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Understanding Full Spectrum Operations

Insights from Operation *Enduring Freedom*



Soldier patrolling in Ganjgal, Afghanistan

55th Signal Company (Harold Fields)

By MICHAEL W. ISHERWOOD

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An ancient Afghan proverb reflects the commitment and mindset of Afghans today: *Ba solha goftan dunya aram namaisha*—The world will not find rest by just saying “peace.” As Afghans work to renew their nation, they understand that peace, stability, and an end to hostilities require more than just well-intentioned ideas; they take hard work. And they are making that commitment.

Afghans today are not alone. They are making this effort with the assistance of the Combined Joint Task Force–76 (CJTF–76) and the coalition. Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, together with a variety of Federal civilians and international partners, are working hand-in-hand with Afghan leaders and citizens to craft a better future. It is a story

that is unfolding far from the headlines. In fact, the coalition effort is succeeding despite headlines that suggest the opposite.

As the Southern European Task Force (SETAF) took the leadership role in CJTF–76 in the spring of 2005, it adopted a mission calling for “full spectrum operations.” In retrospect, this phrase has become somewhat of a cliché in most mission statements. The joint warfighters’ experiences in Operation *Enduring Freedom* from spring 2005 to spring 2006, however, provide insight into the diverse and demanding elements that define the phrase *full spectrum operations* today.

SETAF undertook our mission in the midst of a process that began in November and December 2001, when the Taliban was ousted from power. Afghanistan made spectacular progress in 2002: *The Loya Jirga* elected

a 2-year transitional government, the first Afghan National Army unit stood up, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization began the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). In 2003, the Afghan National Army (ANA) conducted its first combat venture, and the first Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) began operations. Equally important, the United Nations Children’s Fund reported that 6 million pupils returned to school. By 2004, ISAF expanded its mission into northern Afghanistan. The political process continued with the adoption of a new constitution, and the first presidential election was held.

Clearly, Afghanistan has momentum on a positive path, but it still faces a variety of challenges and threats. Opium production remains a problem. Farmers can make eight times more money raising poppies than wheat. Moreover, the infrastructure requires investment. Water, roads, and schools are among the elements in need. Good governance is

Colonel Michael W. Isherwood, USAF, is Deputy, Air Component Coordination Element, Combined Joint Task Force–76 (CJTF–76).

making progress in some provinces and halting progress in others. Tribal association competes with the authority of national political institutions in some areas, creating sources of conflict. Local and national security forces are growing but are not complete.

Hostile elements remain active and seek to exploit the fissures created by the drug economy, poor infrastructure, governance challenges, and tribal affiliations. These forces include a variety of insurgents, such as the *Hizb-I Islami Gulbuddin*, which often operates like both a crime family and an apostle of al Qaeda. Elements affiliated with al Qaeda are active in the countryside, and remnants of the Taliban are present. Further complicating this mixture is a conglomeration of warlords, whose allegiance is to themselves and their drive for power and resources.

Importance of Partnerships

This backdrop of progress and risk highlights the importance of the command's mission: to conduct full spectrum operations

cannot win by themselves. The cornerstone to any success over the past year is captured in one word: *partnership*. The command partnered its capabilities and intentions with those of civilians from the interagency community, international partners, and Afghan national, provincial, and military leadership. Collectively, it created the conditions that allow Afghan institutions—political, security, economic, social, and religious—to be stronger and deny influence to hostile elements.

A starting point to understanding full spectrum operations is combat operations. SETAF's tenure built on the foundation of previous rotations, and CJTF-76 took the fight to the enemy to deny both sanctuary and operating room. The core of these forces used included three combat brigades, to include a special operations group. These combat elements conducted some 260 offensive operations in 2005 for missions such as search and cordon, attack-in-zone, and patrols, to name a few. They attacked in the summer, fall, and winter. The combined

pressure on the foe, but denied him temporal sustainment and geographic refuge.

These elements were enabled by key actors, such as an aviation task force with fixed- and rotary-wing combined forces land component assets. A joint logistics command provided critical support to the warfighters, and an engineering task force contributed key capabilities to defeating the insurgents and promoting prosperity.

While many of these forces were Soldiers, the entire joint team was engaged. A Marine battalion deployed along the eastern Afghan border as an integral part of Regional Command East. In the summer of 2005, Navy aviators replaced Marine aircrews flying daily EA-6B support to deny hostile forces the ability to exploit the electronic medium.

The combined forces air component also contributed combat and combat support forces. With a wing deployed inside the combined/joint operations area and at least four wings outside Afghanistan, Airmen provided a constant vertical vantage. A-10s, B-52s, British GR-7s, French Mirages, and other fighters provided responsive close air support. These aviators often employed weapons with friendly forces as close as 65 meters to the hostile fighters. Other coalition partners such as New Zealand, Norway, and Denmark played decisive roles as well. As impressive as these numbers might be, the CJTF commander focused on the quality and capabilities of the Afghan Forces, not merely the quantity.

The most important players were the Afghan forces themselves. In the spring of 2005, the ANA had 18 combat battalions. By the end of 2005, this number had grown to 40. These forces doubled their number of patrols by the end of the year.

A key to success, however, was the partnership initiated by CJTF-76 over the past year. The task force partnered with ANA and, occasionally, the National Police, so all operations were planned and executed with Afghan forces. They were an integral element of every operation. As a result, ANA patrols increased 40 percent in 2005. Partnership ensured that the new forces gained positive and experienced mentoring with coalition forces.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams

PRTs are the most salient example of effective partnership. These are joint civil-military units that strengthen the reach and enhance the legitimacy of the Afghan government at all levels into outlying regions. The

the Medical Task Force works closely with the Minister for Public Health to operate 10 hospitals in southern and eastern Afghanistan

to defeat insurgent forces and to promote Afghan peace and prosperity.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen of the Combined Joint Task Force-76

joint task force operated in times and locations where the enemy had never seen U.S. forces. Collectively, this not only maintained



U.S. civil affairs officer and New Zealand soldier conduct veterinary civic assistance program in Dagar, Afghanistan

55th Signal Company (Michael Zuk)

first team began in 2002 in Gardez, and 24 are now deployed throughout Afghanistan.

Typically, PRTs have 60 to 100 personnel and provide a mixture of military personnel for security and civil-military personnel for stability and infrastructure development. The teams have established relations with key national and provincial leaders, tribal and military officials, and religious groups, nongovernmental organizations, and UN officials. They have helped with voter registration and in disarmament of local militia groups, adjudicated differences and brokered agreements between factions, and assisted in developing and mentoring ANA and Afghan National Police. Equally important, they have prioritized reconstruction and development efforts. Being located in remote areas, they have reached areas the national government has yet to embrace.

There are many key contributors to the PRTs. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its field program officers (FPOs) are one. The FPOs select projects and activities in consultation with the PRTs and local leaders. They use funding from their Quick Impact Program to facilitate a climate of freedom and economic activity in the provinces. Activities include construction of roads, bridges, water supplies, irrigation, government administrative buildings, schools, and clinics as well as micropower generation and gender training. As of September 2005, almost 200 projects had been completed, with 179 under construction and 115 in planning and design. USAID officials expect over 600 projects to be finished by the end of fiscal year 2006.

Another positive contributor to PRTs was the U.S. Department of Agriculture. As Afghanistan is an agrarian society, the department provided vital educational assistance to veterinary and agricultural colleges and assists with an Afghan Conservation Corps. Working more than 100 projects in 21 provinces, it also provided work for returning Afghans. The projects ranged from soil conservation and reforestation to food assistance and poultry farming initiatives.

Military personnel also perform vital development support. One salient, dual benefit is road construction. CJTF-76 teamed with nongovernmental organizations, USAID, and the government to prioritize and integrate this key infrastructure effort. Over the past year, more than 150 miles of finished roads have been built. For example, the

Kandahar to Tarin Kowt road reduced travel time from 18 hours to 5. In addition, the CJTF used these opportunities to train ANA engineers and local Afghan subcontractors to plan and execute the project to a higher standard. Such endeavors not only extend the reach of local governments and security forces, but also promote economic development and trade. As a result a road built from Qalat to Shinkay, for example, the cost of flour dropped by 1,000 Afghani.

In addition, the CJTF-76 Medical Task Force works closely with the Minister for Public Health to enable 10 hospitals in southern and eastern Afghanistan. Moreover, allies contribute vital medical care. In northern Afghanistan, Jordan operates a hospital that conducts an average of 120 surgeries and treats 15,000 patients a month. In eastern Afghanistan, a Korean outpatient clinic treats 4,000 Afghans a month while an Egyptian hospital has 30 inpatient beds. The hospital allows for a wide range of dental and medical care that averages 50 surgeries and more than 3,000 patients a month. Finally, the CJTF surgeon partnered with the local hospitals in the vicinity of Bagram. Over time, the Afghan medical personnel gained enough expertise to allow some local Afghans to be transferred to nearby hospitals.

Has this level of effort—with the human resources, financial capital, and time—made a difference? The answer is clearly yes. The momentum has continued over the past year. At the national level, ISAF expanded into western Afghanistan and continues planning for the next stage. A second nationwide election resulted in 60 percent of eligible voters going to the polls, to include 41 percent of the women. The first parliament was seated in December. Some 4.2 million Afghans returned home.

Just as important are the positive trends at the local and village level. For example, the increase in ANA patrols this past year has a twofold impact: it extends the sovereign authority of the Afghan government into the previous sanctuaries of hostile forces, and it has probably helped bring an increase in reports of violence. The near doubling of the ANA and National Police presence means that a violent encounter is more likely to be reported and recorded.

At the same time, the insurgent forces show signs of being less capable. More indirect and suicide attacks have occurred, reflecting a more desperate and less capable adversary. Contacts with enemy forces tend

to be more fleeting than a year ago. While we are cautious that such analysis might reflect seasonal trends, the overall direction is right as the number of fighters seeking reconciliation more than doubled between July and November 2005.

Local indicators also suggest that the reconstruction and development efforts are having an effect. One brigade commander said that when he arrived, villagers turned in one improvised explosive device a month. By the fall of 2005, they turned in an average of 13. While such a statistic reflects many variables, it indicates that the average Afghan is willing to risk the wrath of the hostile elements to create a more secure and positive future. It also demonstrates that even in the most dispersed and remote areas, Afghans recognize that they have a stake in this new order—a future where they can choose their economic livelihood, political options, and social and educational opportunities. Just 5 years ago, it was a future of their dreams. Today, it is within their grasp.

There will continue to be setbacks and disappointments in Afghanistan. The hostile elements lose a lot in any future where Afghans take charge of their own destiny. The momentum, however, is in the right direction. While military forces support this momentum, they alone cannot “win.” America’s Armed Forces, in cooperation with coalition partners, are creating conditions to allow the Afghan institutions (political, economic, judicial, educational, and so forth) to gain strength and eliminate the root causes of insurgency.

The country’s potential today was made possible by executing full spectrum operations. Those planning combined and joint operations may add this term to their mission statements, but they must do so with the full appreciation of the dynamic, difficult, diverse, and richly rewarding challenge for which they are posturing themselves. Full spectrum operations require planners to envision how their combat activities will support nonlethal, humanitarian, and reconstructive efforts; understand how Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines must integrate with interagency and international partners; and appreciate how to meld with the cultural norms and expectations of the society they are supporting. In this process, the local and national institutions of the nation we are helping will gain the strength and sovereignty to determine its future. **JFQ**