future presented by Afghan militias exceeded that of the terrorist and insurgent groups. After the fall of the Taliban, the various Afghan militias were, in essence, federalized into the Afghan Militia Force (AMF). Many of the AMF leaders, commonly referred to in the media as warlords, were very powerful and influential figures in Afghan domestic politics. In their various home territories, they wielded an influence far greater than that of the central government. During the months prior to the election, disputes between warlords and against the transitional national government posed a grave risk of throwing parts of the country into civil war. One UN analysis from that time described this threat:

> *…the danger is that the question of national unity may at any time take a back seat in favor of parochial interests and local hegemonies. A number of autonomous actors, ranging from Ismail Khan* [governor of Herat] *to Gul Agha, the governor of Kandahar, to the Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, and a host of others who have their own personalized armies and income, are in a position to frustrate or undermine the efforts of any central authority to create a national system of governance.*[6]

From March through October 2004, as the elections neared, political maneuverings by influential militia leaders sparked factional fighting that threatened to destabilize the country and disrupt the election process. This fighting repeatedly drew Afghan and Coalition forces away from counterinsurgency efforts to conduct peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. The forces employed in quelling these factional disputes consisted primarily of Afghan National Army (ANA) battalions, referred to as *kandaks.* The employment of ANA *kandaks* was a symbolic effort to demonstrate the legitimacy of the central government.

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[6] Newman, Edward and Roland Rich, ed., The UN Role in Promoting Democracy: Between Ideals and Reality (New York: 2004), 333.

However, the *kandaks* were frequently backed up by US conventional and special operations forces and air power. As these operations were frequently in areas far removed from the southern provinces along the Pakistan border, which was the geographic focus of Coalition counterinsurgency efforts, such commitments to peacekeeping reduced the number of Afghan and Coalition forces fighting the Taliban and al Qaeda. But, with the critical and symbolic national elections on the horizon, it was clearly not in US interests to see Afghanistan step back into civil war. Also, despite close US affiliations with some of these regional leaders, the US clearly had to take the side of President Karzai in any factional dispute in order to support the rule of law and the authority of the central government. Therefore, while Coalition military commanders were loath to commit forces to such endeavors, it was clearly a political imperative to do so whenever the stability of the central government, and thereby the election process, was threatened.

The most significant of these crises occurred from August 14-17, 2004, when fighting broke out between Herat Governor Ismail Khan and his rival Amanullah Khan in the western provinces of Herat and Badghis. To stabilize the situation, three ANA *kandaks,* US special forces and elements of a US cavalry squadron were deployed to the airfield at Shindand and to the city of Herat. Most of the force literally moved overnight in a rapid deployment that clearly demonstrated the ANA's maturing capabilities and the commitment of Coalition forces to supporting the Karzai government.[7] This show of force coupled with significant diplomatic maneuvering succeeded in resolving the dispute, though it subsequently required the indefinite commitment of ANA and Coalition forces in the western provinces for peacekeeping. This crisis was emblematic of the threat factional fighting posed to the Afghan

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[7] William Wynn, Major, US Army, "Deploying to Shindand with the Afghan National Army." <u>Commentary on Defend America News</u>. 31 August 2004. <<u>http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/aug2004/a083104a.html</u>> [31 January 2006]

security environment. The instability caused by such fighting disrupted election preparation activities and presented the fledgling Karzai government with a significant test of authority.[8]

Because of the threat these militias posed to Afghanistan's future, the UN, in cooperation with the Afghan government, established the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program with the goal of completely dismantling the militia forces. Prior to the presidential election, great emphasis was placed on advancing the DDR program, as described in the following excerpt from a DDR newsletter published by the UN:

> *Specified targets for DDR before the elections,* (included) *demobilization of at least 40 percent of the estimated 100,000 ex-combatants and cantonment of all heavy weapons. This was intended to send a signal of improved security and of political liberalization, since most areas of Afghanistan were still controlled by political military factions. Without some degree of demilitarization, those factions could effectively deny political access to opposing parties and thereby damage the credibility of the elections process.*[9]

However, the realities of the security demands coupled with passive resistance on the part of some AMF commanders prevented the complete dismantling of the AMF. Until the ANA and the Afghan National Police (ANP) could be fully established, in many areas the AMF represented the only form of security and law enforcement available to the local populace. In 2004, the AMF numbered between 50,000 and 100,000.[10] By the presidential election, only about 20,700 AMF troops had completed the DDR process.[11] The AMF, therefore, as a

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[8] Other such crises, albeit on a smaller scale and for a variety of other reasons, also occurred in Chagcharan, Maimana, Faizabad and Mazar-e-Sharif during the summer and fall of 2004. Each required the deployment of ANA and Coalition or ISAF forces. Another example of controversial political maneuvering involving militia leaders was Karzai's decision to select Ambassador Massoud as one of his vice presidential candidates over Defense Minister Fahim Khan. This move risked putting Karzai in conflict with the most powerful militia leader in the country. Fahim Khan, however, chose to counter this move by joining with one of the rival presidential candidates. Yet another such test occurred when President Karzai decided to marginalize powerful militia leaders by ordering them to give up militia command for political postings within the government.
[9] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 6.
[10] The actual number is closer to the lower figure as the AMF units are paid by the central government based on the number of personnel listed on their rolls, thus giving cause for AMF commanders to inflate their numbers. Source: United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA), Afghan New Beginnings Program (ANBP), UN Development Program (UNDP), DDR Newsletter, Issue Number 8, (Afghanistan: 2004), 2.
[11] UNAMA, ANBP, UNDP, DDR Newsletter, Issue Number 10, (Afghanistan: 2004), 1-4.

whole, represented the largest security presence in Afghanistan during the time of the election. Thus, while they were a prime cause of instability, they were at the same time essential for security operations throughout the country. In light of that, AMF issues had to be dealt with very carefully to ensure that the security situation throughout the country was not inadvertently unraveled.

AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR POST-CONFLICT ELECTIONS

Military support to post-conflict elections encompasses a very specific mission set within stability operations.[12] The recently published DoD Directive 3000.05 on stability operations specifically states that developing "representative governmental institutions" is one of the key tasks for the military in post-conflict operations.[13] As elections are the means for establishing a democratic government, supporting elections is a critical mission for military forces. Yet, the election process is accomplished over a series of stages which can take years to complete, and the involvement of the military varies throughout. Therefore, it is important to define the role of military forces in each stage of the election process so that military efforts can be efficiently directed.

Elections are inherently political events and the primary role of military forces throughout the election process in a post-conflict nation-building effort is that of an enabler. Military forces enable elections by establishing a secure environment so that the elections can be conducted. This is achieved by a careful and flexible pursuit of three objectives: (1) defeating threats, (2) enhancing indigenous security force capabilities, and (3) directly supporting the election process. In establishing a secure environment, the majority of military

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[12] Headquarters, Department of the Army, <u>Peace Operations</u>, FM 3-07.31 (Virginia: 2003), 102 (VI-4).
[13] Department of Defense, <u>Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations</u>, DoDD 3000.05 (Washington D.C.: 2005), 2.

efforts are directed towards the first two objectives. It is the third objective that lacks

discussion in joint doctrine and is often little understood. It is, therefore, the focus of this

section.

The following is presented as an operational framework for understanding the

election process and the role of military forces throughout. Direct support to elections varies

depending on the stage of the election being supported. The seven stages below are proposed

as the framework for presenting the election process in joint doctrine:

> *Stage 1: Voter Registration*
> *Stage 2: Establishment of the Legal Framework*
> *Stage 3: Electoral System and Political Party Preparations*
> *Stage 4: Distribution of Election Materials*
> *Stage 5: Conduct of Voting*
> *Stage 6: Collection and Counting of Ballots*
> *Stage 7: Announcement of Results and Establishment of Officials*

While the military should not be directly involved in the actual mechanics of each of these

stages,[14] it is critical that the military be aware of the ongoing process so that operations can

be synchronized with election activities and directly contribute to their success. The

following sections discuss key aspects of each stage of the election process and the

corresponding role of military forces (see Appendix A for a summary in table form). In

practice, the first three stages overlap. However, they are separated in this operational

framework due to their distinctly different objectives and the varying role of military forces.

Stage 1: Voter Registration. One of the first requirements in any election process is

the registration of the voting population. This serves many purposes but is particularly

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[14] This principle is specifically outlined in <u>Peace Operations</u>, p. VI-5. This reference addresses the role of military forces with respect to that of the host nation's government: "(1) The HN is responsible for free and fair elections. (2) The electorate must feel that these elections are under the control of their own country. (3) The HN populace should see the international community assisting the process, not running it. (4) The military is not responsible for conducting elections."

critical for determining the logistical requirements of the election: the locations of polling

centers, the quantities of election materials and the number of election workers required. As

United Nations (UN) reports on electoral support missions describe, compiling this database

is one of the most arduous tasks of the election process:

> "*...nearly all post-conflict elections take place in an environment where basic census and other records are missing. The construction of a comprehensive register of voters is thus often a first step in the bureaucratic process of state-building. It is also an enormously time-consuming, logistically challenging, and resource-intensive process.*"[15]

In Afghanistan, voter registration began in December 2003 and continued throughout

the spring and summer of 2004. Civilian Afghan and UN election officials had the

tremendous task of establishing the organization and infrastructure to carry out voter

registration. The UN after-action report on the presidential election described this effort:

> "*thirty-four provincial offices... for the management of 9,200 teams consisting of approximately 36,800 staff members. Over 5,000 registration sites were opened... Registration teams sometimes traveled more than two days on donkeys to reach remote locations. Coalition forces air-lifted elections registration teams into inaccessible or insecure areas.*" [16]

For most of Afghanistan's low threat provinces, voter registration was conducted by

election officials independent of Coalition forces. However, in the high threat provinces,

voter registration was timed to coincide with Coalition security operations. Operation

MOUNTAIN STORM, followed by Operation LIGHTNING RESOLVE, were two major

operations conducted by Coalition military forces to support the election process. These

operations primarily focused on the defeat of terrorist and insurgent threats and on the

reconstruction of the Afghan security apparatus. The priority for reconstruction was to

enhance and expand the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA).

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[15] Newman, 120.
[16] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 14.

It was recognized that they would play a vital role in securing the upcoming election, enhancing its legitimacy and improving the national government's credibility.[17] But, these operations also included significant direct support to voter registration efforts. This support included synchronized area security operations, aviation transportation assistance to gain access to dangerous or remote areas, and coordination and liaison with election planners. As a result of these coordinated efforts, over 10.5 million voters were registered in a nine month time period.[18]

Stage 2: Establishment of the Legal Framework. In a constitutional democracy, the structure of the government, the rules for the formation of political parties, and the procedures for the conduct of an election are all established in two essential documents that define the legal framework for the election. These two documents are the constitution and the electoral law. Of these, the constitution is foundational:

> "*The constitution is the blueprint for the government and elections are the mechanism for forming that government. The constitution must set out sustainable arrangements for power sharing, and must be seen as credible by the electorate and owned by them through participatory mechanisms.*"[19]

In Afghanistan, the Constitutional Loya Jirga, a traditional Afghan Grand Council with nationwide representation, was the credible, participatory mechanism that met from

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[17] "Whenever practicable, the larger portion of the military and police duties required to guarantee an impartial election should be provided by the native military organization. This force should be employed to its maximum capacity before employing United States forces. The display of United States armed forces at or near the polling places is kept to a minimum in order to avoid the charge that the Government of the United States has influenced the election, or placed favored candidates in office by the employment of military forces. However, the safety of the Electoral Mission personnel must be considered at all times. The use of the native military organization places the responsibility for law and order where it properly belongs. It also tends to give the electorate the impression that the election is being conducted under the control of their own country. Care must be exercised to prevent the native military organization and individuals composing that organization from exhibiting any partiality. There cannot be a 'free and fair' election if the use of the native constabulary degenerates into a partisan display of force." Source: US Marine Corps, Small Wars Manual (Quantico: 1940), 14-6.

[18] Actual number was 10,567,834 registered voters. The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 14.

[19] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 5.

December 2003 through January 2004 to develop and ratify the Afghan Constitution. Following this, the Afghan Electoral Law was signed on May 27, 2004. These two documents were particularly important for planning military support to the elections as they outlined the various election requirements and established the election timeline. They were critical components of the commander's estimate of the situation. For example, some of the more important features were the designation of a 90 day time period from the announcement of elections to election day, designation of a 30 day political campaigning period, and the establishment of a requirement for a run-off election in case one candidate failed to receive a majority vote.[20]

Another example of the importance of these documents was highlighted in their direction to convene new elections in the event of a candidate's death. The following passage from the Afghan Constitution created a potential complication in election planning:

> "*In case of death of one of the candidates during the first or second round, after the elections or prior to the announcement of the results of elections, new elections shall be held in accordance with the provisions of law.*"[21]

All interested parties in the election (political and military) became concerned that anyone wishing to disrupt the election process simply had to assassinate one of the 18 candidates and the whole election timetable would have to be restarted per constitutional law. It was later interpreted that this only applied in a post-election day context and only if it involved one of the leading contenders. During the election, this interpretation fortunately was not tested.

President Karzai announced the commencement of the election process on July 9, 2004, thereby setting Election Day as October 9th, 90 days later in accordance with the law. Coalition operations, in direct support of this stage, consisted only of security augmentation

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[20] Government of Afghanistan, <u>Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan</u> (Afghanistan: 2004).
[21] <u>Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan</u>, Article 61.

to the Constitutional Loya Jirga. Outside of that support, Coalition activities were focused on the continuation of operations that emphasized the defeat of threats and the expansion of Afghan security forces.

Stage 3: Electoral System and Political Party Preparations. This stage of the election process is primarily aimed at establishing the political and electoral framework for the election. This involves the creation of an electoral management commission, the raising of funds from donor countries, the recruitment and training of election workers, the determination of voting districts, the locations of polling centers, the formation of political parties, the conduct of civic education efforts, the determination of political candidates, and the conduct of election campaigning by candidates and parties. Due to its highly political nature, the military has almost no direct involvement in this stage outside that of shaping the overall security environment in the country. However, it is critical for the military to establish coordination mechanisms with key electoral officials as election planning is ongoing throughout this process.

In July 2003, the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA)[22] and the Government of Afghanistan established the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) to be the policy-making authority for all aspects of the elections. JEMB was the organization charged with conducting elections consistent with Afghan electoral law, the Afghan constitution, and international election standards. The manning of the JEMB consisted of 13 Afghan and UN electoral experts. To plan and conduct the election, the JEMB established a

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[22] UNAMA was established by UNSC Resolution 1401 (28 March 2002). The UN "was entrusted with a pivotal role to establish a kind of democratic order which Afghanistan had never had, but which it would need to have if the Afghan people were to have a viable future within a properly governed, stable, and securely reconstructed modern state. Rightly, no UN Security Council resolution specified the kind of democracy Afghanistan should have, but Resolution 1378, adopted on 14 November 2001, authorized the United Nations to play a "central role" in helping the Afghan people to establish a transitional administration for the formation of a new government." Source: Newman, 326.

Secretariat (JEMBS) as its operational branch.[23] The JEMBS consisted of 6000 Afghan and 425 international workers in the national office, eight regional and 34 provincial offices.[24] Running the presidential election required the hiring of over 120,000 additional election workers spread throughout the country at 4,898 polling centers.[25]

A key element of this stage is the formation of political parties. Sufficient time and opportunity has to be allowed to enable political parties to form and come into compliance with the constitution and electoral law. During the summer of 2004, nearly 50 political parties were registered with the JEMB. For the presidential election, however, the final number of candidates put forward by these parties was 18.

From a military command and control perspective, the JEMBS was the lead organization for election operations and planning. Detailed planning for the final stages of the election process occurred during this stage. Meanwhile, Coalition military activities continued to focus on security reconstruction efforts, peacekeeping operations and offensive operations against terrorist and insurgent groups.

During the election campaigning time period, candidate security was a prime concern. However, it was not a mission that Coalition forces assumed, both for feasibility and legitimacy considerations. Security for President Karzai was provided by the Afghan presidential protective detail—trained and reinforced by US Department of State (DoS) contractors and occasionally augmented by US forces. Security for the other candidates in the election was provided by their own political parties. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) offered to

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[23] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 10.
[24] "Rebuilding Afghanistan." The White House, Policies in Focus.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/afghanistan/#joint%20electoral> [31 January 2006].
[25] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 17.

provide each candidate with a small protective detail, however the majority opted to hire their own.[26]

Stage 4: Distribution of Election Materials. The distribution of election materials marks a significant shift into high gear for election operations. This begins the final countdown to Election Day and is an intense logistics effort that requires assistance from military forces.[27] The distribution effort involves two categories of materials: sensitive (ballot papers and ink bottles) and non-sensitive (empty ballot boxes, polling screens, and furniture).

The distribution of these materials in Afghanistan was conducted in two waves, with non-sensitive materials being moved first. To mitigate against election fraud, ballots were kept secured in central locations as long as possible. They were then distributed along a hub and spokes concept on a timetable that distributed ballots to polling centers just in time for Election Day. With the country organized into eight regions, all the material was pushed from Kabul to each regional center and then onward down the electoral chain from there "to province centers and ultimately to polling centers in districts."[28] All of the material had to be distributed to nearly 5000 polling centers throughout the country, to include some deep in the mountains only accessible by helicopter or donkey.

Coalition military forces provided very limited support in the distribution of non-sensitive materials. However, the distribution of the sensitive ballot papers received close attention and tight security. Each ballot convoy that departed Kabul contained an entire region's worth of ballots—numbering in the millions. These regional convoys were identified as a critical vulnerability by the Coalition and thus needed protection. Had one of them been

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[26] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 20-21.
[27] Peace Operations, VI-6.
[28] Joint Electoral Management Body, 2004 Afghanistan General Election Operational Plan Outline (Afghanistan: 2004), 46.

lost, it would have delayed the elections as only a very small reserve of ballot papers was retained in Kabul. Coalition air and ground forces in conjunction with Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) protected some of these convoys.[29] Additionally, the Coalition flew helicopter and C-130 sorties to distribute ballots directly to some of the more inaccessible voting districts.

Stage 5: Conduct of Voting. The actual Election Day is the seminal event of the election process. Due to the voting population's vulnerability to attack, it is also the most critical stage when election and security operations must be closely synchronized. The Marine Corps' Small Wars Manual, written over sixty years ago, still holds true in its clear articulation of the role of security forces during this stage of the election process:

> "*Military and police forces are employed to prevent violence to personnel conducting the elections at voting booths, to prevent the destruction or seizure of ballots and electoral records, and for general protection of the populace from guerrilla activities. Protection is furnished the inhabitants in towns, in cities, and along lines of communication in order that registrants and voters may not be prevented from registering or voting due to threats of bodily violence while proceeding to and from registration and polling places.*"[30]

For all security forces in Afghanistan—both Afghan and Coalition—Election Day and the days immediately before and afterward constituted a time period of surge operations to establish presence and area security dominance in all key population centers. "Security measures were put in place to facilitate the protection of the polling sites, the 120,000 election workers and up to 10.5 million voters."[31] JEMB's goal was to have six policemen at every polling center to provide immediate physical security for election workers, voters and

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[29] For the remote region of Herat, the Coalition provided C-130 support to JEMB to lift the ballots directly there from Kabul, thereby saving them the risky four or five day journey around the Ring Road. In this instance, JEMB could not afford to contract aircraft for the trip and had instead opted for the more economical journey by truck. The Coalition, however, changed that plan since it was more economical for the Coalition to fly it themselves than to secure it for the entire journey by ground.

[30] Small Wars Manual, 14-5.

[31] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 17.

ballots. In addition to establishing presence at polling centers, a combination of police and military security measures were put into effect throughout all major population centers to enhance overall security. Such measures included dismounted patrols, mounted patrols, vehicle check points, aircraft overflights and the establishment of multiple quick reaction forces. Due to the desire to project the image of an *Afghan* election, indigenous forces were extensively employed to conduct these security missions.

ANA *kandaks* were the key indigenous security force throughout the whole election time period. As a multi-ethnic Afghan force, the *kandaks* represented the power of the national government and the hope of a new Afghanistan in which all ethnicities could get along. As such, *kandaks* were usually popularly received by the local people and were in high demand by both the Afghan government and Coalition commanders. As election security planning progressed, the ANA were extensively incorporated due to their effectiveness and the Afghan identity they provided to the elections. For the 2004 presidential election, the ANA fielded 11 *kandaks* totaling 11,800 troops. These were dispersed throughout Afghanistan to the key population centers and potential hot spots.

In election operations, however, police are preferred over military forces as they create greater legitimacy in demonstrating the rule of law. In Afghanistan, the number of trained Afghan National Police (ANP) had grown to around 25,000 by the time of the presidential election.[32] Though less capable than the ANA, the ANP were critical to election security operations. The Afghan Ministry of Interior also designated a newly graduated police academy class as the ANP's Rapid Action Division (RAD) to provide security

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[32] Insufficient communications, transportation and weapons frequently hampered the ANP. Furthermore, they were often at odds with local militia forces vying for the status as the "keeper of the peace."

exclusively for election related activities.[33] The RAD provided the JEMB with a flexible force at their disposal to provide security at sites they deemed of critical importance.

Coalition forces directly supported Afghan security forces in high threat areas and were postured to quickly react to potential crises in others. Combined security operations with ANA and ANP were conducted on key routes and in key population centers. On Election Day, all security forces in Afghanistan achieved area security dominance by maintaining a very active and overt presence. They also imposed strict force protection measures, such as the restriction of vehicular traffic around polling centers. These combined efforts proved extremely effective in deterring attacks and in defeating the ones that did occur.

Stage 6: Collection and Counting of Ballots. Once voting is completed, a second major logistical effort is initiated. This time, it is the reverse movement of ballots from polling centers to counting centers. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Election Observation Handbook, the scope of this effort varies depending on the location of the counting center:

> "*In most countries, the vote count takes place in individual polling stations. When ballots are not counted in the polling station but are instead transported to a central counting location, this produces extra problems of visibility and verification.*"[34]

In planning for the Afghan presidential election, there was debate at the JEMB Secretariat as to whether the counting would take place at the provincial or the regional level. Due to the limited number of international observers available to monitor counting, the

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[33] Sergeant First Class Darren Heusel, American Forces Press Service, "New Division Assists in Added Afghan Election Security," American Forces Information Service, 19 August 2004; http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Aug2004/n08192004_2004081905.html

[34] Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Election Observation Handbook, (Europe: 2005), 61.

decision was made to consolidate and count ballots at eight regional counting centers. This also simplified the security equation.

As polling centers closed on Election Day, the ballot boxes were secured by election workers and police. They were then transported to district and provincial collection points from which they were transported to regional counting centers where the votes were tallied. The majority of the collection process was completed within five days of the election, but in some cases, due to terrain and weather, the ballot boxes took over a week to reach the counting centers. All regional counting centers had an ANA and ANP presence for security.

Coalition forces during this stage focused on route security and on monitoring the security of the counting centers. In high threat areas, JEMB truck convoys moving ballots from provincial collection points to the regional counting centers were provided Coalition military escorts in addition to their Afghan police or army escorts. In some of the more isolated and remote areas, Coalition helicopters and C-130s assisted in collecting ballot boxes. Once all the ballot boxes had been accounted for, the tallying of the vote was completed.

Stage 7: Announcement of Result and Establishment of Officials. The final step in the election process is to announce the result and establish the newly elected officials in office. This stage is critical in that the election results must be viewed by the populace as legitimate. There is also a danger that election losers may resort to violence. The UN's after-action report on the 2004 Afghan presidential election comments on this potential threat:

> *In a post-conflict context, a presidential election is a divisive exercise in exclusion –of the losers – rather than inclusion. Its outcome is, therefore, more liable to be challenged and, potentially, overturned by violent means.*[35]

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[35] The 2004 Presidential Election in Afghanistan: Lessons Learned, 19

Military planners must, therefore, develop contingency plans for dealing with widespread violence by election losers.

In Afghanistan, on November 3, 2004, the counting process and probing of voting irregularities was completed and Hamid Karzai was announced as the winner of the election with 55.4% of the vote.[36] Despite some minor complaints, the election was widely viewed as being legitimate and all parties peacefully accepted the election results. Military contingency plans were not required to be implemented. President Karzai was then sworn into office in Kabul on December 7th for a five-year term as the first directly elected president in Afghanistan's history. Coalition forces led the effort in providing the tight security for the inauguration, which had about 150 foreign dignitaries in attendance, including Vice President Cheney and Secretary Rumsfeld.[37]

OPERATIONAL LESSONS LEARNED

This section discusses some of the critical operational lessons that were learned during the course of the 2004 Afghan presidential election. The most important lessons for future election support missions pertain to command and control, intelligence, logistics and rules of engagement.

Command and Control (C2). The key to success for C2 was the establishment of effective mechanisms to coordinate between the civilian and military organizations involved in the election. This was achieved through three primary means—the establishment of liaisons, regular planning meetings and an election security operations center.

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[36] "Karzai Declared Afghan President." BBC News South Asia. 3 November 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-2/hi/south_asia/3977677.stm> [31 January 2006].
[37] John Lancaster, "At Inauguration, Karzai Vows Action on Tough Issues," Washington Post, 8 December 2004.

First, the establishment of permanent military liaisons (LNOs) at JEMB's security office in Kabul and at each of the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) regional offices proved vital in facilitating coordination between Coalition forces and election officials. These LNOs were not only instrumental in coordination of election matters but were also critical for reconstruction efforts and in coordinating in-extremis support to IOs and NGOs when they came under attack. These LNOs were designated in May and June 2004 with varying degrees of success in their implementation. Typical of LNO lessons from other operations, these individuals must be dedicated full time to the mission— not a collateral duty, must have the communications equipment to do their job (satellite phones and email capability), and must receive the support of the various commands operating in their areas. The LNOs perform a vital role as a conduit for intelligence sharing and for synchronizing operations. This synchronizing function was particularly important during the voter registration operations and in the distribution and collection of sensitive election materials (Stages 1, 4 and 6 of the election process).

The second coordination mechanism was the establishment of a weekly meeting in Kabul by the JEMBS security director to facilitate coordination and planning between all the relevant security and political organizations. It was *the* meeting to attend for anyone interested in election planning. The coordination that occurred during this meeting was critical to obtaining unity of effort between the wide variety of organizations involved in the election.[38] The meeting covered all aspects of the election to include political developments, security concerns and logistics. As a side bar to this meeting, a select group convened to conduct intelligence sharing. This was a two-way street as the JEMB security office received

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[38] The Multi-Service Publication FM 3-07.31 Peace Operations (2003) is an excellent source for more detailed information on issues that should be discussed at a pre-election coordination meeting such as this one that occurred in Kabul. See page VI-7.

threat information from sources outside the Coalition's intelligence reporting architecture. These meetings began in June and continued right up to the election in October. Just as this meeting was vital to effect coordination at the national level, similar meetings occurred at the regional and even provincial levels—although with less regularity and with varying degrees of success in the different regions.

The third mechanism was the establishment of an Election Security Operations Center (ESOC) in Kabul. The ESOC stood up about two weeks prior to the election and was not disestablished until the ballot counting process, Stage 6, neared completion. All relevant security organizations were plugged into the ESOC. The ESOC became the 24-hour operations center for election operations with its scope of coordination extending beyond just security issues to all aspects of the election. A separate center was established to handle strategic policy issues as well as the media, thereby allowing the ESOC to focus on operations and coordination. The use of an unclassified chat system enabled real time reporting between the various organizations. The Combined Joint Task Force 76 (CJTF-76) liaison cell contained operations, intelligence, communications, logistics and aviation representatives. This robust CJTF cell had satellite communications which enabled it to push and pull information over the CJTF's secure chat. As reports through the UN chain came into the ESOC, the CJTF cell would transfer those reports from the unclassified chat to the secure chat so that all Coalition forces in country could obtain immediate visibility on those reports. NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) cell at the ESOC had a similar secure chat capability to coordinate with NATO forces. These systems at the ESOC facilitated real time coordination at the operational level between all commands in country.

The ESOC proved valuable throughout the election time period. It was so effective that all involved organizations unanimously recommended the establishment of a permanent coordination center. For the military organizations responsible for maintaining a secure environment, such an arrangement would enhance the visibility of UN and NGO activities on a real time basis. This visibility is critical for providing timely support to UN and NGO personnel during crises. While Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) maintained a degree of visibility of UN and NGO activities in some of the provinces, a comparable Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) at the operational level with permanent representation from the Coalition, the UN and other NGOs did not exist at that time in Afghanistan. This was in large part due to a lack of personnel by all parties. All agencies had to conduct surge operations in personnel just to support the ESOC during the election time period.

Intelligence. Sharing intelligence with JEMB security personnel was critical and procedures and mechanisms had to be established to facilitate this. As mentioned previously, the perception of a lack of security was a major concern to UN personnel. One means of alleviating UN concerns was the implementation of frequent intelligence sharing. This enabled CJTF representatives to paint an accurate threat picture for JEMB security personnel so that they could be more informed in their operational decision making. Likewise, the reporting and analysis of threats that came through UN channels served as a valuable source of information to supplement Coalition analysis. Establishing the mechanisms for sharing intelligence proved to be a challenge due to classification restrictions. This required the development of some specific guidance and procedures for sharing threat information with the UN.

Another intelligence related lesson learned was the tracking of presidential candidate movements. This proved nearly impossible to track. Coalition forces, and even Afghan security forces, had very little visibility of candidate campaign plans. Most reporting on political rallies came after they occurred. This was largely because the candidates did not trust anyone outside their closest supporters with information on their whereabouts or movements. This made it very difficult for Coalition forces to posture to respond to security challenges to the candidates. However, the 30 days of election campaigning passed with very few instances of violence or civil disturbances associated with candidates and political campaigning.[39]

Logistics. Obtaining authority and funding to provide aviation transportation assistance to JEMB was the biggest hurdle that had to be overcome in providing logistics support to the election. This was one a frustration for tactical level commanders who were trying to support JEMB personnel in their movements to or through dangerous areas. The hurdle was primarily a legal one since approval to fly civilian personnel, per DoD directives, required a waiver signed by the CJTF commander for each mission due to liability reasons. This restriction hamstrung efforts to support election officials as it was not adaptable to the fluid nature of election operations. JEMB personnel, therefore, could not take advantage of opportune military lift. With the UN only having five helicopters in Afghanistan, their air mobility was extremely limited and widely dispersed. In the meantime, the Coalition was flying numerous sorties into and out of some of the remote and dangerous areas and could have greatly facilitated JEMB's access into those areas. Coordinated flights did occur on many occasions when collaborative planning with JEMB could be done in advance. But, the

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[39] There was one instance when a rocket was fired at President Karzai's helicopter while he was making a campaign visit to Ghazni. After the attack occurred, the visit was aborted.

requirement to obtain CJTF level approval imposed a bureaucratic restriction that hindered commanders from being able to provide more responsive support.

Furthermore, launching dedicated aviation sorties in support of JEMB operations fell into a category of airlift outside the scope of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) mission and by law required DoS approval and reimbursement. This was most stringently applied to C-130 missions flown to move election materials or President Karzai. These missions were usually referred to the secretary level in Washington for approval. One interesting dimension to this funding issue was that DoS had already donated millions of dollars to JEMB to specifically support election logistics, such as the contracting of commercial aircraft. Yet, the reality on the ground was that contract aviation support was frequently not a viable option, and despite US donations to JEMB, they were still operating on a constrained budget. In the end, the authority and funding for the aviation missions in support of ballot movements was approved—though it required the submission to DoS of a detailed schedule of all aviation sorties. The weeks long effort required to produce such a schedule highlighted the fact that JEMB lacked a logistics planning staff. The few personnel they did have were frequently consumed by current operations. It was only when the CJTF provided a dedicated logistics planner to JEMB—just a few weeks out from the election—that a detailed distribution schedule was established and the Coalition support requirements assessed.

Rules of Engagement (ROE). As the election neared, the ROE needed to be modified and units repositioned and tasked to ensure that JEMB/UNAMA compounds were secure. On September 12, 2004, a rioting crowd in the city of Herat burned the compounds of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Development Program

(UNDP) in a sign of protest over Ismail Khan's removal as provincial governor.[40] The UN

personnel on these compounds were evacuated by US and ANA forces, but the compounds

were not protected. As a result, the infrastructure on these compounds, which had been the

hub for JEMB operations throughout the whole western region of the country, was destroyed.

Following this attack, the UN seriously considered suspending operations in the entire

western region. The UN was not only concerned with the safety of their personnel, but also

the loss of infrastructure which could not easily or quickly be replaced. With the presidential

election only a month away, a UN suspension of operations would have made a nation-wide

election impossible.

Following this crisis, to alleviate UN security concerns, Coalition forces were tasked

to ensure the security of all UN compounds within their areas of operation, defending them

with deadly force if required. While it could be argued that the ROE to support this already

existed, the CJTF command clarified the ROE in case there was any doubt. Furthermore, the

importance of this task relative to the success of the election process was communicated to

subordinate commanders. In some areas, this order resulted in Coalition forces being

repositioned to provide immediate security on UN compounds until Afghan forces could be

assigned this task. With this ROE, Coalition forces ran an increased risk of confronting a

rioting crowd. This potential led to a request by subordinate commanders for non-lethal

capabilities—something that most CJTF units were neither equipped nor trained for at that

time.

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[40] "Supporters of Former Afghan Governor Sack UN Office." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 12 September 2004. <www.rferl.org/featuresarticleprint/2004/09/b34df2f1-7269-4f27-8112-e341c8ad79fe.html> [31 January 2006]

CONCLUSIONS

Conducting a successful election support mission in a post-conflict scenario is vital to the establishment of a functioning democratic, legitimate government. The election process itself can take years to complete before a fully functioning government is established. In Afghanistan, this process took four years to complete. The Taliban were overthrown in November 2001, and it was not until three years later in December 2004, that the first presidential inauguration took place. Even that did not complete the formation of the government. The elections for Afghanistan's legislative branch, the National Assembly, were in September of 2005. The inaugural session of its elected members, thereby completing the formation of the national government, was on December 19, 2005, over four years after the fall of the Taliban.

Coalition military support to a post-conflict election process can be critical to its success. Without the establishment of a secure environment, an election is prone to failure. Rather than promoting the credibility of the government and the abilities of indigenous security forces, extensive violence at the polls can make the election demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the government. Consideration of the timing of the elections is critical to ensure that they are not conducted before the government and indigenous security forces are set up for success. That is not to say that all threats must be defeated prior to the election. The recent elections in both Iraq and Afghanistan highlight that elections can be conducted despite the threat posed by insurgent forces or discontented political parties. Through close planning with election officials and the synchronization of security efforts, the challenging election process can be completed successfully.

Key to this success is that military forces understand their role throughout all seven stages of the election process. The framework presented here is provided to assist military commanders and planners in crafting plans for supporting the various stages of a post-conflict election. It is recommended that this operational framework be incorporated into joint doctrine for post-conflict election support missions.

Election support missions are a critical component of stability operations. Given America's commitment to the advancement of democracy, additional missions in the future will undoubtedly occur. Therefore, joint doctrine for stability operations needs to incorporate an operational framework that captures the entire election process and defines the role of military forces. Doing so will ensure that the commanders and troops conducting these future operations are properly prepared to conduct them.

APPENDIX A

Table 1. Stages of the Election Process, Key Tasks, and the Role of Coalition Forces

ELECTION STAGE	KEY ELECTION TASKS	ROLE OF COALITION MILITARY FORCES
During ALL Stages		Maintain a secure environment through the following key tasks: ➢ Deter and defeat threats ➢ Rebuild, reform and expand indigenous security forces ➢ Coordinate and integrate security operations with indigenous security forces and election officials ➢ Secure key election facilities and teams with indigenous security forces
Stage 1: Voter Registration	➢ Register Voters	➢ Synchronize security operations with registration efforts ➢ Assist registration teams in gaining access to remote or high threat areas
Stage 2: Establishment of the Legal Framework	➢ Develop and Ratify Constitution ➢ Establish Electoral Law	➢ Secure government officials and facilities involved in developing the legal framework
Stage 3: Electoral System and Political Party Preparations	➢ Establish Electoral Commission ➢ Establish Electoral System (offices and polling centers) ➢ Recruit and Train Electoral Workers ➢ Register Political Parties ➢ Register Candidates ➢ Enable Political Campaigns ➢ Conduct civic education campaign	➢ Establish liaison with key election security and logistics planning nodes at the operational and tactical levels ➢ Monitor candidate security, campaign efforts and political agendas ➢ Support civic education campaign efforts in information operations campaign
Stage 4: Distribution of Election Materials	➢ Distribute non-sensitive election materials ➢ Distribute sensitive election materials	➢ Secure distribution of sensitive election materials ➢ Support election logistics efforts as required
Stage 5: Conduct of Voting	➢ Conduct voting	➢ Conduct area security dominance in key population centers and along lines of communication ➢ Establish quick reaction forces with coverage of key population centers
Stage 6: Collection and Counting of Ballots	➢ Collect ballots at counting centers ➢ Count ballots ➢ Resolve electoral disputes	➢ Secure major ballot box movements ➢ Secure counting centers ➢ Support election logistics efforts as required
Stage 7: Announcement of Result and Establishment of Officials	➢ Announce result ➢ Establish elected officials	➢ Be prepared to respond to reactions by election losers ➢ Secure the inauguration event

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