

Expanding the Qawm: Culturally Savvy Counterinsurgency and Nation-Building in Afghanistan

**A Monograph
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Abstract

EXPANDING THE QAWM: CULTURALLY SAVVY COUNTERINSURGENCY AND NATION-BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN by Major Sean R. Slaughter, U.S. Air Force, 77 pages.

This monograph investigates culture and society in Afghanistan and recommends an operational approach leveraging a blend of formal and traditional institutions, working with the propensity of the Afghan system, and building capacity and legitimacy for GIRoA. It examines some commonly misunderstood concepts within Afghan culture such as qawm and tribe, and attempts to correct some of the misconceptions about Afghanistan as a ‘tribal’ society. It finds that Afghans draw their identity not from the tribe, but from the qawm—a more malleable and locally oriented system. The monograph also examines the intersection of traditional and formal Afghan institutions, Afghan culture, and ISAF intervention in four focus areas: governance and rule of law, security, development and economic growth, and ISAF organization.

Afghanistan’s chief characteristic is its physical and social complexity, including its variegated terrain, its diverse cultural tapestry, and the interplay between the two. This complex heterogeneity and fragmentation defies a mirror-imaged Western solution or even a singular, templated Afghan solution ostensibly exportable throughout Afghanistan. To manage the complexity of the Afghan system, the monograph recommends an agile, decentralized approach, synchronizing and synergizing efforts at the sub-provincial level, and maintaining an integrated, empowered, enduring presence in the districts. The decentralized approach will enhance counterinsurgency and nation-building efficacy in Afghanistan through a culturally savvy, locally focused, bottom-up system of transformation, setting conditions for qawm expansion as a way to defragment Afghanistan and Afghan society.

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Acronyms

ABP	Afghan Border Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANCOP	Afghan National Civil Order Police
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Force
AUP	Afghan Uniform Police
CDC	Community Development Council
CDP	Community Development Plan
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command - Afghanistan
DST	District Support Team
ETT	Embedded Training Team
FDD	Focused District Development
FP	Facilitating Partner
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HTS	Human Terrain System
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
KMTC	Kabul Military Training Center
MoD	Afghan Ministry of Defense
MoI	Afghan Ministry of Interior
MRRD	Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	Afghan National Directorate of Security
NSP	National Solidarity Plan
OMLT	Operational Mentor and Liaison Team

PDC	Provincial Development Council
PMT	Police Mentoring Team
PMT-D	District-level Police Mentor Team
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RTC	Afghan National Police Regional Training Center
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Qawm and Local Orientation in Afghan Culture

Certain things are not known to those who eat with forks. It is better to eat with both hands for a while.¹

— Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*

Introduction

As we approach our first decade of counterinsurgency and nation-building in Afghanistan, a reflective look at the events leading to this point reveals successes, failures, answers, and questions. While the international force in Afghanistan continues to be very good at the immediate kinetic fight, it often falls short in setting the conditions for long-term security and stability. Despite the rhetoric proclaiming the need to understand the problem from the Afghan perspective, we continue to promote mirror-imaged, top-down, Western solutions that are expensive, quite elegant, but fundamentally wrong. Many of our approaches may resolve the immediate, surface problem, but in our method, action or inaction, ultimately create unfavorable higher-order effects and bigger, deeper dilemmas for a later time. When we do get a glimpse into one facet of one part of Afghan culture, we often proclaim holistic authority and attempt to induce grand, simple strategies that may be templated and exported throughout the country. Unfortunately, reality confounds even the most tantalizing of these simple ideas and notional understandings. Afghanistan is too complex for a quick, simple fix.

¹Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2003), 126. First published in 1901. A note on transliterations, translations, and definitions of words from Dari and Pashto to American English. There are many different, yet perfectly acceptable English spellings of Dari and Pashto words and Afghan place names. In this monograph, I have selected the spellings that either most closely match the actual spelling or pronunciation in Pashto, Dari, Farsi, or Arabic; that have grown to be widely used in scholarly sources; or that are the most recognizable or usable for the English speaker. The eastern Afghanistan province of Paktya, for example, is commonly spelled Paktia, Paktiya, or Paktya. I have selected Paktya from the common spelling in Dari and Pashto, پکتیا, p-(a)-k-t-y-a. Direct quotes will retain the spelling used by the quoted source and may vary from the spelling used throughout the monograph. I took most original Pashto spellings from H.G Raverty, *A Dictionary of the Puk'hto, Pus'hto, or Language of the Afghans: With Remarks on the Originality of the Language and its Affinity to other Oriental Tongues*, 2nd ed. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867) <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/raverty/> (accessed February 22, 2010). Italicized words of Dari, Pashto, Farsi, or Arabic origin are translated and defined in the glossary.

Afghanistan can be quite a conundrum. To unravel the puzzle, we must understand it as a complex system of interactions shaped by myriad actors, conditions, and tensions. Power and information brokers, tribal and Islamic culture, regional and world politics, radical Islam and narco-terrorism, history and fragmentation, and human and physical terrain all play important roles in the narrative of Afghanistan. The complex adaptive system these factors engender also presents a challenge to the counterinsurgent and nation-builder. A veritable cornucopia of international and Afghan agencies and organizations—military, civilian, interagency, and non-governmental—operate within their spheres of influence and areas of expertise in an attempt to enhance security, stability, governance, and economic capacity. However, these disparate efforts lack the synergy that would come from an integrated, though not effect-limiting approach to counterinsurgency and nation-building. Furthermore, many of the high-dollar, purportedly high-impact projects and programs conceived in Kabul, Washington, Brussels, and New York reflect not only a lack of awareness of Afghan cultural values and norms, but also reveal a basic misunderstanding of the fragmented, tribal, diverse, and locally focused nature of Afghan society at large. The result of such well-intentioned machinations is frequently an expensive program, structure, equipment catalog, or organization that has neither contemporary utility nor long-term hope for engendering Afghan self-sustainability. A decentralized, culturally savvy campaign plan designed and executed properly will yield far more efficacious long-term results in counterinsurgency and nation-building.

If we hope to succeed in our attempt to bring stability to Afghanistan, we must understand the Afghan system, its problems, and its propensities, and design a path ahead that leverages its strengths and potential. Afghan citizen and Chief of Party in Afghanistan for the United States Institute for Peace (USIP), Shahmahmood Miakhel says that the “key to success in Afghanistan is understanding the Afghan mindset. That means understanding their culture and

engaging the Afghans with respect to the system of governance that has worked for them in the past.”²

A campaign designed with a thorough understanding of the physical and cultural environment, paired with an integrated, iterative, and cognitively agile approach to counterinsurgency and nation-building, will set the conditions for a self-sustaining, stable Afghanistan, able to maintain its sovereignty, defend its population, grow its economy, and enforce rule of law within its borders. In Afghanistan, success in counterinsurgency and nation-building will not come from a Western solution, templated in Kabul and foisted upon every community across the country. The Afghan system is far too complex, diverse, and fragmented for that centralized strategy to work. Understanding the nature of the Afghan system, its strengths, weaknesses, tensions, and propensities, we find that the best approach to counterinsurgency and nation-building in Afghanistan is a decentralized, locally oriented strategy with a focus on enhancing sub-national governance and its mutually beneficial connectivity with the people. Miakhel highlights the crucial nature of the local focus in Afghanistan:

It is imperative to understand that the only way that the majority of the people in Afghanistan will participate in security, governance and development is through cooperation with local authorities on the district level.

Considering the complexity of the relationships, it may appear to be difficult to build consensus easily. But once done, you will have the full support of the tribes and villagers. No one will feel left out from participation and decision-making. It ensures fair and equal participation and decision making powers regarding all issues. It is the Afghan form of democracy.³

A culturally savvy, locally oriented, bottom-up approach to counterinsurgency and nation-building yields not only better prospects for improving governance and rule of law, security, and development and economic growth, but also a higher likelihood that Afghanistan

²Shahmahmood Miakhel, “Understanding Afghanistan: The Importance of Tribal Culture and Structure in Security and Governance,” *Pashtoonkhwa*, November 2009, 1, <http://www.pashtoonkhwa.com/files/books/Miakhel-ImportanceOfTribalStructuresInAfghanistan.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2010).

³Miakhel, 19.

will be able to sustain itself without long-term external support. To work with and not against the propensity of the Afghan system, GIRoA and ISAF must not ponder a centralized, templated, top-down, national strategy. Nor should they attempt to focus on ‘the tribes’, which are not the source of identity for Afghans. GIRoA and ISAF must pursue a decentralized, bottom-up strategy, leveraging functioning tribal institutions and merging them with the formal system to help set the conditions for the cognitive expansion of solidarity inclusivity. Afghanistan is a fragmented compilation of diverse terrain, people, and cultures, creating a patchwork of unique sub-societies and communities with varying degrees of isolation from the state and from other, usually competing sub-societies. A decentralized, locally focused, bottom-up approach to counterinsurgency and nation-building in Afghanistan promises the greatest potential for success.

Methodology

This monograph will analyze research on the history and culture of Afghanistan and counterinsurgency as well as awareness of current military, interagency, and NGO operations with a particular emphasis on governance, rule of law, security, development, and economic capacity building. The author conducted interviews with military, interagency, and Afghan primary sources—field practitioners, and experts from academia. The author also drew upon personal experience in the field throughout Afghanistan, and his notes from successes and challenges in working with the Afghans and the Coalition. This monograph will explain some of the concepts and intricacies of Afghan culture that are vitally important for the Western counterinsurgent and nation-builder to understand. It will explain cultural patterns and traditional institutions that may be unfamiliar to the non-Afghan. The monograph will then investigate the intersection of Afghan culture with three focus areas—governance and rule of law, security, and development and economic growth—then explore ways to organize for effective counterinsurgency and nation-building. The conclusion provides a summary of cultural and operational lessons learned and recommendations looking forward.

Understanding Culture

Afghanistan is an enigma for the Westerner on his or her first visit to the country. Regional differences may catch even the experienced traveler off guard. Because of its rich history and geographic location at the crossroads between civilizations, Afghanistan enfolds a rich blend of traditions and collects myriad tribes, peoples, solidarity groups, and cultures within its borders. However, because of the conspiracy of geography, history, and religion, there exists no single, nation-wide Afghan national culture or set of norms. “In Afghanistan, there is no common accepted identity that cuts across the various segments of society.”⁴ Nor is there a single, national narrative. Consequently, what passes for common practice in the Tajik North or Hazara Central may simply be unacceptable in the Pashtun South or East. Afghan society is really a patchwork of tribal and ethnolinguistic subcultures, commonly in conflict with one another, thus presenting no coherent, national whole.

Understanding a nation’s history, culture, norms, and values is of the utmost importance for the counterinsurgent and nation-builder, particularly when undertaking such pursuits in a culture significantly dissimilar to one’s own. Afghan-American scholar Ehsan Entezar states that, “an understanding of the Afghan national culture is essential for functioning effectively in Afghanistan.”⁵ To function effectively, the Westerner must not only grasp the fundamental differences between Western and Afghan culture at large, he must also understand the regional and local differences between subcultures and geography within Afghanistan. An understanding of Afghan culture in general is a good start because it precludes the tendency to mirror-image, or support a Western solution to a uniquely Afghan problem. An understanding of the fragmented

⁴Angela Parvanta, “Afghanistan—Land of the Afghans? On the Genesis of a Problematic State Denomination,” in *Afghanistan—A Country Without a State?*, eds., Christine Noelle-Karimi, Conrad Schetter, Reinhard Schlagintweit (Frankfurt: IKO, 2002), 19.

⁵Ehsan M. Entezar, *Afghanistan 101: Understanding Afghan Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2007), 9.

nature of Afghan society is the next logical step in that it contravenes the proclivity to impose a single, nationwide template upon an inherently local issue. As anthropologist Kevin Avruch put it, “to ignore local culture is to rely on a theoretically overdeveloped and deterministic concept of human nature that erases the observable facts of cultural variability and in practice usually ends up meaning . . . that everyone else is less well got-up editions of ourselves.”⁶

During the evolution of our intervention in Afghanistan, we have refined our approach both as we learn about Afghanistan and as the system and situation evolve. Some ideas hint at a wiser approach but fail to complete the thought and carry through with execution. Some ideas proclaim a culturally sensitive approach, then reveal a complete misunderstanding of fundamental dynamics of Afghan society. For example, the paper, *One Tribe at a Time* by Jim Gant⁷ has some very worthwhile observations, assessments, and recommendations on approaches that worked well in his operating location in the Pesch Valley in Konar province. The idea of living among the Afghans, building rapport, and understanding their system and society at the local level is commendable and definitely seeking the appropriate level to understand and access. So is the concept of leveraging traditional institutions. However, the paper misses the mark entirely with its adamant focus on ‘tribal’ engagement in Afghanistan. Gant’s assertion that, “we must work first and forever with the tribes, for they are the most important military, political, and cultural unit in that country”⁸ and that “every single Afghan is part of a tribe and understands how the tribe operates and why”⁹ is a fundamentally flawed ideation in regards to Afghanistan and casts doubt over the parts of the paper that are worthwhile. In truth, a half-right approach may be the

⁶Kevin Avruch, *Culture & Conflict Resolution* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1998), 10.

⁷Jim Gant, “One Tribe at a Time,” *War & Reality in Afghanistan*, October 29, 2009, http://blog.stevenpressfield.com/wp-content/themes/stevenpressfield/one_tribe_at_a_time_ed2.pdf (accessed March 11, 2010).

⁸Ibid., 4.

⁹Ibid., 10.

most perilous path of all because the implementer may be unable to identify which segments of the approach led to success or failure. He may inappropriately discard the good or retain the bad, either of which may hinder long-term efficacy.

The fact is that most of the people of Afghanistan are not members of a tribe at all¹⁰ and those that are do not understand their identity and relationship with the tribe in the way Gant presupposes. Anthropologists and Afghanistan experts agree that, “no clear evidence exists of tribes actually coalescing into large-scale corporate bodies for joint action, even defensively, even for defence of territory.”¹¹ Dupree points out that the concept of tribe, “has, in general, degenerated into a term of identification when away from one’s own village or area,”¹² and does not play a significant role in an Afghan’s identity. Tapper says, “The notion of ‘tribe’ is notoriously vague . . . and has almost ceased to be of analytical or comparative value.”¹³ There is an insidious danger to applying words such as ‘tribe’ or ‘tribal’ to systems that do not meet the commonly understood conception of those monikers. The nomenclature is not merely academic—it can incite “live political issues in many countries of the world, and in many cases, [results in] ignoring or sometimes deliberately exploiting the ambiguities of the notion of ‘tribe’, [and in doing so] states adopt unfortunate and often disastrous policies towards their ‘tribal’ populations.”¹⁴

¹⁰There is not a Tajik, Uzbek, or Aimaq ‘tribe’ for example. These and other compilations of similar people form ethnolinguistic groups and are non-tribal. Pashtuns and their sub-divisions like Durrani, Ghilzai, Wazir, Mehsud, Jaji, and Mangal are ostensibly tribal, but do not necessarily draw their identity from membership in the Pashtun ‘tribe’. The Pashtun tribe is not hierarchical and there is no chief, single man, or office that speaks for the Pashtun tribe or some sub-division thereof.

¹¹Jon W. Anderson, “Khan and Khel: Dialectics of Pakhtun Tribalism,” in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, ed., Richard Tapper (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 132.

¹²Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 183.

¹³Richard Tapper, *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 1.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

In Afghanistan, specifically, Tapper articulates that, “it is better not to use the term ‘tribe’ for major ethnic groups or nations, such as Afghans, Pushtuns/Pathans, Kurds, Hazaras, Turkmens, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Lurs, Arabs, Baluches, which are culturally or linguistically distinct but not normally politically unified—though political and territorial units bearing those names have existed in each case.”¹⁵ The U.S. Army’s Human Terrain System also recognizes the fact that ‘tribal’ is not the best way to describe and understand social dynamics in Afghanistan. In the Human Terrain System (HTS) Afghanistan Research Reachback Center paper, *My Cousin’s Enemy is my Friend: A Study of Pashtun “Tribes” in Afghanistan*, HTS contrasts the concept of tribes in Iraq with the concept of tribes in Afghanistan.

The way people in rural Afghanistan organize themselves is so different from rural Iraqi culture that calling both “tribes” is deceptive. “Tribes” in Afghanistan do not act as unified groups, as they have recently in Iraq. For the most part they are not hierarchical, meaning there is no “chief” with whom to negotiate (and from whom to expect results). They are notorious for changing the form of their social organization when they are pressured by internal dissension or external forces.¹⁶

The HTS also stresses that because of the extremely variable nature of Afghan society, engagement cannot be standardized or templated. There is no substitute for “local knowledge, cultural understanding, and local contacts. . . . There are no shortcuts. What this means in practical terms is a need to focus on ground truth, looking at local groups and their conflicts, rather than arriving with preconceived notions of how people should or might, given the proper incentives, organize themselves tribally.”¹⁷

It is easy for decision makers to latch onto an idea and attempt to run with it, but any ideas or proposals should not be followed mindlessly, even if they seem refined or appear to work

¹⁵Ibid., 9.

¹⁶Department of the Army, Human Terrain System Afghanistan Research Reachback Center, *My Cousin’s Enemy is My Friend: A Study of Pashtun “Tribes” in Afghanistan* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC G2 Human Terrain System, September 2009), 2.

¹⁷Ibid.

in one part of Afghanistan at some particular time. There are no ‘silver bullets’. Ideas like those presented in *One Tribe at a Time* should be examined critically, taking the good to inform policy, and discarding the ludicrous as unnecessary or even dangerous waste. A ‘tribal’ focus is not the appropriate path in Afghanistan. Afghans do not put stock in ‘tribal’ identities and ‘tribal’ institutions. However, in Afghanistan, there is another system and concept that should garner more attention from strategists and policy makers—a concept explored later in this monograph.

Culture Defined

Since the beginning of OEF, many have come to realize that cultural awareness enhances our understanding of the human terrain and improves our ability to operate effectively in a foreign environment dissimilar to our own. The Department of Defense has tended to focus on cultural awareness at the tactical level, exposing deploying soldiers to cultural elements such as language, norms, values, rituals, and codes of behavior. However, cultural awareness has prospects for the operational, strategic, and political levels, as well, particularly if we develop a deeper understanding of the complex cultural environment of the areas in which we operate. FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency defines culture as “a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another.”¹⁸ Culture is learned, shared, and internalized by members of a society and can lead to patterned, if not predictable behavior.

While FM 3-24 stresses the collective nature of culture, anthropologist Geert Hofstede defines culture in a way that also stresses its cleaving nature. He says that culture is, “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of

¹⁸Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), 3-6.

people from another.”¹⁹ Understanding of both the collecting and dividing nature of culture is important for the counterinsurgent and nation-builder in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not a country with a homogenous culture—quite the opposite is true. Afghanistan is a compilation of numerous cultures, some living side-by-side in relative peace, and some traditionally opposed and inclined to conflict.

While many define culture as the result of external patterning, another concept of culture places emphasis on the individual, his narrative, and his social and psychological processes. Avruch sees culture as something less stable and less homogenous than traditional conceptions of culture. He recognizes culture as “a derivative of individual experience, something learned or created by individuals themselves or passed on to them socially by contemporaries or ancestors.”²⁰ Avruch further postulates that culture emerges not only from tribal or ethnic lineages, but also from experiential derivations such as profession, occupation, religion, and location.²¹

Tribe and Ethnolinguistic Group Defined

Recently, there has been increased interest in a more population-centric approach to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. Correspondingly, military writers began to publish papers and articles such as *One Tribe at a Time* and “Going Tribal: Enlisting Afghanistan’s Tribes” that advocate ‘tribal’ engagement as a key facet of the population-centric approach.²² Recognizing that there are significant differences in Western and Afghan culture is a good start. Shifting focus

¹⁹Geert Hofstede and Gert Jan Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 400.

²⁰Avruch, 5.

²¹Ibid.

²²Gant, *One Tribe at a Time*; Dan Green “Going Tribal: Enlisting Afghanistan’s Tribes” *Small Wars Journal* (2009), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/278-green.pdf> (accessed March 11, 2010).

from a broad, national level to a local level is, likewise, a step in the right direction. However, the concept and reality of ‘tribe’ in Afghanistan is fundamentally different than it is in other places. For example, in Iraq, tribes tend to meet the FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency manual definition, which says that tribes “are generally autonomous, genealogically structured groups [and] are essentially adaptive social networks organized by extended kinship and descent with common needs for physical and economic security.”²³ Iraqi tribes, indeed, tend to be structured, hierarchical, somewhat homogeneous, and led by a group of key elders or individuals. Consequently, in some ways, Iraqi tribes can be engaged as a unified entity, via a tribal leader, or with a very similar approach from place to place. This is not the case in Afghanistan, where the tribe is not the proper level or even the proper entity to engage.

An important concept to understand in the context of Afghanistan is that not all groups of people are tribal. A more-encompassing term for the various larger compilations of people who share ethnic and linguistic background is ‘ethnolinguistic group’. All tribes are ethnolinguistic groups, but not all ethnolinguistic groups are tribes. For example, while the Pashtuns may be considered tribal to some extent and may refer to themselves, for example, as Pashtun or some particular subtribe like Popalzai Durrani or Mangal Ghilzai, the non-tribal Tajiks and Aimaq do not call themselves Tajik or Aimaq. They prefer to refer to themselves by locality, identifying themselves as Panjshiri or Kabuli, that is, from Panjshir or Kabul.²⁴

²³Department of the Army, 3-4—3-5.

²⁴Shaista Wahab and Raheem Yaseer, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Center for Afghanistan Studies, interview by the author, November 3, 2009.

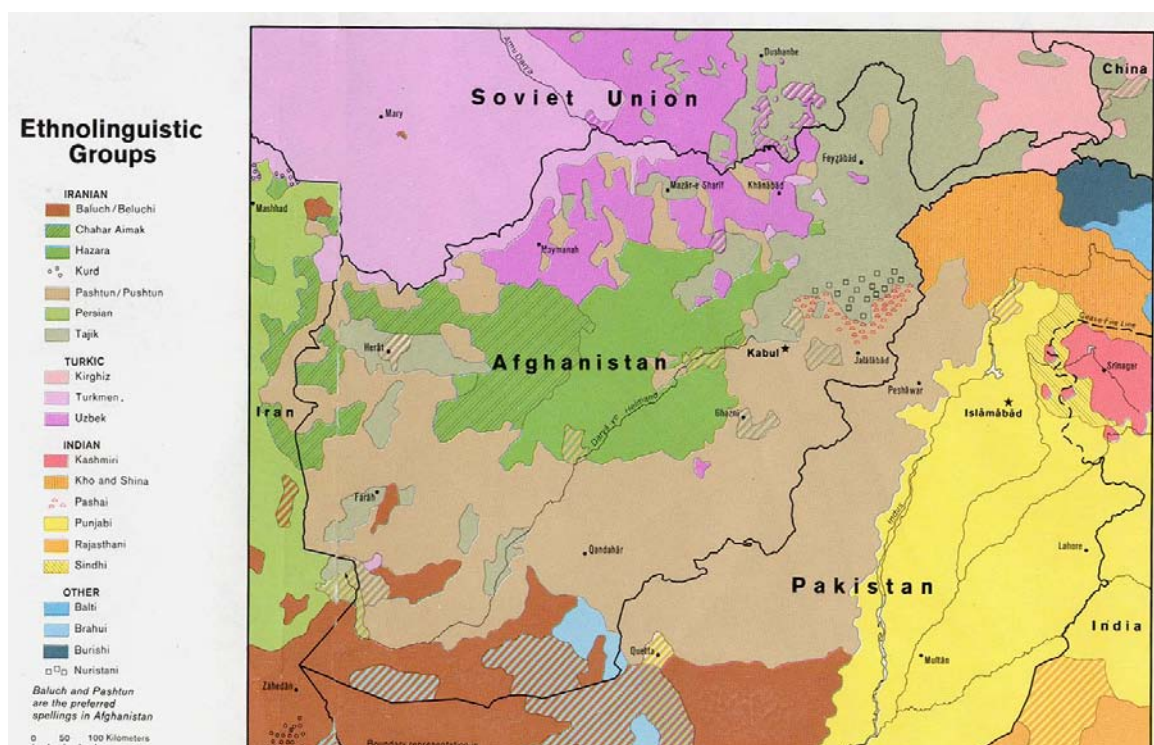


Figure 1. Ethnolinguistic Groups of Afghanistan and Surrounding States.

Source: University of Texas Libraries, “The University of Texas Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection,” http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/afghanistan_ethno_1982.jpg (accessed November 17, 2009).

As shown in figure 1, the political boundaries of Afghanistan encompass several different tribes or ethnolinguistic groups, but not all of these groups reside wholly within Afghanistan’s political borders. People who claim a particular tribal affiliation may be found on either side of Afghanistan’s borders with adjacent states. Afghanistan’s largest ethnolinguistic group, the Pashtuns, for example, fall on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and to a lesser extent across the Iranian border. In fact, despite the Pashtun plurality in Afghanistan, more Pashtuns live in Pakistan than in Afghanistan.²⁵ Likewise, though not tribal, the people of the Tajik

²⁵Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed January 2, 2010). 11.9 million Pashtuns live in Afghanistan and represent 42 percent of its population. 14.1 million Pashtuns live in Pakistan and represent 8 percent of that country’s population.

ethnolinguistic group reside both in northeastern Afghanistan and in Tajikistan. The same is true for the Uzbeks and Uzbekistan in the north, the Turkmen and Turkmenistan in the northwest, and the Baluch and Pakistani Baluchistan in the south.

One ethnolinguistic group that falls predominantly within the confines of Afghanistan, with no significant permanent residence in bordering states is the Hazara of central Afghanistan. Unlike the majority of other Afghan ethnolinguistic groups, the Hazara are Shia. This fact, along with their Mongoloid features, has led to their political and cultural isolation and castigation throughout Afghanistan's modern history. Like the Hazara, the Nuristanis are an ethno-tribal group found almost exclusively within the borders of Afghanistan. Situated in Nuristan and Konar, their physical and cultural isolation was so extreme, that the Nuristanis were, in fact, the last group of Afghans to convert to Islam, doing so only after Abdur Rahman conquered them in 1896. Known as *Kafiristan*, or, Land of Infidels, prior to Rahman's conquest, the region became *Nuristan*, Land of Light, after the Iron Emir's forced conversion program.²⁶

***Khel* Defined**

Ethnolinguistic groups and what we sometimes call 'tribes' are large entities and not always useful constructs when seeking to understand Afghan society at the local level. Subdivisions of tribes and supertribes in Afghanistan are called *khels*. *Khel* may translate to clan, as it may be loosely based on patrilineal descent, or it can signify any subdivision of a tribe, no matter what level of subdivision.²⁷ While describing groups of people, the word *khel* also finds its way into place names, particularly in Ghilzai Pashtun-dominated east and southeast Afghanistan. The names of these villages and towns, such as Ali Khel in Paktya, and Yaya Khel, Jani Khel,

²⁶Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 103.

²⁷Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 240.

and Yousef Khel in Paktika help determine the likely lineage, clan, and ethnolinguistic background of the village and district's inhabitants.

Districts and even villages in Afghanistan range in levels of homogeneity. Some are fairly uniform, but some are significantly heterogeneous. Afghanistan's social system at the village level is somewhat complex, with clans, *khels*, tribes, and ethnolinguistic groups generating ties and bonds through marriage, conquest, design, and luck; and generating tensions and rifts through conflict, competition, encroachment, and competing claims on resources. Consequently, each district becomes its own social ecosystem, with its own unique dynamics, and is connected with other equally unique district ecosystems.

It is most beneficial to find the appropriate level of focus when examining Afghans and Afghan society. Zooming too far out and attempting to examine too large an area such as a region or too large a group such as all Pashtuns yields too general a look. Zooming too far in, and attempting to examine each of the more than 42,000 villages is too specific, impractical, and likely to result in loss of the big picture and universal trends. Looking at Afghan society from the district level provides appropriately sized chunks of terrain and numbers of villages and people for examination. It is close enough to see and understand internal *khel* dynamics, yet far enough to observe the effects of ties to other nearby *khels*. It is also a good level to gain an understanding of what most significantly drives an Afghan's sense of identity—the *qawm*.

Qawm Defined

As evidenced by such programs as the Human Terrain System (HTS), District Support Team (DST), Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), the Focused District Development (FDD) program, and the National Solidarity Program (NSP), the operational concept in Afghanistan has slowly been shifting away from the holistic, nationalistic approach to a more decentralized, population-centric approach. ISAF is growing to recognize the complex, fragmented nature of Afghan society and is attempting to adjust to those realities with a regional, provincial, or tribal

construct. However, a tribal approach and focus does not capture the true essence of Afghan identity. For that fidelity, one must look to the local level.

In Afghanistan, people draw their identity or sense of belonging from the *qawm*. While sometimes translated as tribe, *qawm* is actually a more fundamental, yet fluid concept. *Qawm* refers to any form of solidarity from which a person or group draws identity and can be based on kinship, location of residence, or occupation.²⁸ Though the tribe can be a form of *qawm*, in Afghanistan, not all people draw their identity from ethnicity or tribal affiliation, and those that do most likely have a stronger affinity to their sub-tribal group, *khel*, or clan. However, every person will have an affinity towards some group. That constructive unit, bound by some set of close ties constitutes the *qawm*.

Afghanistan has always been at best a loose compilation of ethnolinguistic groups, tribes, and *qawms* with a “long tradition of resistance to central authority and foreign interference.”²⁹ Throughout Afghanistan’s turbulent history, rulers have had varying degrees of success in controlling or influencing the *qawms*, but there has never been a strong, unanimous sense of nationalism or national identity. Grau points out that the *qawm*, “not Afghanistan, is the basic unit of community and, outside the family, the most important focus of individual liberty.”³⁰

The *qawm* serves a variety of functions. It provides solidarity, protection from other *qawms*, protection from the state, and a sense of identity for the members of the *qawm*.³¹ In basic terms, the *qawm* separates us from them.

²⁸Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 25; Roy, 242.

²⁹The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost*, Trans by Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Gress (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), xx.

³⁰*Ibid.*, xxi.

³¹Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan’s Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 19.

Qawms are neither static, nor singular. They will alter or shift over time, expanding, contracting, and changing as the environment and situation compel. Moreover, a person may feel differing degrees of belonging to different *qawms*, and draw some level of identity from different solidarity groups. In Afghanistan, people,

may choose to organize themselves along many different forms of identity, and may be conscious of belonging to more than one form of community simultaneously. Pashtuns' motivation for choosing how to identify and organize politically—including whether or not to support the Afghan government or the insurgency—are flexible and pragmatic. “Tribe” is only one potential choice of identity among many, and not necessarily the one that guides people's decision-making.³²

The *qawm* system may be seen as concentric circles starting with the immediate family and circling wider and wider to encompass such groups as the clan, the village, the subtribe, the tribe (or ethnolinguistic group), the nation, the *ummah*, and so on. It may also be viewed as multiple rings fanned out from any given individual or small group and intersecting ring systems of other individuals and small groups with various levels of inclusivity and overlap. While the prospect of a national *qawm* holds some long-term potential, the *qawm*'s propensity for the near future remains a local orientation. Afghans will continue to look to the clan and village for identity, protection, justice, and guidance. They will not tend to look to Kabul or the institutions of the central government.

In addition to locale and heredity, *qawms* may develop around occupations, particularly when accompanied by strong ties to a location. Such is the case with the Aimaq of western Afghanistan. The Aimaq are a non-tribal, multiethnic group of people residing to the west of the Hazarajat in Herat, Ghor, and Badghis and make their living primarily from agriculture and cattle breeding.³³ Although their ethnicity includes Tajik, Pashtun, Hazara, and Turkmen lineage, these diverse people draw their identity more from location and occupation than from tribe. The Aimaq

³²Department of the Army, Human Terrain System Afghanistan Research Reachback Center, 2.

³³Hafizullah Emadi, *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 10.

also reside in a location at the seam between numerous ethnic groups. While locations such as these can serve as the impetus for conflict, they can also serve as zones of intermingling, intermarriage, and stability through temporal homogenization.

Another of Afghanistan's important, non-tribal groups is the Kabuli. Since Timur Shah Durrani established it as the capital of Afghanistan in 1776, Kabul has drawn people from all ethnic groups.³⁴ Like the western Hazarajat, Kabul also sits at the seam between numerous ethnic groups—the Pashtuns to the south, the Tajiks to the north, and the Hazaras to the west. Generally attracted to Kabul for economic reasons, people stayed for a variety of reasons including comfort, income, educational opportunities, availability of services, and safety. Over time, people began to draw more sense of belonging to the location and culture of Kabul than to their original tribal lineage or heritage. While they still have an awareness of their ethnicity, be it Pashtun, Panjshiri, Qizilbash, and the like, Afghans from Kabul tend to refer to themselves as Kabuli when asked what they are. To be Kabuli implies a more liberal, cosmopolitan, secularly educated and western-oriented Afghan than his rural counterpart. A Kabuli typically speaks Dari and probably puts professional or technical experience to use as a bureaucrat, shopkeeper, or service provider.³⁵ He lives in an apartment, house, or some other permanent structure, but may have spent time as a refugee in Pakistan or Iran during the Soviet occupation or during the reign of the Taliban. He may have been educated in the West or even be an expatriate working in the U.S. or Europe.³⁶

In order to work with the system in Afghanistan, it is important for the counterinsurgent and nation-builder to understand and embrace the concept of *qawm*. Understanding the locally oriented nature of Afghan society and applying that understanding to campaign design,

³⁴Blood, Peter R., ed., *Afghanistan: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: GPO for the Library of Congress, 2001), <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/51.htm> (accessed November 8, 2009).

³⁵Goodson, 19.

³⁶Many Afghanistan-centric think tanks in the U.S. employ Afghan expatriates; a great number are Kabuli. Such is the case with the University of Nebraska Omaha's Center for Afghanistan Studies and the Navy Post Graduate School's Program for Conflict and Culture Studies.

operational approach, programs, and execution helps preclude the likelihood of attempting either to mirror-image a Western solution to an Afghan problem or to template a national Afghan solution to an inherently local problem. What works in the U.S. may not necessarily be the best thing for Afghanistan. Of equal importance, what works in Kabul may not have any efficacy whatsoever in Lashkar Gah. It is also important to understand that the *qawm*, while a source for local solidarity, is a fundamental force driving Afghanistan towards fragmentation at the national level.

Islam in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has a rich history of religious significance, from Zoastrianism to Buddhism to Islam. Many physical artifacts of former religious influence dot the Afghan countryside as cognitive aspects inform Afghan tradition and culture. Islam arrived in western Afghanistan in 652 A.D., but did not take hold in Kabul until the ninth century and the central highlands until the eleventh. The people of the mountainous Nuristan region did not become Muslim until 1896 at the end of Iron Amir Abdur Rahman Khan's spear of forced conversion.³⁷

Today, Afghanistan is a Muslim country and Afghans consider themselves devout Muslims. However, Islam, as practiced in Afghanistan, is a unique blending of tradition and religion that contrasts its practice in other parts of the Muslim world.³⁸ Moreover, Afghan practice of Islam differs from region to region, even valley to valley. Sunni, Shia, and Sufi Islam prevail in various parts of Afghanistan, and followers of different schools such as Deobandi, Wahabi, Hanafi, Salafi, Jaffarite, Ismaili, Naqshbandiyya, and Qadiriyya are dispersed throughout the country. The resulting theological-cultural patchwork defies a single, templated approach to analyze Islam and its effects on the *qawm*. This heterogeneity also leads to conflict at times.

³⁷John C. Griffiths, *Afghanistan: Key to a Continent* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1981), 21.

³⁸Raheem Yaseer, interview by author, November 3, 2009.

“Islam is practiced in a variety of ways, and in Afghanistan, people struggle to live peacefully with each other.”³⁹ It is crucially important for the counterinsurgent and nation-builder to understand Islam and its relationship with the *qawm* in the area in which he operates. Afghans and their “practice of and belief in their view of Islam plays a fundamental role in providing daily moral, ethical, and social guidance.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, Islam has played its part in further fragmenting Afghan society and confounding centralized government control. “The role of Islam, the complexity of ethnic groups, and their diverse languages made it difficult to cohesively govern or control many different social groups. In Afghanistan, people lived, traditionally, under communal codes of autonomy and individual freedom.”⁴¹

The fragmented nature of Afghan society reflects in the multifarious nature of Islam in Afghanistan. Practice of Islam in Afghanistan is diverse and locally oriented, not structured and ordinal. “In Afghanistan, the isolated valleys and oasis towns as well as ethnic and linguistic differences among people lent themselves well to the observance of Islam without the need to communicate in a hierarchical line with leadership.”⁴² Consequently, the *mullah* tends to wield a considerable amount of influence in the community not only through moral position, but also because of the *qawm*’s physical and cognitive isolation and separation from other religious influencers; and those who fund the *mullah*’s efforts hold considerable influence over him. In order to avoid unnecessary tension with the community, the counterinsurgent and nation-builder should develop a productive relationship with *qawm mullahs*, particularly if, upon analysis of the *qawm*, he finds the *mullah* to wield a disproportionately large amount of influence or power. He

³⁹Emadi, 53.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Nematollah Nojumi, *The Rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan: Mass Mobilization, Civil War, and the Future of the Region* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), ix.

⁴²Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 74-75.

should also understand who funds and influences the *mullah*, and understand their thoughts, goals, and feelings towards GIRoA, ISAF, and the insurgency.

It is also important to understand that Afghanistan is an Islamic Republic, as stated in Article 1 of the Constitution of Afghanistan.⁴³ Article 2 declares, “The sacred religion of Islam is the religion of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” and Article 3 says that, “no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.”⁴⁴ Thus, there is a national aspect of Afghan Islam, as well as local, but the former does not regulate the latter.

In working to build a stable, productive future for Afghanistan and its people, ISAF and GIRoA must proceed with care and understanding of the culture, history, and propensity of the Afghan system. “The state has never been strong enough to establish effective control throughout the countryside. . . . Despite the bonds of Islam, a sense of national unity has thus always been weak, except when an unusually strong leader has appeared or the nation has come together when threatened by an external enemy.”⁴⁵

The trick is to help Afghans create an Afghanistan that is stable, effective, and, if not unified, at least less fragmented and more accessible without resorting to an iron-fisted leader or an external, existential threat. Focusing special attention on the local level and gradually and deliberately expanding the *qawm* is a path to that end.

Governance and Rule of Law

Therefore let us keep our independence, and have none of your law and order and your other instruments, but stick to our customs and be men like our fathers before us.⁴⁶

— Mahsud Pashtun *malik*

⁴³The Constitution of Afghanistan, Chapter 1: State, January 2004, http://www.supremecourt.gov.af/PDFfiles/constitution2004_english.pdf (accessed February 25, 2010)

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ewans, 11.

⁴⁶Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans: 550 BC - AD 1957* (London: MacMillan & Company Ltd., 1958), 396.

Western attempts to create a recognizable, mirror-imaged government and legal system in Afghanistan face an extraordinary challenge. Many ideas and institutions that work effectively in modern, liberal, industrialized society such as those found in the U.S. and Western Europe are simply untenable in the very different and unique Afghan system. This system is not particularly intuitive to the Western nation-builder and his attempts to impose that which he thinks is logical and rational may create tensions that will tear the system apart over time. It is of the highest importance that the counterinsurgent and nation-builder seek a deep understanding of the Afghan system in order to help work with its propensity, not against it. The “chances of success of the international community’s attempt to re-establish the Afghan state are diminished by its inability to understand and analyse Afghan politics.”⁴⁷ It is incumbent upon those that seek to affect the Afghan system positively to understand the system as it was, is, and could be—to discard its conceptions of what is right, wrong, and normal, and to leverage the propensity of the actual system and its inherent strengths.

Contrary to the romantic image of the lawless, independent Afghan randomly fighting his neighbors and terrorizing anyone who encroaches upon his territory or independence, Afghans actually have a strong tradition of governance and rule of law. However, because of the fragmented nature of Afghan society, this traditional system is exercised effectively only at the local level, with national institutions left to wither to the point of marginalized insignificance through much of Afghanistan’s history. On the other hand, at the local level, tradition has provided *pashtunwali*, a strong, clear, and well-understood code of conduct, system of laws, and pattern of expectations for Afghans. Moreover, the system works in concert with the egalitarian nature of Afghan society, giving adult males a forum and a voice in community decision-making.

⁴⁷Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: Wars and Warlords in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 2.

Governance in Afghanistan at the local level is driven by tensions and competition, which Ahmed and Misdaq call the “Islamic District Paradigm,” and Kilcullen refers to as the “Tribal Governance Triad.”⁴⁸ Observing the system from a *qawm* point of reference, the Qawm Power Trinity places the local population in the middle of a competition between tribal, or *qawm* leadership institutions, such as *jirgas* and *khans*; religious functionaries, to include *shuras* and *mullahs*; and the government representative, or *malik*, district governor, and local ANP chief. In stable times, these three elements of the trinity balance in healthy competition, as seen in figure 2.

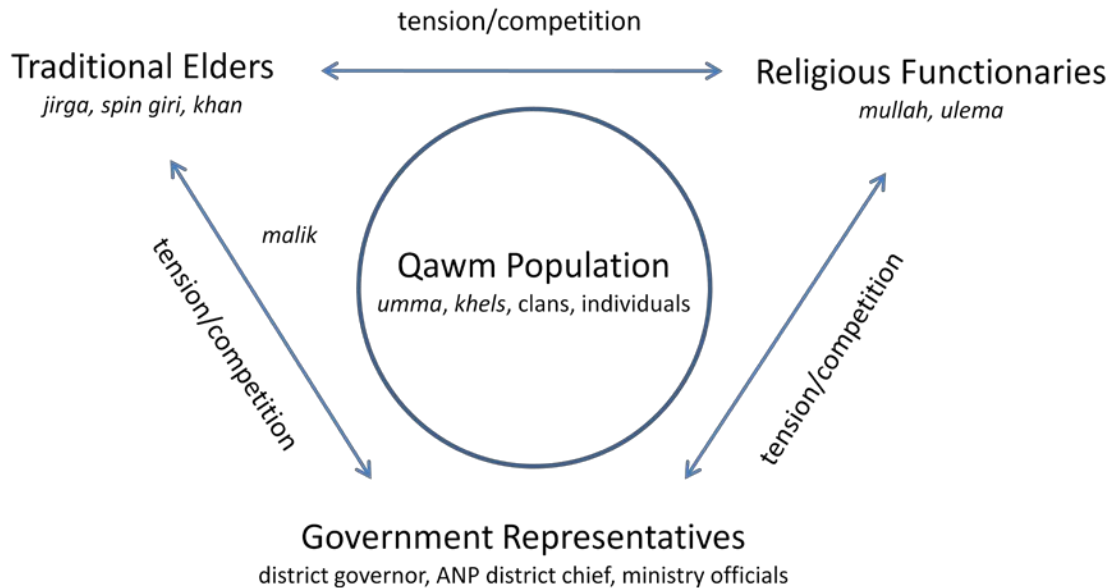


Figure 2. The Qawm Power Trinity

Source: Created by the Author. Adapted from Akbar Ahmed’s *Islamic District Paradigm* and David Kilcullen’s *Tribal Governance Triad*.

⁴⁸Akbar S. Ahmed, *Religion and Politics in Muslim Society: Order and Conflict in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6-9; David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 79-80; Nabi Misdaq, *Afghanistan: Political Frailty and External Interference* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 15.

The players inhabiting the three sides of the triad vie for power and status in the *qawm* system, and their adaptive interplay forms a system in itself. “Depending on the situation, these groups historically form and shift their alliances to face new situations, like invasion from outside, [and] encroachment by central government or its local administrative representative.”⁴⁹

USIP’s Afghanistan Chief of Party, Shahmahmood Miakhel echoes Ahmed’s model and Kilcullen’s and Mirdaq’s assessment of the three-part governance system, concluding that, “to have peace and security in Afghanistan, there must be a balancing act between tribal, religious, and government structures.”⁵⁰ Governance and rule of law in Afghanistan must be nurtured at all levels. While it is important for the central government to establish legitimacy, it cannot forcefully assert itself with the *qawm* lest it reap an unrelenting amount of resistance from the population. GIRoA must build its capacity to govern throughout Afghanistan by working with the propensity of the *qawm*’s traditional decentralized institutions of governance. A culturally savvy approach to governance capacity building in Afghanistan compels GIRoA to leverage the strengths of traditional institutions, working with them in partnership, and incorporating them into the formal system. As the national government increases in strength and ability to provide for Afghans, and connecting institutions build and strengthen, over time, local institutions will be absorbed into the national system. As long as Afghans perceive that they have a voice in the system and most importantly, that they feel they retain control and direction over their own lives, the *qawm* will not feel threatened and forced to retaliate against a central government meddling in its affairs. In short, the *qawm* must feel empowered by expanding its own bounds of inclusivity, absorbing and being absorbed by the larger system.

⁴⁹Mirdaq, 15.

⁵⁰Miakhel, 22.

Spin Giri, Khans, and Maliks⁵¹

Though egalitarian and individualistic in nature, Afghan society places a disproportionate amount of respect on some individuals. While these individuals cannot necessarily be called rulers or leaders in the common western understanding, they, without a doubt, wield a great deal of influence and power in Afghan society. Afghans traditionally respect age and force more than expertise and authority.⁵² The *qawm*'s elders, for example, tend to be more highly respected than their younger counterparts, though younger men still have a voice in *qawm* politics. *Qawm* elders carry the honorific, *spin giri* in Pashto or *rish safed* in Dari, both meaning 'white beard', a title of respect. Entezar says that, "all things being equal, an elderly person has more social power and prestige than a younger individual."⁵³ Noelle-Karimi echoes the sentiment, and sees the disproportionate influence of the *spin giri* as superseding the otherwise egalitarian nature of Pashtun communal decision-making. "Local power structures do impinge on tribal politics. The so-called 'white-beards' (*spinzhiri*), men distinguished by their experience, rhetoric abilities and their reputation as good Pashtuns, act as opinion leaders and have great influence on the outcome of the meeting."⁵⁴

In addition to age, high religiosity and charisma enhance social power in the *qawm*, particularly when the *spin giri* also has those qualities. Protocol is also important as a visible manifestation of power within the *qawm*. For example, elders are given the position farthest away

⁵¹Much of this section is informed through interviews by the author with Khost Human Terrain Team (HTT) anthropologist Audrey Roberts conducted in February and March of 2010.

⁵²Entezar, 30-31, 41.

⁵³Ibid., 41.

⁵⁴Christine Noelle-Karimi, "The Loya Jirga—An Effective Political Instrument? A Historical Overview," in *Afghanistan—A Country Without a State?*, eds., Christine Noelle-Karimi, Conrad Schetter, Reinhard Schlagintweit (Frankfurt: IKO, 2002), 38.

from the door at social gatherings.⁵⁵ More formally, elders are looked to for their advice and consultation in dispute resolution, and community decision-making at *jirgas* and *shuras*.

The traditional nature of power in Afghanistan is locally derived, locally exercised, collective, and communal. Giustozzi says, “tribal leadership occurs at the clan and sub-tribe level if at all.”⁵⁶ The egalitarian nature of Afghan society connotes individualism and self-determination as fundamental themes across all of Afghanistan’s many ethnolinguistic groups. While *qawms* are not necessarily led by individuals, either elected or self-appointed, communities do, upon occasion, select a *khan* who may wield considerably more influence than the average individual. The *khan* is a wealthy landowner within the community and generally the head of a large family with many dependents. He provides food, shelter, loans, and other comforts for the community. He may be considered the leader of a clan or *qawm* in some cases, but not always, and not in the sense that he directly controls the *qawm*. His leadership is much more indirect—more about influence than control. When the *qawm* chooses a *khan*, or a *khan* otherwise emerges from the milieu, the people of the *qawm* have high expectations of him. *Khan* implies a certain type of symbiotic, or mutually beneficial relationship with the *qawm*. The *qawm* will not tolerate a *khan* who does not provide for the *qawm*. The community expects the *khan* to support them, providing for the community and championing its interests. “The *khan* must always show, by his generosity and his availability to those who need him, that he is the only person worthy of fulfilling” the function of *khan*.⁵⁷ Moreover, the *khan* must not rest on his laurels—he must keep an open table for those who empowered him. Afghanistan expert Michael Bhatia points out another facet of the *qawm-khan* relationship, stressing the *qawm*’s strength as a collective entity

⁵⁵Sher Jan Ahmadzai, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Center for Afghanistan Studies, interview by the author, November 5, 2009.

⁵⁶Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 49.

⁵⁷Roy, 23.

and its primacy over the individual *khan*. The “*khan* does not operate as a strongman. Instead . . . his influence is both limited by the community and based upon public opinion.”⁵⁸

This is the nature of power and influence at the local level. However, this relationship between the empowered and the empowering is not merely a local phenomenon. It extends to the national level, as well, much to the consternation of uninitiated Western observers, who tend to identify some aspects of this system as corrupt, nepotistic, or otherwise inappropriate. For example, as President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai appointed several men to office who had somewhat checkered pasts, but who had helped him consolidate power in 2001 and 2002, win election in 2004, and win re-election in 2009. Warlords Muhammad Fahim, Ismail Khan, Abdul Rashid Dostum, and others all received appointments within Karzai’s government. Karzai appointed Fahim Minister of Defense in 2001 then selected him as his First Vice President in 2009. He appeased Dostum with ceremonial positions in the Afghan government, first as Deputy Minister of Defense in 2001, then as Chief of Staff to the Commander of the Armed Forces in 2003. Ismail Khan, who has been enormously influential in western Afghanistan, was appointed Governor of Herat in 2001, then ‘promoted’ to a relatively unimportant position as Minister of Water and Electricity in 2004 after he fell out of favor with the U.S. and GIRA.⁵⁹ Karzai, desiring what may be construed as ‘*khan*’ status on a larger, national scale required the support of these and other power brokers, leveraging them and their influence to garner support throughout the fragmented country as well as boost the number of votes he could expect to receive in the general election.

Karzai sought and received support from those power brokers and their constituencies, but that support was contingent upon some level of reciprocity—just like the *khan-qawm*

⁵⁸Michael Bhatia and Mark Sedra, *Afghanistan, Arms, and Conflict: Armed Groups, Disarmament and Security in a Post-War Society* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 90.

⁵⁹Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 262.

relationship at the local level. That reciprocity was repaid in the form of appointments to the Karzai government. In turn, these power brokers, who were *khans*, as well, repaid their constituency with jobs in the ministries and areas they now controlled.⁶⁰ While Entezar ties power and wealth together in terms of Afghan society, he also stresses the importance of maintaining the bond with the *qawm*. “Obtaining positions in the ministries . . . usually requires strong ties, cold cash, or both. The bribe money paid to the official pays off later when the newly appointed individual goes to his new job and begins taking bribes and gifts from people.”⁶¹ When a Pashtun heads a ministry, the majority of the workers in that ministry tend to be Pashtun. When a Hazara heads a ministry, the majority of the workers are Hazara. This is the case with all groups and all ministries. For example, when Fahim, an ethnic Tajik from Panjshir, was Karzai’s defense minister, he filled the Ministry of Defense and the officer ranks with Tajiks. Thirty-seven of the thirty-eight generals he appointed to the newly formed Afghan National Army General Staff were Tajik, as well—a majority of those, his cohorts and from his *qawm* in Panjshir.⁶²

The community of power brokers provided for Karzai, so he provides for them. These power brokers, in turn, provide for those that empowered them. In a locally based, egalitarian society where power is derived directly from public opinion, this type of activity is commonplace, predominantly acceptable to Afghans, and compulsory for the empowered.

Simple corruption such as the taking of *bakhsheesh*, or bribe, is commonplace and basically accepted by Afghans as the price of doing business in Afghanistan. In a counterintuitive way, it is also empowering to Afghans. “Corruption, if it is done at a reasonable price and kept within acceptable limits, is not wrong as far as the peasant is concerned: it makes it possible for

⁶⁰Entezar, 33-34.

⁶¹Ibid., 34.

⁶²Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 196.

him to resist regimentation, and to avoid dealing with issues which he does not understand and whose purpose is, in any case, beyond him. . . . Corruption makes the official powerless and ensures that bureaucratic machinery can only function in a vacuum.”⁶³ In other words, *bakhsheesh* is the way the peasant feels he can buck the system and take control back from those who would otherwise control him.

The *khan-qawm* relationship succeeds as a system within Afghan society because it does not operate contrary to the fundamental imperative of individuality and self-determination within Afghan culture. Although the *khan* wields more power in some circumstances, the individual Afghan feels that he retains the power, even over the *khans* elected over him. Because the community can decide to remove a *khan's* power if they determine he is not providing for them, Afghans feel that the real power lies with the community of individuals, not the *khan*. A *khan* that fails to provide for the community loses *khan* status. This relationship, when viewed in the context of Afghanistan's fragmented nature, also explains the challenge in developing an effective central government in Afghanistan.

For a *khan* to be effective, he must provide for his community without violating the individual Afghan's concept of individuality and self-determination. For a national government to be effective, it must provide for the nation without violating the *qawm's* concept of individuality and self-determination. A number of pathologies inhibit a central government's prospects in this regard. Disenfranchisement, or a general perception by the people that they either did not participate or that their votes were discarded or otherwise not counted, damages the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the *qawm*. Moreover, an Afghan government that does not provide for the *qawm* through provision of basic services deemed government purview, or fails to distribute largess in general, also hurts its legitimacy. Afghans expect a return on their investment if they bestow power upon an individual or institution. There is a Pashtun saying, “*na khan bey*

⁶³Roy, 21.

dastakhan” which translates to, “there is no *khan* without tablecloth.” The saying means that a person cannot retain power unless he maintains an open table for those who empower him—figuratively and literally.⁶⁴ Finally, a lack of government presence whatsoever creates a void filled by local power brokers and traditional institutions such as *khans*, warlords, *jirgas*, and *shuras*. This is the case for much of Afghanistan’s history and a significant portion of Afghanistan today. Once these power brokers and traditional institutions entrench themselves in *qawm* life, their hold is difficult to sever.

When the central government extends its institutional presence to the sub-provincial level, it comes into closer, more intimate contact with the *qawm*, its people, and its traditional non-governmental institutions. This level of protrusion is the level that can create the most tension between the *qawm* and the government because this is the level where the two entities come into contact with each other. To ameliorate this potentially antagonistic relationship, the *qawm* and the government agree on a go-between.

The *malik* is a local leader elected by *qawm* elders to represent the community as an intermediary between the central government and the *qawm*.⁶⁵ Like the *khan*, the *malik* is expected to protect the *qawm*’s interest and shield them from government interference. However, the *malik* is not necessarily expected to provide for the *qawm* in a direct manner like the *khan*.

In most cases, the district governor is not the *malik*. In Afghanistan today, the district governor is appointed by the provincial governor, the Ministry of Interior, or the President of Afghanistan and is, by design, usually an outsider, not a member of the *qawm*. He will not be from the local area and may not even be of the same ethnolinguistic background as the people within his assigned district. The benefit of this relationship is that the governor theoretically

⁶⁴Roy, 250. For example, in parts of Nuristan, the *khan*’s status and social power is solidified and maintained through a complex system of collective meals he must provide for the village. The frequency and size of the meals he feeds the village very precisely determines his status.

⁶⁵Roy, 21, 23, 241.

should not be beholden to any one *qawm* above any other *qawm* living within the district he is to govern, and therefore will be able to govern fairly, and equitably, not showing favoritism to any given *qawm* within his jurisdiction. He will also seek a balance between GIRoA's interests and the interests of the *qawm*, which may be two different things altogether. A member of the *qawm*, such as a *malik*, should always keep the *qawm*'s interest at the forefront, especially as he negotiates with GIRoA, an entity that would most likely attempt to infringe upon the *qawm*'s perceived sovereignty.

Past government infiltration into the *qawm*'s physical and cognitive space have generated two conceptions of *malik* from the *qawm*'s point of view.⁶⁶ At the lower, traditional level, a *malik* represents the village to outsiders. However, with "greater government interference in the twentieth century, the *malik* came to function as a synopsis between village and government interests. His position increasingly resembled that of an elected mayor, with the exception that his authority within the village was limited."⁶⁷

The *malik* lies at the intersection or impact point of relations between the central government and traditional *qawm* institutions. The *malik* obviates the need for the government to deal directly with individuals, a structurally unreasonable prospect at this point in time given that GIRoA simply does not have the institutional capacity to access every individual across the country. However, by "making the *qawm* into an entity which it can only approach through the mediation of the *malik*, the state has strengthened the authority of the latter."⁶⁸ The state has been willing to make this concession in the past because it would have been otherwise unable to manage the country any other way. Historically, the state "has been forced to transform the

⁶⁶Christine Noelle, *State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Muhammad Khan (1826-1863)* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997), 151.

⁶⁷Noelle, 151.

⁶⁸Roy, 23.

village communities into abstract entities—units within the system of administration which can thus be managed with the help of the *malik*.”⁶⁹ By treating village communities or *qawms* as a unit, the state has been able to simplify its administrative processes and institutional infrastructure. Taxes and conscription quotas were levied collectively, and even unsolved crimes or rebellion resulted in fines imposed on the community.⁷⁰

In Afghan society, leadership is earned, not inherited. Such is the case with *spin giri*, *khans*, and *maliks*. “Leaders in such egalitarian tribal organizations gained their positions by displaying special skills in mediating problems within the tribe or successfully organizing raids and wars. It was an achieved status not automatically inherited by a man’s sons, for there were always potential rivals ready to seize any opportunity to replace an incumbent or his heir.”⁷¹

Jirgas and Shuras

One of the strongest and best-known traditional institutions in Afghanistan is the concept of collective consensus and decision-making known as *jirgas* and *shuras*. Many Westerners use the terms interchangeably to mean meeting or council, but they have different etymologies and meanings. However, they both reflect the egalitarian, individualistic nature of Afghan society and the strength of locally oriented, traditional institutions to resolve locally oriented problems effectively. Throughout much of Afghanistan's rural area, “the *jirga* forms the only available means of decision-making and expresses in many ways the egalitarian ideals of Pashtun society.”⁷²

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Thomas J. Barfield, “Tribe and State Relations: The Inner Asian Perspective,” in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, eds., Philip S. Khoury and Joseph Kostiner (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 162.

⁷²Noelle-Karimi, “The Loya Jirga”, 38.

Jirga is a Pashto word for ‘assembly’ borrowed from the Mongolian word for ‘circle’. The concept of ‘circle’ is key to the execution of a *jirga* because it implies every member has an equal voice and an equal forum to speak his mind. *Jirgas* tend to be called to resolve a single, usually pressing issue such as a land or property dispute between *qawm* members, or an encroachment upon *qawm* sovereignty by an entity external to the *qawm*. If the *jirga* is called to resolve an issue between two parties, the parties must agree to arbitration by the *jirga* and agree to abide by the decision the *jirga* delivers. The elders first follow tradition and *pashtunwali* as their guiding principle in the execution of the *jirga*, but also strive to follow their conception of *sharia* and the principles of Islam and the *hadith*. In sum, the *jirga* seeks to do what is right, fair, honorable, and best for the *qawm*.

While the *jirga* has no formal legal authority to compel a party to adhere to its decision, this in no way limits its power in the *qawm*. The *jirga* has multiple tools that give it considerable power. One tool is the *arbakai*, or tribal police. The *arbakai* is activated by the *jirga* to enforce *qawm* rules and *jirga* decisions, and to protect the *qawm* from outside threat.⁷³ Another punitive option is castigation. Castigation is a particularly effective tool that leverages Afghan culture and the *Pashtun* concept of *nang* or ‘honor’ found within the fundamental precepts of *pashtunwali*. To go against the *jirga*’s decision is to go against what is best for the *qawm* and the defiant party risks castigation or expulsion from the *qawm*, its resources, and its protection. In the Afghan’s mind, the subsequent destruction of the individual’s honor would be effectively the worst thing that could happen to a person *and* that person’s family. Castigation is such a useful tool in nationally fragmented and locally collective Afghan society because loss of honor and expulsion from the *qawm* signifies social death and has very real implications to the outcast and his or her family. The *qawm* will cease to provide protection, shelter, livelihood, and benefits for the offending individual, while the person’s family will lose social status when it carries the dishonor,

⁷³Bhatia and Sedra, xxvi.

as well. The individual, and quite possibly his family, will not be able to marry well or perhaps not even be able to marry at all, and therefore be unable to expand its clan, its connections within the *qawm*, and its ability to network with other *qawms*. The line will lose strength and influence and eventually die. This is why the family itself will take steps to correct the individual even if it means killing the offending family member in what Westerners have come to know as ‘honor killings’. While it may seem insignificant to a Westerner, castigation and expulsion from the *qawm* is serious business to Afghans, particularly the rural variety.

Jirgas enjoy strong legitimacy, particularly in the rural areas. With the lack of a strong central government and judiciary, *jirgas* became the only way to provide justice for the *qawm*. Even now, “in the rural areas of Afghanistan, most people solve their disputes and problems through *jirgas* or *shuras* because the formal justice system is weak, inaccessible, expensive, lacking in capacity, and is viewed to be very corrupt.”⁷⁴ Moreover, while *jirga* decision is considered honorable and usually closes the books on an issue, decisions made in the formal system are “generally considered invalid and cannot prevent the possibility of future revenge”⁷⁵ and continued bloodshed. Moreover, because all parties agree to abide by the *jirga*’s ruling, decisions “made at the *jirgah* are fair and binding. That is why the Pashtuns prefer *jirgahs* to government courts, which are usually corrupt, unfair, cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly.”⁷⁶

Jirgas can be called at any level from village to national to resolve an issue or reach a consensus. “The primary purpose of calling a *jirgah* is to resolve disputes or deal with pressing issues. It is used at all levels from intra- and inter-family to intra- and inter-*qawm* to national

⁷⁴Miakhel, 5.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Entezar, 106.

levels.”⁷⁷ Ever-larger *jirgas* signify ever-larger member inclusivity such that the *loya jirga*, or ‘grand assembly’, as a national-level *jirga* is attended by elders from all parts of Afghanistan. *Loya jirgas* have convened to ratify constitutions, select presidents and kings, and declare sides or neutrality in war.

The *jirga* is a powerful, traditional institution the counterinsurgent and nation-builder should understand and leverage. By integrating the *jirga* into the Afghan system of governance and rule of law, system capacity increases, government legitimacy strengthens, and the *qawm*-state rift narrows. By leveraging traditional institutions like the *jirga*, GIRoA can meet the needs of the people while building capacity with the formal judicial system. This will provide an alternative to the promised quick justice of Taliban courts.

Similar to the *jirga*, the *shura* is another traditional collective decision-making institution in Afghanistan. *Shura* is a Dari term commonly translated as ‘council’. Like the *jirga*, the *shura* is comprised of the body of elders from the *qawm* who come together to voice their opinion and make decisions on the *qawm*’s behalf. Though similar, one important difference between the two concepts prevails. While *jirgas* tend to be called to resolve a single or immediate issue, *shuras* have a more enduring connotation. *Shuras* are considered standing entities that manage functions or discuss, decide upon, and revisit standing or recurring issues. *Shuras* may have recurring meetings, such as weekly and monthly development councils, or even the annual Taliban Quetta *Shura*. *Shuras* can also have a more religious tone than *jirgas* and see more involvement from the *mullah* or *ulema*.

In the Afghan system, real power at the *qawm* level lies not with the individual, but with the collective in the visible form of the *jirga*. Noelle stresses that, historically, the “*jirga* attended by all tribesmen continued to be in charge of all village matters and the *malik* was solely

⁷⁷Ibid.

entrusted with the execution of its decisions concerning communal projects.”⁷⁸ The *malik* may be the spokesman for the *qawm*, “but is not set apart from his fellow tribesmen otherwise. The Pashtun concept that each man is sovereign precludes concentration of power. Tribal councils are attended by all men of the community and decisions are made strictly on the basis of consensus.”⁷⁹

Like the *malik*, the *khan*’s role in the *jirga* is influential, yet limited. While the *khan* may act as an opinion leader in the *jirga* and shape its decision-making, he must not act contrary to the interest of the *qawm* lest the *qawm* remove his *khan* status and prestige.⁸⁰

Warlords

While in Western circles, the term ‘warlord’ has evolved into a pejorative word, in Afghanistan, the label may have been used a bit too recklessly. Those power brokers which some may label ‘warlord’ are an important part of the Afghan system. These individuals and the influence and power they bring to the system, if used properly, can yield favorable system effects in both the short and long terms. By their nature, warlords are usually not completely antagonistic to the state and its development, and may even help enhance government institutions in some cases. They do, however, tend to be double-edged swords in that the state they help empower, they also seek to exploit for their own agendas.

Afghanistan’s history and prospects for the near future preclude the central government’s effective control over the entire population. Although many define the state as the entity with the monopoly on patronage and legitimate use of force,⁸¹ attaining that monopoly in fragmented

⁷⁸Noelle, 151.

⁷⁹Ibid., 152.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 156.

Afghanistan has always been a difficult task, usually only nominally accomplished by harsh dictators such as the Iron Amir. “While it is easy to agree that a monopoly on violence and centralised patronage are factors of state strength, the real problem is how to develop them without destroying a polity in the process, as resistance is to be expected.”⁸²

Instead of categorically opposing traditional and existing power brokers such as warlords, it is better to incorporate them into the system and use the strength, capability, and access they afford. If done wisely, GIROA support and access can benefit from warlord co-option without hindering GIROA’s legitimacy. “The transition from patrimonialism to a more institutionalised, legitimate and bureaucratised . . . system has always been highly problematic and fraught with difficulties.”⁸³ Karzai treads this fine line between legitimacy and patrimonialism adeptly. For example, Ismail Khan is a particularly powerful figure in western Afghanistan’s Herat, Badghis, and Ghor provinces. Known as the Amir of Herat since he rose in prominence while fighting the Soviets in the 1980s, Ismail Khan can also be considered one of the most powerful warlords in Afghanistan. He held the official title of Governor of Herat at various times before and after the Taliban and was able to bring security, stability, development, and international investment to western Afghanistan. However, when his actions began to stray too far from the direction Karzai and the coalition desired, Karzai ‘promoted’ him to a cabinet position in Kabul—Minister of Water and Electricity. This political wrangling helped Karzai consolidate government legitimacy to some extent and keep a watchful eye and an additional level of control over Ismail Khan.

What Westerners see as corruption, Afghans see as pragmatism. Knowing the attempted assassination, arrest, or disregard of a powerful warlord would cause more problems for the nascent administration, Karzai instead chose to marginalize the threat through co-option or bribery. In this way, the power of the warlord may still be used for the betterment of the

⁸²Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud*, 297.

⁸³Ibid.

community, and his control of patronage and violence in his domain is marginalized. Karzai also co-opted powerful Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum by assigning him the high-sounding, though ceremonial position of Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief. Karzai did the same with Panjshiri warlord Fahim Khan, initially making him an advisor in his administration, then later making him First Vice President for his re-election bid. By providing warlords positions in government, Karzai was able to garner votes and increase GIRoA's formal legitimacy and control while marginalizing the warlord's relative legitimacy, strength, and power.

To use warlords in the development of a nation, it is best to use their hunger for wealth and power for the good of the nation-building effort. In the initial stages of nation-building, they can help ensure security and stability of the areas under their purview. Once they realize the international community will not recognize them or support their attempts to monopolize patronage, they will see the state as means to their ends. Ideally, they will self-enlist into the formal system by attempting to create political parties and participate in the government process. Most warlords will at least seek stability in their region and a symbiotic, if not parasitic, relationship with the central government, as violence and instability is generally bad for business.

Connecting with Traditional Afghan Governance Institutions

Presently, the *qawm* is external to the state in an adversarial relationship creating a physical and cognitive rift between the two systems. The *qawm*-state cognitive divide starts at the district level. However, by facilitating the *qawm*'s perception of larger social inclusivity, while empowering its sense of community via increased accessibility and participation in governance, this rift may be elevated higher and higher in the hierarchy until it reaches an appropriate level of *qawm*-state competition or eventually disappears altogether when a nationally inclusive *qawm* becomes the state.

One way to increase the *qawm*'s sense of inclusivity in the state's governing apparatus is by phasing out GIRoA's practice of appointing provincial governors and district governors, and

filling those positions via popular election. GIRoA should initiate general elections first for district governors and later for provincial governors. If the people of the district elect their own governor instead of one being appointed from abroad, that official now becomes both the *malik* and the district governor. With some significant initial supervision and support, the *qawm* may expand from *khel* or village dimension and inclusivity to a more inclusive district-scaled entity. At that point, the *qawm*-state rift has elevated from the district to the provincial level. Popularly elected provincial governments, equally well supervised, will further create the conditions for further *qawm* expansion, this time to a provincial scale.

While some oppose the popular election of district and provincial governors, many favor the concept and have adopted direct, popular election as a fundamental plank of their political platform. Burhanudin Rabbani, for example, leads a coalition and political party called *Jabha-ye Milli* (National Front). This mostly non-Pashtun party firmly favors a parliamentary government and popular elections for sub-national government leadership.⁸⁴ Part of the National Front's fervent support for this form of federalism is to limit and balance the power of the Pashtun elites who traditionally control the central government and seek to consolidate power by appointing Pashtun officials to govern non-Pashtun provinces and districts. Pashtun *qawms* would also support popular elections, because even they feel marginalized by governors appointed almost universally from different *qawms*, as well.

Afghanistan has already started the integration of *qawm* and state to a fair amount of success. Mitigating the *qawm*-state rift are existing popularly elected institutions such as community and provincial councils established in Afghanistan's constitution, and community development councils (CDCs) and Provincial Development Councils (PDCs) established by the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Articles 137 through 141 of the Constitution of Afghanistan establish these councils, spell out their role in development, and mandate that the

⁸⁴Entezar, 159-160.

people of the province and district popularly elect council members.⁸⁵ Provincial council members serve four-year terms. District and village council members serve three-year terms. While provincial governors and district governors are currently appointed by the President of Afghanistan, there is nothing in the constitution compelling this method of appointment or forbidding the use of general elections to popularly elect individuals to fill these posts.

Afghan governments that have managed to exercise some level of control over the rural population have tended to treat *qawms* as entities and have forgone the attempt to access Afghans individually. As GIRoA is not in a position to manage the complexity of such a system, nor the technical infrastructure prepared to maintain such connectivity, a federal system providing services and control to the district stratum is a reasonable target level that can still incite the appropriate patronage from the citizenry while tying into and leveraging traditional sub-national governance institutions. *Jirgas* and *shuras* are still appropriate institutions the *qawm* can use to resolve issues up to a certain scale. For example, a *jirga* of local *spin giri* is the ideal institution to rule on local land disputes. The *jirga* is comprised of actors who know the background, understand the context, and generate decisions most likely to be accepted by the community. Furthermore, judicial institutions within GIRoA at this point are a long way from having the capacity to manage the sheer volume of these types of locally oriented cases effectively. Nor will their decisions be as well informed, credible, or enforceable. However, for higher crimes such as murder, GIRoA's judiciary should be the sole adjudicator.

Tying together traditional and GIRoA governance institutions cannot happen in a vacuum. GIRoA, through the assistance of the international community, must build governance capacity at all levels—national, provincial, and district. Mentorship and visibility provided by professional District Support Teams (DSTs) can enhance this capacity, monitor and marginalize corruption and incompetence, and help establish integration with traditional *qawm* institutions.

⁸⁵The Constitution of Afghanistan, Chapter 8: Administration, January 3, 2004.

Culturally savvy DSTs must mentor and monitor, but take a more subtle, behind-the-scenes role so the people perceive a fruitful and mutually beneficial *qawm*-state relationship that protects and supports *qawm* interest without foreign meddling.

Securing Afghanistan

Due to a lack of overall strategic coherence and insufficient resources, the ANP has not been organized, trained, and equipped to operate effectively as a counter-insurgency force. Promising programs to reform and train police have proceeded too slowly due to a lack of training teams. . . . The ANP must increase in size in order to provide sufficient police needed to hold areas that have been cleared of insurgents, and to increase the capacity to secure the population.⁸⁶

— General Stanley McChrystal, COMISAF’s Initial Assessment

The international community has invested a great amount of time, effort, money, and lives in developing capacity in various sectors of the Afghan system. ISAF has expended most of its effort on security sector reform and Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) development, and within this sector has focused mainly on the Afghan National Army (ANA)—to the detriment of the Afghan National Police (ANP). Assessments year after year decry the ANP as lagging behind the ANA in terms of professionalism, capability, and credibility. Usually following these dark assessments is the declaration of ANP reform and capacity building as the new main effort. However, ANA growth, reform, and capacity building continue to far outpace ANP growth, reform, and capacity building and this appears to be the standard course ahead. The disproportionate amount of attention paid to the ANA is understandable but unfortunate. ISAF and CSTC-A are fundamentally military institutions with unparalleled expertise in military affairs. These organizations and the people who lead and man them are simply more comfortable with the Army than with the Police and consciously or subconsciously gravitate towards what they know. Serious focus on ANP reform became something left to the Embassy, the Germans, or

⁸⁶General Stanley McChrystal, “COMISAF Initial Assessment,” August 30, 2009, G-2—G-3, http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?sid=ST2009092003140 (accessed March 25, 2010).

DynCorp. Talented officers were either vectored towards ANA affairs or self-selected that path while ANP reform enlisted fewer proponents.

This imbalance and the subsequent lack of attention to ANP reform and capacity building has exacerbated many of the problems we face in counterinsurgency and nation-building in Afghanistan today, and has led to a crisis in security and legitimacy in many parts of the country. While development of the ANA is absolutely important, the truth is that development of a professional, capable, and credible ANP is potentially more vital to the prospects of defeating the insurgency, protecting the population, and establishing and consolidating GIRoA legitimacy. While the ANA has long claimed to be able to clear ground in Afghanistan, particularly with its growing Commando capability, ANA cannot hold the ground indefinitely. They eventually have to return to garrison or deploy to another area of concern. The ANP, particularly district-level Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), on the other hand, have a lasting presence, and an enduring relationship with sub-provincial municipalities, communities, and *qawms*.

Afghan Border Police (ABP) units and district-level AUP are, indeed, the front line of the counterinsurgency. They, along with the district governor, are also the face that GIRoA presents to the *qawm*. Corruption, lack of professionalism, and lack of capability to defend the populace or themselves exacerbates the *qawm's* grievance against the government, widens the *qawm*-state rift, and damages GIRoA legitimacy. Insurgents understand this and continue to attack the ANP as tactically soft targets, the destruction of which, when paired with strong propaganda, yields strategic effects.

Afghan National Security Force

The ANSF is comprised of two primary entities managed by two different government ministries. The ANA works under the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) administers the ANP. The ANA and ANP form the front line in the fight against insurgency in Afghanistan and have been trained and mentored by ISAF Embedded Training

Teams (ETTs), Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs), and Police Mentoring Teams (PMTs). GIRoA and the international community have agreed upon manning numbers and capture that authorization in an Afghan document called the *tashkil*. The ANSF has grown in authorized and actual strength since the coalition began reforming Afghan security forces in 2002, and the authorized strength targets grow every year or two.⁸⁷ ANSF strength as of early 2010 was 192,000, with 97,000 ANA and 95,000 ANP. By the end of 2010, ISAF projects a total ANSF strength of 243,000 with 134,000 ANA and 109,000 ANP. ISAF's 2013 goal is a 400,000-strong ANSF with 240,000 ANA and 160,000 ANP.⁸⁸ The clear numerical emphasis continues to be on the ANA, with the ANP left to spread only 40 percent of the entire ANSF against every district in Afghanistan, even though they must maintain an enduring presence there.

The ANA and ANP follow different development philosophies. The ANA centrally train at the Kabul Military Training Center (KMTC), one *kandak* (battalion) at a time. ANA *kandaks* are built with an Afghan face, that is, each *kandak* has a mix of Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and other ethnic groups manning the unit. After training, the *kandak* can be sent to any one of the regional Corps.⁸⁹ The ANA is well-equipped, well-supported by GIRoA and ISAF, and extensively partnered with ISAF units, ETTs, and OMLTs. The ANA is fairly capable in counterinsurgency and has improved its capability by fielding western weapons and Commando *kandaks*. The ANA Commandos, initiated in 2007, are highly trained in advanced infantry tactics, leadership, and COIN tactics and operations and bring a particularly effective capability to the ANA. The question, though, remains whether or not the Afghans have the capacity to self-sustain

⁸⁷Richard L. Phillips, "American Nation Building in Afghanistan" (Research Project, Army War College April 18, 2009), <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA508296&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf> (accessed March 20, 2009).

⁸⁸International Security Assistance Force, "IJC Command Brief," December 30, 2009.

⁸⁹The ANA is organized into regional Corps. 201-Kabul/east-central, 203-Gardez/east, 205-Kandahar/south, 207-Herat/west, 209-Mazar-e-Sharif/north, and (starting in 2010) 215-Lashkar Gah/southwest. A seventh Corps, the Afghan Army Air Corps (ANAAC) is headquartered in Kabul and operates in various parts of the country.

such units and weapons as ISAF begins its inevitable drawdown and monetary support for Afghanistan begins to dwindle.

Unlike the ANA, the ANP is recruited, trained, and fielded regionally, giving it a more local face. Most often, ANP recruits return to their *qawm* or district of origin after ANP training at the Regional Training Center (RTC). At one point in Afghan history, there were dozens of types of police.⁹⁰ However, after reform and some experimentation on specialization, today's ANP construct includes Afghan Uniform Police (AUP), Afghan Border Police (ABP), and Afghan Civil Order Police (ANCOP). Like ANA Commandos, ANCOP policemen receive additional training and employ additional weaponry. AUP are fielded at the provincial, district, and village levels, and constitute the primary source of police presence and interaction with the *qawm*. ABP deploy as brigades and battalions, and are arrayed along the Afghanistan's borders and, to a smaller extent, at the international airports.

ANP development, funding, reform, and fielding lag behind that of the ANA. However, to ensure enduring security and lasting stability in Afghanistan, it is vitally important to develop a professional, capable, credible, respected ANP. This goal requires attention given to the ANP equal to or greater than that given to the ANA. With a higher *tashkil* cap on ANP soldiers and a correspondingly higher number of district-level PMTs (PMT-D) to mentor and train them, GIRoA and ISAF will be well on their way to marginalizing and defeating the insurgency.

There currently exists a very tangible gap between ANA and ANP development, quality, and growth. There is an equally recognizable chasm between quality and quantity in the ANP, with more emphasis placed on immediate fielding and less emphasis placed on developing

⁹⁰Some examples include Afghan Highway Police, National Park Police, Traffic Police, and others. ISAF and GIRoA reform eliminated many of the unorganized, unmonitored, ineffective, and often quite corrupt entities, and even experimented with such short-lived projects as the Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP).

professionalism in the police force. However, the struggle to find the appropriate balance between quality and quantity in ANP fielding is not a zero-sum game.

In order to field the appropriate number of police in districts and villages across Afghanistan, GIRoA, ISAF, and the international community must increase the *tashkil*-authorized number of ANP—particularly district-level AUP. To meet this fielding demand, ISAF must correspondingly increase its training output. However, the RTC program does not instill the professionalism required in the police force.

To help instill professionalism in the police force, ISAF must reexamine its approach to police mentorship and partnership, fielding more PMT-Ds to more districts across the country. These teams serve a dual role. The first, more visible role of the PMT is to mentor AUP soldiers and leadership and continue the training burden where the RTC left off. This role implies enduring PMT contact with Afghan police units at the district and village level, training the police on basic skills, ensuring they remain appropriately equipped, and teaching them to sustain their own training and logistics. Through training and mentorship, PMTs increase the capability and professionalism of the AUP. By their mere presence, PMTs decrease likelihood and instances of AUP corruption such as taking *bakhshesh* or bribes from Afghans—a fairly common pathology among police and a particularly salient annoyance for the average Afghan that widens the *qawm*-state rift.

The second PMT-D role is more subtle, but equally important. PMT-Ds provide visibility into district- and *qawm*-level dynamics, and integrate with other district-level institutions to coordinate, synchronize, and synergize efforts to build capacity within all district-level Afghan institutions. PMT-Ds must observe and understand district and *qawm* dynamics, gain contextual understanding, and adjust efforts to professionalize the AUP. Moreover, they help set the conditions for growth of sectors beyond the security sector. In the safety of a PMT-enabled and ANSF-ensured secure environment, the Afghans can pursue development, economic growth, and governance without deleterious molestation from insurgents, criminals, and other malign actors.

In addition to the district AUP and district governor, the PMT-D must integrate with the DST to ensure a coordinated, synchronized total effort. The PMT-D will help ensure the AUP and ISAF (as necessary) secure the people of the *qawm* and the projects they desire to pursue.

While capability in the various sectors is important, it means little if the Afghans cannot self-sustain that capability in the out years as coalition forces withdraw and Afghans and Afghan institutions assume primacy. In fact, not being able to self-sustain institutions such as the ANSF may lead to more problems than just the obvious decrement in security capability. If the international community develops a western-style, mirror-imaged ANSF, it may be capable, but completely unsustainable given Afghanistan's meager resources and infrastructure. Large and technologically advanced western-style armies rely on extensive funding, logistics, technology, and highly capable leaders with bureaucratic-administrative expertise. Capability is important, but capacity is vital.

Connecting with Traditional Afghan Security Institutions

Local police are just that—local. They are not national entities sent down from abroad. The *qawm* accepts the *arbakai*, or tribal police, because it is part of the *qawm*—local and responsive to the *qawm*'s interests. A national entity operating in the *qawm*'s space, on the other hand, will tend to exacerbate *qawm*-state tension because the *qawm* perceives it as an outsider that supports the state's interest at the *qawm*'s expense. The ANP's lack of professionalism and inadequate oversight can manifest as corruption and weakness, alienating the local populace, and further widening the rift between *qawm* and state.

The most effective way to enhance the capability, capacity, and professionalism of the AUP and to improve its relationship with and acceptance by the *qawm* is to field PMT-Ds who will establish enduring relationships and understanding of the AUP unit, the *qawm*, and the unique situation in its particular district. The intent is to build an ANP that is no longer in conflict with or in opposition to the *qawm*. By building a professional ANP that supports the *qawm*'s

interests, and is locally manned and supported, the *qawm* can expand to enfold the district AUP, and therefore eliminate both the need for an *arbakai* and the cognitive space or rift between the *qawm* and the state at the district and later the provincial level.

Development and Economic Growth

Given the ingredients of the non-literate, peasant-tribal, inward-looking society . . . the human problems appear as monumental as the magnificent engineering edifices left on the landscape; but without consideration of the human factor, great dams simply make great ruins.⁹¹

— Louis Dupree in reference to the 1946 Helmand Valley Project

In 1946, the Afghan government contracted Morrison-Knudsen Afghanistan Inc., an American company, to undertake an enormous project in the Helmand River Valley. The intent was to build two large dams and an extensive, elaborate system of canals and waterways that would bring water to Helmand's desert and a corresponding increase in agricultural production and economic growth to a region otherwise deemed economically unproductive. While the engineering and technical aspects of the project were mostly sound, the project managers in Kabul and the U.S. did not adequately consider the social and psychological systems the project would contact and influence, and the cultural characteristics of the affected areas. Nor did the planners consider long-term maintenance or Afghan self-sustainment of these systems. Though the program's intent was to help the people of Helmand and strengthen the rural-state relationship, it actually served to widen the rift and sow discontent. "The inward-looking society . . . militates against change, and any major shifts in the ecological patterns tend unfavorably to tilt centuries-old, functioning cultural practices."⁹²

Afghan society, particularly in the rural areas, is conservative, resistant to change, and dubious of any government interference in daily life. Furthermore, anything that affects water and land will be an emotional event for the rural Afghan because the *qawm's* balance of power is

⁹¹Dupree, 483.

⁹²Ibid., 500.

often adjudicated on these elements and their distribution. Altering the flow of water, changing the distribution of arable land, and bringing in people from different locations drastically affect the social dynamics and stability of the *qawm* system—to the benefit of some and the detriment of others. Those that stand to lose or even perceive that they will lose power or social standing will fight against the state or external change agent even if the community stands to gain from the project. The fundamental problem is that the *qawm* perceives top-down programs and projects conceived from abroad and implemented locally as an encroachment on *qawm* dynamics, way-of-life, and individual legitimacy. The *qawm* will fight against such perceived attacks. The bottom-up, locally oriented approach is a better way to access and integrate the locally oriented *qawm* system because the *qawm* perceives itself as being the impetus for beneficial change and development.

Pursuing development, particularly in rural Afghanistan, is a critically important facet of counterinsurgency and nation-building. Zakhilwal and Thomas say that, “development in the rural areas, where most of Afghanistan’s citizens live, could perhaps be the most critical issue in determining the future. In many ways, the war in Afghanistan can be attributed to past rural development policies (or lack thereof).”⁹³ They also emphasize the inauspicious history of development in Afghanistan: “in a country where rural development policies have meant either almost no government services or the opposite (i.e., unwanted reforms forced on the people leading to uprisings and war), drastically different rural policies are needed—ones that are sensitive, sustainable, and participatory.”⁹⁴

⁹³Omar Zakhilwal and Jane Murphy Thomas, “Afghanistan: What Kind of Peace? The Role of Rural Development in Peacebuilding” from *The Paradoxes of Peacebuilding Post-9/11* ed. Stephen Baranyi (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2008), 147.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 149.

National Solidarity Program and Locally Focused Development

Recognizing the efficacy of locally oriented development, GIROA has taken the initiative to connect with the *qawm* via a locally oriented approach. The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) began implementing the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) via the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in 2003. Shifting the emphasis from top-down to bottom-up development has met with a fair amount of success in Afghanistan and has served to strengthen the bonds between the *qawm* and the central government. The NSP is a nation-wide development program commissioned to “develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage, and monitor their own development projects. Through the promotion of good local governance, the NSP works to empower rural communities to make decisions affecting their own lives and livelihoods.”⁹⁵ While popularly elected Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Provincial Development Councils (PDCs) determine the course of development in the district or province, ISAF and the international community support Afghan decisions as Facilitating Partners (FPs), bringing money, expertise, and advice, but otherwise staying in the background while GIROA and the community itself is in the forefront. The CDCs discuss and vote on projects for their own community then help build, support, and maintain these projects by themselves.

Communities have selected such projects as wells, schools, clinics, roads, water distribution, electrical distribution, and others. GIROA and the FPs facilitate block grants for the community’s approved development plan and the community, as the key stakeholder, helps fund, build, and maintain projects. Because of the ownership mentality communities develop in regards to their own projects, they also inherently take responsibility for security, protection, and maintenance of these projects.

⁹⁵Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, National Solidarity Programme. <http://www.nspafghanistan.org/> (accessed March 21, 2010).

The NSP also recognizes and works with the diverse, fragmented nature of Afghan society in that it does not attempt to template a solution and export it across all of Afghanistan. “The rural areas of Afghanistan represent a diversity of cultures, topography, and histories. . . . Rural development strategies, therefore, must address these diversities, must be balanced and inclusive, and must address inequalities of gender, regions, religions, ethnicities, and locations.”⁹⁶ The locally focused approach is a good model the international community should continue to support and ISAF should support and learn from, mirroring the program’s flexibility and locally oriented access to the system, which develops an ownership mentality among *qawm* members, and helps engender stronger bonds between Afghans and GIRoA to span the *qawm*-state rift.

As of February 2010, over 22,000 CDCs have been elected and mobilized by MRRD and FPs. Over 99 percent of these communities have submitted and gained approval for their Community Development Plans (CDPs). MRRD has approved nearly 51,000 projects, over 38,000 of which are complete in 361 districts of all 34 provinces in Afghanistan.⁹⁷ This is a significant number that proves the ability to connect with the *qawm*, even when it resides in a distant, rural, previously considered inaccessible area.

While NSP has been very effective in most of Afghanistan, it has been somewhat dysfunctional in a few areas. The communities that are having problems with NSP implementation are usually those that do not have adequate mentorship from FPs in the initial stages, and those communities whose CDCs have been co-opted by local power brokers for their own benefit and power. However, with adequate oversight and mentorship, the *qawms* have been mobilized, strengthened, and drawn closer to GIRoA and the rest of the nation, while simultaneously building capacity to improve their own development and economic growth.

⁹⁶Ibid., 153.

⁹⁷Data as of February 19, 2010 as per MRRD NSP website (accessed March 21, 2010).

Leveraging Traditional Institutions for Development and Economic Growth

In order to form a more effective physical and cognitive connection between GIRoA and the *qawm*, and engender a mutually beneficial relationship between the two entities, GIRoA must provide visible benefits and services to the *qawm* even as the *qawm* gives up some of its traditionally held power to the central government. Afghanistan's geography and history of weak central government, and inadequate or non-existent connecting institutions have contributed to Afghan society's fragmentation and the emergence of diverse yet self-sufficient *qawm* networks of solidarity. The *qawms* provided for the community by bringing leadership, governance, judicial decision, and basic services. If the government wishes legitimacy in the eyes of Afghans, it must effectively provide a number of important things to the people. GIRoA must effectively and reliably provide basic services to the people of Afghanistan in order to help consolidate its legitimacy in Afghan eyes. Basic service areas expected of GIRoA include providing access to water, education, energy, health care, communication, transportation, sanitation, banking, and religious services.

It is imperative that GIRoA is the perceived basic services provider and that those services are provided effectively. If the Afghans perceive ISAF, an NGO, or some other facilitating partner as being the one providing services, this does little to legitimize GIRoA and may actually diminish the central government in the eyes of the people. Moreover, if GIRoA promises service then fails to deliver on these promises, its legitimacy is further diminished. This lack of performance may be from a lack of capability, a lack of competence, or because of insurgent attack. No matter what the cause, GIRoA's inability to meet that contract further widens the *qawm*-state rift.

In some places in Afghanistan, the NSP's locally oriented approach to development has proven highly successful in reaching out to the *qawm*, leveraging its strengths and propensity, and enfolded its traditional institutions into the formal Afghan system. The NSP finds a good balance

between tradition and modernity by holding popular elections for the *shura*-like CDCs and PDCs, and by bringing non-traditional voices into the public domain. For example, the program ensures women have a voice, role, and position on the council. While some particularly traditional and conservative areas have expressed some level of discomfort with the more public role of women in NSP, the decentralized and flexible nature of the program allows for district-specific structures such as dual CDCs—one male and one female. The program has also provided a structure that spans the rift between traditional and formal institutions of governance. In fact, some CDCs have expanded beyond their chartered developmental focus and now help resolve local disputes, manage the community’s finances, and make other decisions for the community.⁹⁸ *Qawm* members recognize these successes as community driven, but facilitated by a helpful GIRoA in a mutually beneficial relationship that enhances stability, self-sustainability, and GIRoA legitimacy.

Organizing for Success in Afghan COIN

International Coalition troops have had limited contact with the locals, and accordingly, have had little success in winning over the population . . . there are too many subcontractors dispersing international aid with too little coordination and accountability to Afghans and their interests.⁹⁹

— Gilles Dorransoro, *The Taliban’s Winning Strategy*

Given the fragmented nature of Afghanistan—its people, terrain, isolation, size, and dearth of connecting infrastructure—and the adaptive nature of the insurgency, ISAF and GIRoA, as the counterinsurgents, must have the organizational flexibility, and its leaders, the cognitive agility, to match the complexity of the system, the situation, and the enemy. Moyar recognizes the importance of a flexible, locally focused approach: “Counterinsurgency requires different methods from one place to another because of the differences in the local population, the

⁹⁸Zakhilwal and Thomas, 164-165.

⁹⁹Gilles Dorransoro, “The Taliban’s Winning Strategy,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/taliban_winning_strategy.pdf (accessed March 23, 2010).

insurgent forces, the counterinsurgent forces, and the terrain.”¹⁰⁰ Situations are rarely homogenous across the battlespace, and in the case of Afghanistan, are quite different from province to province, and often valley to valley. Moreover, with a light, savvy, adaptive enemy, the counterinsurgent must be temporally adaptive, as well. Counterinsurgency “requires different methods from one moment to another because the insurgents change their behavior frequently, often in response to the actions of the counterinsurgents.”¹⁰¹

The complexity of Afghanistan, its people and the insurgency compel ISAF to become a true learning organization—decentralized, agile, and adaptive. As a learning organization appropriately tailored to leverage the fragmented nature of Afghan society, ISAF will be more effective in its partnership with the international community, GIRoA, and the Afghan people. Such an organization “can deal with complexity and uncertainty in war because people at all levels are capable of proactively developing and implementing new ways of achieving individual, unit, and institutional excellence and effectiveness.”¹⁰² In discussing the concept of learning organizations, Brigadier General Fastabend and Robert Simpson state that in such institutions every person is “invested in the organization’s success and feels a responsibility to implement new and better ways to achieve organizational objectives. People are encouraged to try alternative paths, test ideas to the point of failure, and learn from the experience. Experimentation and prudent risk-taking are admired and encouraged.”¹⁰³ These are all qualities ISAF must internalize if it hopes for efficacy in Afghanistan.

¹⁰⁰Moyar, 5.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Donald E. Vandergriff, *Raising the Bar: Creating and Nurturing Adaptability to Deal with the Changing Face of War* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Defense Information, 2006), 22.

¹⁰³Brigadier General David A. Fastabend and Robert H. Simpson, “Adapt or Die: The Imperative for a culture of Innovation in the United States Army,” http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/culture_of_innovation.pdf (accessed February 27, 2010).

Decentralization and the Local Focus

Afghanistan's fragmented society and extremely diverse terrain remove any possibility of the counterinsurgent or nation-builder applying a single template across the entire country. In Afghanistan, "from province to province, district to district, even village to village, people organize themselves in different ways."¹⁰⁴ Because of the extreme differences from one place to another, that which may be successful in one part of Afghanistan may not work at all in another. This fact compels the counterinsurgent to decentralize—to empower lower echelons to become familiar with the situation in their locality and design and execute a campaign to effect beneficial change in the situation within their geographic sphere of influence. While the national-level commander and staff should be concerned with big-picture concepts like trends, support, and the national political environment, the local commander should be allowed to focus on his specific area of responsibility. He should live within his AOR and become familiar with its physical aspects like terrain, weather, climate, resources, infrastructure, and communications. More importantly, he must understand the socio-cultural aspects of the people within his AOR such as their culture, history, narrative, psychology, allegiances, and enemies. He must know the power and information brokers, and understand how they operate in the dynamic political landscape. He must not only observe the level of government presence and infrastructure within his district, but its relationship with the local population and their perception of its legitimacy and relative popular support compared to the insurgent infrastructure. He must understand how the people within his area of responsibility feel about the insurgents, GIRoA, ANSF, foreign nation-builders, and ISAF forces. Only in understanding the human and physical terrain, and how their sub-elements interact to weave a complex tapestry of perceived reality can the local commander understand what the problem is and how he needs to proceed. This level of detail is unobtainable by the commander and staff operating behind the compound walls of a headquarters in Kabul. In

¹⁰⁴Department of the Army, Human Terrain System Afghanistan Research Reachback Center, 6.

Afghanistan, this level of granularity is only truly accessible at the district level or below. Moyar points out that decentralized command “has been the hallmark of effective counterinsurgency since ancient times,” and that national leaders should “communicate the mission and a list of restrictions to local commanders and then let the local commanders decide how to accomplish the mission.”¹⁰⁵

Moyar also points out that the local commander must be knowledgeable and well-studied in counterinsurgency theory and practice and know what has worked well in other places, but “must be able to determine which ideas are transferable and which are not, and to adapt methods and create new ones.”¹⁰⁶ Nationwide templating will not work—especially in Afghanistan. A locally oriented approach gives the best prospects of success.

Risk Acceptance

Mao Tse-tung said that the guerrilla is like a fish among the water of the people.¹⁰⁷ ISAF talks about a population-centric strategy and that the support of the population is the prize. However, ISAF has traditionally separated itself from the water—the people it claims a desire to protect and whose minds it wants to win over. This bunker mentality creates a cognitive and physical divide between ISAF and the Afghans—a divide the insurgents adroitly exploit. While it seems counterintuitive, one of the paradoxes of counterinsurgency is that by accepting short-term, tactical risk, the counterinsurgent can actually reduce long-term operational and strategic risk. Force protection policies and procedures that lead to a bunker mentality alienate the populace and create enemies of those who were once friends or at least ambivalent towards GIROA or coalition forces.

¹⁰⁵Moyar, 5.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2005), 93.

Afghans respond to the appearance of strength and power, quite often exhibited non-verbally in a person's manner and action. In the cognitive battle between the insurgent and the ISAF-GIRoA team, the otherwise apathetic Afghan will choose the side that appears stronger and more likely to win. The simple fact is that certain force protection policies and operational procedures often make coalition soldiers look weak and afraid. Traveling at high speeds in convoys bristling with weaponry between fortified and widespread operating bases, and never really conversing with the local populace makes ISAF forces seem mysterious on one hand, and appear scared or weak on the other. Contrast this with the insurgent who knows the people, lives among them or close by, does not armor up, but is still able to exert his will and control over the population.

The Afghan Face

The fragmented and incredibly diverse nature of Afghan society and geography compel a decentralized approach to development and provision of basic services. A western-imagined or centrally templated solution will not work in Afghanistan. A more effective approach works with the propensity of the Afghan system, leveraging different strengths, weaknesses, needs, and preferences of different *qawms*. CDCs allow for local determination of what the *qawm* needs, wants, and can sustain. To be effective, ISAF organization must match the decentralized nature of NSP. District Support Teams (DSTs) must synchronize and synergize efforts of all the FPs, to include ISAF, Department of State, NGOs, and IOs, and integrate and support CDCs, the district governors, provincial governors, the ANP, and the ANA. Moreover, to reflect the decentralized decision-making capability of the CDCs, ISAF must delegate decision-making to the district level, as well, and then support the DSTs as they support their corresponding CDCs and *qawms*. The local focus and enduring presence of DSTs (and its elements) allows for visibility into the local environment, its problems, and an understanding of the local system. Furthermore, enhancement of the number, quality, and enduring presence of District Police Mentor Teams

(PMT-D) at the district level will provide visibility and oversight of the AUP and engender through partnership, higher professionalism, less corruption, more capability, and higher capacity.

The DST and PMT-Ds must operate in the background to the maximum extent possible, putting the ‘Afghan Face’ on development projects, basic services delivery, governance, and security. As *qawm* and state capacity builds, DSTs may slowly draw down, leaving more and more responsibility to the Afghans. Finally, while providing for the Afghans, FPs must always consider the Afghan ability to self-sustain that which the international community provides for them or helps them develop.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is.¹⁰⁸

— T.E. Lawrence, August 20, 1917

The sectors addressed in this monograph—security, governance and rule of law, development and economic growth, and organizing for Afghan COIN—should be approached neither sequentially nor in a vacuum. They are part of a system of transformation—a way to get from here to there. They grow in tandem, building capacity, reinforcing each other, each strengthening and enabling the others as the general situation improves. That said, there must exist a minimum level of security to create the conditions for growth. In some parts of Afghanistan, today’s ANSF alone can neither create nor maintain this minimum security level. ISAF forces must, therefore, help establish this inchoate security situation and ensure its initial maintenance, enable incipient growth, and set the conditions for Afghan self-sustainment of the three sectors before fading into the background and handing over primacy to the Afghans.

¹⁰⁸T.E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” *T.E. Lawrence in War & Peace* (London: Greenhill Books, 2005), 144-145.

The insurgents recognize the imperative for an initial level of security. That is why they work so diligently to create a sense of insecurity. They must prove GIRoA unable to accomplish one of the basic expectations of a legitimate government—that is, to protect the population from rampant violence. Insurgents accomplish this goal by attacking coalition forces, government forces, government institutions, or the people at large. It does not even take an enormous number of attacks to create the requisite sense of insecurity. Insurgents exploit this asymmetry, trying to force the counterinsurgent to attempt to be strong everywhere at great expense or diminished effectiveness. However, if the counterinsurgent uses the forces he has wisely, he can generate his own beneficial asymmetry—popular support. With a significant portion of the population working with the central government to stand up against malign actors, the insurgent has nowhere to hide, no safe haven, no internal support, and no population to control. Once the population decides to stand up for itself, the days of the insurgency are numbered.

The truth is that no government can protect all of the people all of the time. That would be an unrealistic aspiration, an unattainable target. However, the goal should be for GIRoA to set the conditions for the Afghan people to take partial ownership of their own security, governance, and development situations. Violent opposition groups exist throughout even the Western world. While occasionally making news, they are not a significant concern to the average Westerner because in their countries, these groups have been marginalized to the point where they cannot operate effectively. The government and the people share active roles in security.

Security, governance, and development cannot be handed to the Afghans—they must take ownership of, and have active participation in, that transformation process and condition maintenance. Fortunately, Afghans have this capacity in their nature and traditions. GIRoA and ISAF must be willing to access and enable this capacity. Afghans desire security, safety, and stability. In general, they do not like or support the Taliban, but often feel compelled to endure them because they are the ones with more presence and control over their daily lives. Every step should be towards making the Afghans believe that GIRoA and the people of Afghanistan will be

the eventual victor in this struggle and that Afghans should tie their hopes, efforts, and support to the winning side. Just as in business, ownership mentality engenders better performance and long-term efficacy. The goal is to create that mentality with GIRoA and the Afghan people.

The nature of the Afghan system compels us to understand the culture and pursue a local approach to counterinsurgency and stability there. Miakhel recognizes the imperative of the local approach, even if it takes more time and effort than attempting a unified, singular national approach.

For security, governance and development, citizen participation must be at the district level. While consensus building or a ‘bottom up’ approach is a time consuming process, in the end, it saves time, resources and avoids catastrophic mistakes. If more time is spent in planning [and] including key community leaders in the process to achieve consensus, then the community will support any project. This process of consensus building is essential in achieving a peaceful, secure, well-governed Afghanistan. It is a democratic process with the support and participation of the people.¹⁰⁹

Recommendations

Avoid mirror-imaging a Western solution to an Afghan problem. Often times, Western nation-builders hold up an image of Afghanistan that looks a lot like the West. However, this is an unreasonable target. The goal should be to help the Afghans along the path of creating an Afghanistan they want and can self-sustain. Moreover, in many cases, the Western nation-builder may try to fix something that is not even broken in Afghan eyes, and in doing so, create short- and long-term problems of sustainability or social tension. Seek to understand the system from the Afghan point of view. It is best to start with what works well for Afghans in a particular area, either build with those designs and themes, or improve them in a way the Afghans of that particular area can self-sustain and recreate in the future without foreign assistance.

Avoid templating a design or solution for use across Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Afghans are very diverse and their heterogeneity precludes a monolithic approach to construction, engagement, development, and capacity building. Just because a design or approach works in one

¹⁰⁹Miakhel, 22.

part of the country does not necessarily mean it will be efficacious in another. Some things may find universal utility in Afghanistan, but many will not. This fact compels a decentralized approach and a system of transformation that allows for low-level decision-making and implementation. A district focus is an appropriate balance.

Do not solely build capability to perform, build capacity to self-sustain. Afghanistan has little hope of self-sustaining many of the Western-style institutions and construction the international community has worked so diligently to install. Lacking the ability to sustain these ideas and projects, they will rapidly fall into disrepair despite, and in many cases because of, their great expense. In Afghanistan, institutions and construction should be rugged, low-maintenance, locally sustainable, and inexpensive to operate. This goes for government and security forces as well as buildings and equipment.

Think small. Many of the most successful projects in Afghanistan and other post-conflict areas have been small-scale projects with extensive local participation. Small projects requested or vetted by local development councils bring development the local people want, understand, and can reap tangible benefits from quickly. Appropriate large projects are certainly important, but Afghans may not see the long-term advantage or reap short- and mid-term benefits, particularly in the rural area. In addition, it is often easier to rectify unintended unfavorable consequences resulting from smaller projects than those arising from larger ones.

Afghan First. All projects should follow the 'Afghan First' policy, seeking to employ as many Afghans as reasonable in the construction and maintenance of the project. This approach has the dual benefit of generating jobs and income for Afghans, some of whom may otherwise be drawn to illicit or malign activities, and also creating something in which the locals are psychologically and physically invested. The former helps deny insurgents a source of recruits, the latter helps engender an ownership mentality in the Afghan who is more willing to protect something he needed, wanted, built, or funded.

Genuine focus on ANP fielding and professional development. The ANP is the key to the successful future of a productive, stable Afghanistan. More than any other institution, the ANP is GIRoA's front line and staying power against insurgency. They are the 'hold' in 'clear, hold, build, self-sustain', and GIRoA's most visible face before the people of Afghanistan. ISAF and GIRoA must work together to recruit, train, field, equip, support, mentor, and develop the ANP as a professional, trusted entity. This means increasing the *tashkil*-authorized numbers, particularly for district AUP, ABP, and ANCOP units. It also means taking a very close look at the Regional Training Center (RTC) training program and the service DynCorp ostensibly provides to ensure ISAF is helping to generate the right balance of quantity and quality in the ANP and ANSF at large. Finally, to ensure accountability and continued professional development of ANP personnel, ISAF must field more PMT-Ds with enduring district-level presence and partnership with district-level AUP.

It is not about the tribe. Many groups of people in Afghanistan are not associated with tribes, and those that are conceive of them differently than other tribal people of the Middle East. To the Afghan, the tribe may or may not play a considerably important role in their thoughts, actions, and identity. To gain insight and understanding, the counterinsurgent and nation-builder must look to a more local level. While it is important to understand generalities of the different tribes and ethnolinguistic groups living in Afghanistan, it is vital to understand that the Afghan draws his sense of identity from his *qawm*, or solidarity group, which is generally based more on location and close relation than on a larger concept of tribe. Thinking in terms of tribe can be counterproductive because it may lead the counterinsurgent and nation-builder to over-generalize a heterogeneous society and underemphasize the significant physical and psychological cleavages between people theoretically of the same tribe. Thinking in terms of *qawm* and finding culturally savvy ways to expand its inclusivity and connectedness with the state and the broader concept of Afghanistan will decrease negative tensions in the country and improve prospects for mutually beneficial relationships.

Create a command with the organizational and cognitive agility to harness the complexity of the Afghan system. Afghanistan represents a complex social system with myriad disparate yet integrated actors and tensions. Afghanistan's fragmented nature and inward-looking *qawms* can belie the fact that a larger system exists. However, ISAF or GIRoA cannot hope to effectively access and favorably influence this system if organized and operated as monolithic entities. The nature of Afghanistan and the insurgency there demand a decentralized, local focus in order to manage their fragmentation and complexity. This starts with a command that provides vision, strategy, and support from the top, as well as a willingness to accept risk by pushing decision-making down to the lower levels.

Counterinsurgents and nation-builders in the field must be well-trained professionals with the right balance of attitude, skill, and maturity. They must be intellectually curious enough to study their areas of responsibility at all levels and culturally savvy enough to understand what they observe. They must think critically and creatively to understand the environment and the problem, then design and implement a solution that not only resolves local issues, but also integrates well with adjacent operations. They must be willing to try, fail, and learn from their mistakes, and be agile enough to modify their approach as the situation changes around them.

Enhanced District Teams. The key to executing the decentralized approach is the fielding of unified interagency teams that maintain an enduring presence in specific districts, have excellent visibility into and understanding of *qawm* system dynamics within the district, and partner with and mentor Afghans at the district level and below. ISAF should leverage the existing District Support Team (DST) concept, but expand and improve upon it by engendering closer coordination and synchronization between facilitators and mentors in the field. The team should include the DST for focus on governance and rule of law; government and non-governmental organizations such as USAID and the Asia Development Bank for focus on development and economic growth; and district-level Police Mentor Teams for focus on security. Additionally, ISAF should field Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) representatives at the

district level who coordinate with other district team members and serve as enduring liaisons between the Afghan community development councils (CDC) and the PRT. All these team members must work together to synergize efforts between each other and the Afghans.

The enduring presence at the district level affords district team members the deep understanding of local conditions and social dynamics that help them design and execute an approach appropriate to that specific location and group of people. These district teams must work closely with the Afghans at the district level and below, not only to gain their trust and a deeper understanding of the system, but also to mentor them to enhance their ability to manage the system on their own one day. The close coordination with the Afghans also provides a form of over-watch, or a check and balance against malign actors intent upon co-opting formal institutions to the detriment of GIRoA or the people in the district or village.

Finally, though these teams will be a visible, known, and accepted presence at the district level and below, they must work in the background as much as possible and become less and less obvious over time. In order to establish and bolster GIRoA's legitimacy and the people of Afghanistan's ability to self-sustain these systems when the coalition and foreign mentors leave, the Afghans must take ownership of the problem, the solution, and the continued maintenance of stability in their community and nation. The Afghans must perceive GIRoA as the entity that brought security, governance, rule of law, development, and economic growth to Afghanistan and the *qawm*. More importantly, the Afghans must see GIRoA and the nation of Afghanistan as the entity that opens its arms to the *qawm* for its inclusion in and importance to the larger system.

Support and expand culturally savvy programs. Before becoming the local expert, the counterinsurgent and nation-builder must first become a general expert. The U.S. Department of Defense should look to all branches of the armed forces for service members who show the attitude and aptitude for service in the field. These service members must learn the language—Dari, Pashto, or whatever the local language of their future operating location may be. They must learn the history and culture of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and the area in which they will operate.

During their preparation for deployment, they must be in close contact with the people they will replace, benefiting from their understanding and insight, and arriving prepared to build upon the progress their predecessors made during their time in the district. Most importantly, these service members must be deployed deliberately to the place for which they trained, not fielded randomly, reactively, or by mere convenience.

Existing programs, such as the Pakistan-Afghanistan Coordination Cell (PACC), Afghanistan-Pakistan Hands (AFPAK Hands), the Human Terrain System (HTS), and Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), are uniquely organized and positioned to provide people with the appropriate skill sets for use with great success as part of enhanced district teams. These culturally educated and culturally savvy individuals will find their greatest use in the field working with, learning from, and mentoring local Afghans; not sequestered on the CENTCOM or ISAF staff, far away from the contact point with the Afghan people. Deployed in their districts, these individuals will continue their education, immersed in the local culture, and return with an even greater understanding of the Afghan system—an understanding that must be used to shape policy, strategy, and future operations. To generate and season enough of these people, the DoD must expand programs such as AFPAK Hands by recruiting, educating, and deploying higher numbers of these Afghanistan experts. Finally, ISAF should support successful locally oriented Afghan programs such as the National Solidarity Program (NSP) by working with the Afghans and the facilitating partners to bring development and capacity building to the *qawm*.

Success in Afghanistan comes first by understanding Afghanistan, its people, their culture, and the complex system that arises from the interaction and influence of myriad cognitive and physical factors, then by helping Afghanistan help itself to a better future. Griffiths states, “The most challenging of the problems facing Afghanistan is the creation of a sense of genuine national unity in a country whose constituent races have . . . little natural affinity.”¹¹⁰ Afghanistan

¹¹⁰Griffiths, 78.

will never be a homogeneous entity, nor should it be. It can, however, be a diverse, productive, stable nation-state with its own form of solidarity. The process will take time, patience, effort, and understanding by the international community, GIRA, and the people of Afghanistan, but the investment will pay off in terms of Afghan-sustainable stability in a critically important region of the world.

Glossary

- Arbakai. Qawm militias, support and enforce jirga decisions and protect qawm from external threats; operates under authority of jirga mandate
- Bakhsheesh. Literally, 'gift'; usually a small bribe paid to a government official or policeman
- Hadith. Traditions of the Prophet; collected Islamic traditions
- Hakim. District governor
- Jirga. Literally, 'circle' or 'assembly'; a community council of elders normally convened to resolve a dispute, make a decision, or determine direction for the qawm
- Kandak. ANA battalion
- Khan. Wealthy landowner and influential person in the qawm; also known as beg, bey, or mir in various parts of the country
- Khel. Clan; subdivision of a segment of a Pashtun tribe, whatever sub-division this may be; also seen in names of villages in southeast Afghanistan
- Loya jirga. Grand assembly, the highest level of jirga in Afghanistan
- Madrassa. Religious school
- Malik. Person appointed by the qawm to engage and interact with the government
- Maulavi. Islamic religious title; educated religious cleric or teacher
- Mullah. Low-level Muslim preacher
- Nang. Pashtunwali concept of honor
- Pashtuns. The largest ethnolinguistic group in Afghanistan, making up 40 percent of the population. Also known as the Pukhtuns and the Pathans. Pashtuns inhabit the area on either side of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.
- Pashtunwali. Ideology and system of traditional rights and expectations amongst Pashtuns; also adopted and modified from place to place in non-Pashtun areas of Afghanistan
- Qawm. Solidarity group from which an Afghan draws his identity, communal group whose sociological basis may vary; could be based on clan, location, profession, or ethnolinguistic group
- Sharia. Islamic law
- Shura. Council of elders, normally convened periodically to address recurring issues; can have a more religious tone than jirga

Spin Giri. Literally, 'white beard' in Pashto, elders influential in the qawm because of their age, experience, and wisdom. Rish Safed in Farsi and Dari has the same meaning.

Tashkil. Document that establishes authorized number and type of ANA and ANP soldiers

Ulema. Plural of maulavi; top class of Muslim religious officials

Umma. The Muslim community

Wali. Provincial governor

APPENDIX A – Afghanistan Development Notes from the Field

The following list of principles for construction in Afghanistan was developed from the author's observations in the field in 2006 and 2007 as Chief of Political-Military Integration for Eastern Afghanistan and presented to the US Army Corps of Engineers, Afghanistan Engineering District (AED) designers and project managers with LCDR Legena Malan, US Navy, Construction Battalion Engineer (SEABEE), Chief of ANP Construction for CSCT-A.

- 1. The guiding principle in design should be low complexity, high durability, and Afghan self-sustainability. Pursue the 'Afghan-First' concept in selecting contractors, workers, and materials.**

View the requirement through Afghan eyes. The expensive, high-quality Western 'solution' is quite often not as effective as the Afghan way. Western design, technology, and equipment may also be hopelessly unsustainable after we depart, leaving the Afghans with expensive yet useless hulks of broken equipment over time. Contract and employ as many local Afghans as possible for the construction of the project. Use local material, manpower, technique, and design. Afghans are very good at building with stone (compound and structure walls, etc.), and in places like Nuristan and Konar, with wood. Also, consider the location. There is no single design that is appropriate for all places in the country. The requirements in high, cold Badakhshan are different from those in hot, desert Helmand or dense, urban Kabul.

- 2. Install only Afghan-style toilets (ground-level hole), not US-style (seat)**

Many Afghans are uncomfortable sitting on the toilet and prefer to squat. Afghans tend to tear up western style toilets by improper use—they often stand astride the seat, eventually breaking it. If you expect extensive, enduring Western presence at a particular site, provide a mix of toilet styles (Western and Afghan), but make the majority Afghan.

3. Install ablution area in latrine

Afghan Muslims ceremoniously wash their face, hands, and feet before prayer and other times. An ablution area should be a ground-level, trough-type basin with faucets and low pedestals to sit on—usually along an interior wall. Lacking an ablution area, Afghans sometimes will stand on latrine sinks to wash their feet. This quickly leads to a lot of broken sinks and pipes.

4. Install hand-pumped well in addition to any electrical water pump

When the generator breaks or power fails (and it will), the Afghans still need to be able to pump water. The hand-pumped well is an inexpensive, sturdy, and worthwhile backup to the electrical pump.

5. Water tower

Water towers provide gravity-fed water for times when power to the electric water pump fails. Fears of RPG and small-arms attacks on water towers are unfounded. They probably won't be targeted. If they are targeted, they probably won't be hit. If they are hit, they probably won't be damaged. However, there is 100 percent certainty the power will go out at times, probably often, and probably for long periods of time. Water towers provide reliable, low-maintenance water flow during those times without power.

6. HVAC, fans, and wood heat

Most Afghans don't have experience with air conditioning, even in the hot southern deserts. While AC provides a nice level of comfort, the expense and complexity of operation and repair may render the units unusable over time. Small, replaceable units are better than expensive, complex, central HVAC systems. Fans are better still.

Electric/gas/oil heating is less ideal than wood stoves. Electric/gas/oil heating presupposes availability of consistent electrical power and/or petroleum supply. Wood stoves give the Afghans heat availability even in times of power loss.

7. Covered Sitting or meeting area

While off duty, Afghans enjoy sitting outside and talking. Provide a cover/shade over a concrete pad in an area open to the breeze. This should be in the central part of the compound.

8. Design should provide space for a garden area

Afghans take great pride in growing gardens. Provide a space for them to grow plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables. This should be near the covered sitting area described above.

9. Ample Driveway and parking inside compound

The ANP and ANA will need to park many trucks inside the compound. Provide space to maneuver and park.

10. No drainage canals; use culverts

Most of the distant places in Afghanistan where these compounds will exist have little ambient lighting at night. Uncovered drainage canals throughout the compound present a significant safety hazard—tripping, falling, driving into the canal, etc.

11. Provide space for a mosque

Even if we are not allowed to build one, provide space for a mosque within the compound appropriate to the size of the detachment.

12. All sites need an appropriately sized shura/jirga room

Provide a large, open room the Afghans can use as a shura/jirga or meeting room. It should be located close to the DFAC so food may be brought in easily. It should also have fans and windows that may be opened to increase air flow. Regional facilities should be able to accommodate at least 125, provincial facilities should accommodate 75, and district facilities should accommodate 60.

13. Better fixtures/sinks

Install durable faucets and hardware—they last longer. Low-quality fixtures will quickly break, either to be repaired at great expense, or just left broken. Also ensure sinks are sturdy and reinforced in the wall or on a pedestal.

14. Secure fuel and ammo storage

Design secure bunkers for fuel storage (generator and vehicle) and a secure armory.

15. Provide adequate barracks

If 150 soldiers/police are assigned to a location, 125+ will live there. Provide ample space for barracks.

16. Install electrical outlets every 2 meters; ensure contractors build to standard

Afghans in barracks will plug in small electric devices (radios, lamps, etc.). If an ample number of outlets are not available, they will likely chain low-quality extension cords and power strips to create more outlets. These will overload low-quality and/or low number of outlets and ignite.

17. Do not install washer and dryer

They will break and no one will be able to repair them, particularly in remote areas.

Large wash basins for hand-washing are much more sustainable. Not a lot of Maytag repairmen in Khost.

18. No Drywall

When the roof leaks or there's some kind of aquatic trauma in the barracks, the drywall will be damaged. Badly.

19. Use Plexiglas windows in high threat environment

Glass windows will be broken and not repaired or replaced in remote, high-threat areas.

Plexiglas is optimal for survivability and injury prevention. Also, leave spare Plexiglas sheets and cutting tools at the location to enable quick replacement as needed.

20. Consult the most recent Tashkil and adjust design capacity to meet requirements

Understand that the Tashkil changes over time, so provide a buffer to accommodate additional personnel.

21. Do not build next to a high rise

This is a force protection issue. A tall building next door provides the enemy visibility and clear fields of fire down into the compound. Enemy attacks or surveillance from the high ground will ensue. Research who owns adjacent property—make sure there's enough standoff.

22. RPG Screen/Sniper Screen

Another force protection issue. Compound walls should be at least 2.4 meters high with a 1.5-meter mesh sniper screen or corrugated metal RPG screen with concertina wire atop.

23. Hills

Consider the proposed land for construction. Placing a facility on a hilltop commands good 360-degree visibility, but also increases the height above the water table. A facility down in a valley may cede enemy the high ground or require outposts or observation posts on key surrounding terrain. Building on hills can be OK, just make sure to budget for the deeper well.

24. Solar

Solar panels should be used when available to provide electricity to essential items and areas of the facility—particularly comms. Use solar as a backup to charge batteries for comm systems.

25. Operations and maintenance

Part of the building contract should include spare parts, expendables (lubricants, filters, fuses, etc.), and training for several individuals at the facility location. The Afghans should offer up smarter, literate, local individuals who will likely stick around a while after receiving facility manager training.

26. Kitchens and stoves

Gas stoves in the kitchen are OK, but Afghans may not use them or may not be able to sustain gas supply for them. Quite often, the Afghans will pull out the gas stoves and install traditional wood-burning stoves, to which they are more accustomed. However,

significant soot builds up on the walls and ceilings of kitchens with wood-burning stoves. A good technique is to provide indoor gas stoves, but build an outdoor cooking area like a big BBQ pit with a cover for shade but no walls. The pit should have 4 or 5 fire areas.

27. To the maximum extent possible, examine, understand, and use local techniques

There is no single design for all of Afghanistan. Examine and use local techniques—they're there for a reason. For example, wood makes for great building material in Nuristan and Konar—it's in relatively good supply and the locals are very proficient at working with it. However, you should not build with wood in Mazar-e-Sharif, for example, as they have a very bad termite problem there. Avoid building with concrete, particularly concrete block. The quality of concrete block in Afghanistan tends to be pretty poor, and concrete is hotter in the summer and colder in the winter anyway. Try to use what the Afghans use locally without forcing a Western design. When you hire locals to build, they'll be more comfortable with the material and style. Face the buildings to take advantage of sun position for heating and cooling. Again, observe how the locals have built. Afghans tend to build durable structures, particularly out of stone. A lot of their buildings have lasted for centuries. These structures also tend to be resilient against attack.

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