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**BLEEDING FOR THE VILLAGE:
SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE HANDS OF LOCAL
POWERBROKERS**

by

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June 2012

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**BLEEDING FOR THE VILLAGE:
SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN THE HANDS OF LOCAL POWERBROKERS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This thesis observes that in most Afghan villages there is a prominent member who acts as the village leader in the village *shura* (council of respected leaders) and *jirgas* (council of elders, tribal leaders, lineage leaders, or heads of families). In all cases, the leader is a man. In some cases, he may be the current tribal elder, or he may be a former mujahedeen fighter. Because these men wield the influence necessary to gain villagers' general acceptance of the coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan, I assert that they are the most important societal elements to win over. It is upon these leaders, or "local powerbrokers" (LPBs), that this thesis focuses. The same need for allegiance is true for the Afghan government as well: To gain the support of local communities in the current fight against the Taliban, the central government in Kabul must first gain the support and involvement of local leaders. However, as Joel S. Migdal points out, there may be conflicts between the empowering of local strongmen and building a state institution. If local powerbrokers get too strong for the government to handle, it can lead to the state's demise. In this thesis, I assert that empowering local powerbrokers is a risk that must be taken if peace on terms acceptable to the global community has any chance of success.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANA:	Afghan National Army
ANP:	Afghan National Police
COIN:	Counterinsurgency
IED:	Improvised Explosive Device
ISAF:	International Security Assistance Force
LPB:	Local Powerbroker
MOT:	Military Observation Team
MOT N:	Military Observation Team November
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PRT:	Provincial Reconstruction Team

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This thesis is dedicated to Christian Lian, Andreas Eldjarn, Simen Tokle, and Trond Bolle, Norwegian Coastal Rangers and Naval Special Forces, who were killed in Afghanistan in an IED attack on June 27, 2010. I am proud to have known, trained, and worked with them.



Last photo of Christian Lian, Simen Tokle, Andreas Eldjarn and Trond Bolle.

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Most importantly, to my family: My wife, Elisabeth, and my children, who sacrificed time spent with me so that I could conduct my research and analysis required to complete this thesis and my studies. My deepest appreciation goes out to you for your patience, support, and understanding. Thank you.

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I. JUNE 2007, FARJAB PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN



Figure 1. Coastal Ranger Command, Military Observer Team November (MOT Norwegian Navy). Without their skills on the battlefield, I would not be alive today.

On a dark, moonless night, I crested a hill on my way to check out the valley below for enemy forces. Suddenly, I came upon three Taliban fighters approximately 10 meters in front of me, apparently as surprised as I was. “Dresh!” (Pashto for “stop”), I yelled. They responded instantly with an instant spattering of automatic fire. A rifle bullet struck me in the shoulder and knocked me to the ground. Bleeding heavily and unable to quickly reach my rifle, I returned their fire with my pistol, as five other fighters began shooting at me from 75 meters away. As the bullets whined past my head, I thought, “Is this the end? Will I never see my wife and children again?” Bleeding and in pain, I pulled my rifle, retreating slowly while returning their fire, killing two and injuring another. Soon my team members, hearing the firefight in the still night, reached me, and together, we defeated the rest of the Taliban fighters. I had looked death in the eye and survived. However, because the skirmish had occurred in an unsecured, dangerous area, an instant medical evacuation was impossible, and we had no choice but to stay where we were for the night.

Our mission, part of Norway’s contribution to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, was to protect a certain village from Taliban attack,

which rumors had said would occur this night. This village was especially important as the home of the provincial governor, a strong local powerbroker. Our hope was that by protecting the village, we would gradually gain the trust and support of the governor, his family, and the villagers.

At dawn, in the relative safety of daylight, we went down to the village, where my second in command told the village leader, who was the brother of the governor, how we saved the village from Taliban attack. The expression in the village leader's eyes and those of the village elders as they looked at me—the team leader, obviously in pain, my uniform drenched in blood, resting in the car—was one of amazement, gratitude, and deep respect. My “bleeding for them” (their own term for such incidents) ensured our mission's success—at least for the time being.

Eleven hours later, back at base camp, the doctors discovered that my body was full of infection from the Taliban bullet. Their fighters soak their bullets in animal excrement to imperil NATO and Afghan forces not only by the energy of the projectile, but also by potentially mortal infection, far from hospital care. I, however, was lucky. Thanks to the excellent assistance and care of my teammates and two surgeries in a military hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif, I returned to my base and soon was on my way home to Norway.



Figure 2. Three hours after being shot: Still out in the field.

How do I make sense of this intense encounter? Although many writers emphasize the importance of influencing the local population in winning insurgent wars,¹ most of them do not articulate exactly which local group or group leader might most effectively help achieve this goal. Is there a key person? Who is he—a farmer, shopkeeper, police officer, mullah, village elder? In Afghanistan, who might be considered the most influential local powerbroker? And what does he want? The key to success typically is to get the local population to move from supporting the insurgents to supporting the government. However, this episode illustrates how winning the support of the entire population may be unnecessary. Instead, this thesis will argue that counterinsurgency operations should focus on local leaders. If these influential community members support the government, their followers will as well. Conversely, if they oppose the government, so, too, will their followers.

Building on the general concepts of McCormick and others, this thesis argues that in most Afghan villages there is a prominent member who leads the village *shura* (council of respected leaders), and *jirgas* (council of the elders, tribal leaders, lineage leaders, or heads of families).² The leader is always a man. He may be the current tribal elder or he may be a former mujahedeen fighter. Because these men wield the necessary influence to gain villagers' general acceptance of the coalition forces fighting in Afghanistan, I assert that they are the most important persons to win over. It is upon these leaders, or "local powerbrokers" (LPBs), that this thesis focuses. The Afghan government shares the same need for allegiance; to gain the support of local communities in the current fight against the Taliban, the central government in Kabul must gain the support and involvement of local leaders.³ But, as Joel S. Migdal points out, there may be cross-

¹ Gordon McCormick, "Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgents Process," lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, August 19, 2010; see also Leites and Wolfes, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts*; Eric P. Wendt, *Strategic Counterinsurgency*; Gregory Wilsons, *OEI-Philippines and the Indirect Approach*; Chalmer Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*; R. W. Komer, *The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of a Successful Counterinsurgency Effort*; and Seth Jones, *It takes the Villages*.

² Harvey Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 4th edition (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 427.

³ Anthony King, "The Powerbrokers We Need Onside," Parliamentary brief, accessed August 10, 2010, <http://www.parliamentarybrief.com/2010/03/the-powerbrokers-we-need-onside>.

purposes between empowering local strongmen and building a state institution. If local powerbrokers get too strong for the government to handle, it can precipitate the state's demise.⁴ In this thesis, I assert that empowering local power brokers is a risk that must be taken if peace on terms acceptable to the global community is to have any chance of success.

In making this point, I am in agreement with three noted Afghan experts, Seth Jones, Thomas Barfield, and Noah Coburn. If approached correctly and persuasively, local Afghan leaders can convince the majority of the population to cooperate with the coalition and Afghan government. In other words, it is not necessary, and indeed may not be possible, to win support directly from local villagers. So far, it has proven far more effective to first win over their "controllers," the local powerbrokers. Jones, a senior political scientist who has worked in Afghanistan several years, says simply, "gaining the support of tribal and community leaders is critical." He notes that, since local leaders hold much of the power today, it is virtually impossible to ignore or bypass them. Thomas Barfield points out that while individuals such as tribal elders and mullahs, and organizations such as jirgas or shuras, are all vitally important, their influence varies with the situation. Barfield argues that the government of Afghanistan can use nonviolent coercion as a means of influencing choice. For example, he says, "if you tell the population in a village that if they do not cooperate, the government will take all their money for development to the next village, which means that they do not get anything . . . this will influence the local leaders to agree to support the government instead, out of fear that they will lose all economic development projects for their village."⁵

Likewise, Noah Coburn, author of *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town*, refers to powerbrokers as "warlords" and, more specifically, as

⁴ Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society* (University of Washington, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64.

⁵ Tom Barfield, presentation about Afghanistan for the Defense Analysis Department of Naval Postgraduate School, October 14, 2010.

“local elders, maliks, and jihadi commanders.”⁶ He finds that they are the most important men to influence, because they “tend to have a large amount of political control over communities.”⁷

Nevertheless, what about strategy? How can the U.S. and other coalition forces in ISAF and the Afghan central government win local the powerbroker’s interest and support? This thesis will show that the most effective strategy requires a clear understanding of the three elements (sometimes interrelated) that are most important to local tribal and village leaders: status, power, and legitimacy. Like leaders everywhere, local Afghan powerbrokers tend to have a “what’s in it for me?” mentality.

This thesis argues that by developing a strategy that combines positive and negative inducements, counterinsurgents may give LBP’s the incentive to choose the coalition and government forces over the Taliban and others. Since a negative cost for making the opposite choice must be built into coalition strategy, coercion must be employed to “keep them in line” and make sure that they are not “playing both sides.”⁸

A. THEORY OF INFLUENCE: COERCION AND DETERRENCE

In *How the Weak Deter the Strong*, Ivan Arreguin-Toft explains that unconventional deterrence not only works, but also has become more prevalent over time. This, he says, is the case particularly when “the nature of the power itself—the power to destroy, the power to coerce, or the power to deter—is historically and culturally specific,”⁹ such as in Afghanistan, where the use of force and violence is an integral part of the culture.

If its efforts to win the Afghan people’s trust and support are to succeed, the government must put pressure on district and village powerbrokers and show that, if they

⁶ Noah Coburn, “Parliamentarians and Local Politics in Afghanistan: Elections and Instability II,” Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (September 2010), accessed February 28, 2011, <http://www.areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/1031EParliamentarians%20and%20Local%20Politics%202010%20DP%20web.pdf>

⁷ Noah Coburn, e-mail correspondence, July 15, 2011.

⁸ Seth Jones, e-mail correspondence, July 8, 2011.

⁹ Paul, Morgan and James Wirtz, *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2009.): 218.

join or support the Taliban, there will be negative consequences. The process should not be one-sided, however. For its part, the government must show willingness, credibility, and a commitment to fight the Taliban and all those who join and follow them.

Lawrence Freedman explains that deterrence is an inherently coercive strategy, and defines coercion as “potential or actual application of force to influence the action of a voluntary agent.”¹⁰ In an article entitled “Rational Deterrence,” Janice Gross Stein defines deterrence as “attempts to prevent someone from doing something he or she would otherwise like to do.”¹¹ In short, a coercive strategy of deterrence involves the purposeful use of overt threats of force to influence another’s strategic choices.

Two historical examples serve to show that use of coercion may be necessary and that a mix of negative and positive inducements is best for achieving cooperation: the 1948–1960 Malayan Emergency and the 1899–1902 Philippine Insurrection. “The Malayan Emergency grew out of one of the many anti-colonial movements of the 1920s, which took the Russian revolution as their source of inspiration.”¹² In the end, the British and Malaysian governments successfully managed to contain, and ultimately defeat, the Communist insurgency in Malaysia.¹³ The Philippines Insurrection was a backlash against U.S. President William McKinley’s attempts to educate the Filipinos and uplift and Christianize them, based on the belief that they could not govern themselves and would therefore be a tempting acquisition for other colonial powers.¹⁴ “The American policy of rewarding support and punishing opposition in the Philippines, called ‘attraction and chastisement,’ was an effective strategy.”¹⁵

Therefore, as both the Malayan Emergency and the Philippine Insurrection suggest, if local Afghan powerbrokers do not support the government, they should be

¹⁰ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2004): 27.

¹¹ Paul, Morgan and Wirtz, *Complex Deterrence*, 60.

¹² R. W. Komer, “The Malayan Emergency in Retrospect: Organization of A Successful Counterinsurgency Effort,” *Rand* (February 1972): 1.

¹³ Komer, *The Malayan Emergency*, Summary.

¹⁴ Timothy K. Deady, “Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency: The Philippines, 1899–1902,” *Parameters* 1 (Spring 2005): 2.

¹⁵ Deady, “Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency,” 3.

persuaded that it is in their best interests not to join the Taliban. To accomplish this, the cost of not supporting the government must be greater than the benefit of joining the insurgency.¹⁶ In other words, both carrot and stick are necessary. “Gaining the support of tribal and community leaders is critical. Historically, doing this effectively in Afghanistan has required both co-optation and coercion—providing incentives to tribes and communities to support the government, and sticks to keep them in line.”¹⁷

Without the clear potential for coercion, local populations might not have the incentive to choose the state, because the threat from the Taliban and the negative costs of not choosing them will be greater and more effective. Without government pressure on local leaders, villagers are likely to play both sides, telling both state officials and Taliban fighters that they have village support.

Through these discussions, this thesis will contribute generally to a better overall understanding of how to win over local powerbrokers and leaders by determining what motivations and incentives will encourage and drive them to cooperate with the government. It is my intent that military units with a “win the village” approach will find the ideas in this thesis useful and applicable in the Afghan endeavor. This thesis is not a rigorous attempt to systematically compare my unit’s experiences in Afghanistan with similar anecdotal examples from history, but occasionally historical examples will be used to illustrate important elements of the argument.

B. A CASE IN POINT: ONE LOCAL POWERBROKER

Fatullah Kahn, from the Qaysar District, Farjab Province, was a classic example of a local powerbroker and the means he used to control his community. Kahn, who was second in command under General Abdul Rashid Dostum in the Northern Alliance fight against the Taliban in 2001, subsequently became the unofficial authority figure in Qaysar. He controlled the district administrators, beginning with the governor (his brother-in-law), and the chief of police. As an elected member of the national Loya Jirga, the governing council in Kabul, Kahn had considerable status among the local people.

¹⁶ McCormick, “Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgents Process.”

¹⁷ Seth Jones, e-mail correspondence, July 8, 2011.

And though he held no official position, such as district governor or chief of police, Fatullah Kahn controlled the district by skillful manipulation of district officials and the threat of his personal militia. In doing so, he exhibited all the characteristics of a local powerbroker; he was motivated by a desire for wealth, fame, and political power and had the three principal prerequisites for achieving these: status, power, and legitimacy.¹⁸

C. THREE FACTORS OF SUCCESS

I argue that the three important factors involved in winning the trust and support of local powerbrokers are status, power, and legitimacy. In many cases, there must be a combination of the three, because they are interrelated. To better show the variety of interactions among these factors, I will address each separately.

1. Status, or Respected Authority

Both tribalism and Islam have combined to make respect for authority basic to the value system. The tribal member is taught the supreme importance of showing proper respect to those who, because of their status, have the right to assert authority.¹⁹

As with most would-be leaders, the desire for and need to maintain respect and status are important motivations for Afghan powerbrokers. There are multiple ways to obtain a position of status and respect, including the acquisition of wealth (often measured in Afghan villages by the land or animals a man owns;²⁰ holding of a desired political position; control over a group of armed followers; or, most often, family lineage.

Within a tribe, the man with the highest status “is a member of the senior lineage, holds a recognized position of tribal authority, is the senior person in his family and lineage, and supports his status with wealth in animals and land, and a large group of well-armed men.”²¹ As the chosen village leader, or malik, he “is the main channel of

¹⁸ This account derives from my personal experience in Afghanistan, June 2007, Provincial Reconstruction Team, Meymaneh. Fatullah Kahn is still a powerful powerbroker in Qaysar, but is living in Meymaneh because of threats from the Taliban. Fatullah Kahn was not the local powerbroker I bled for.

¹⁹ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 183.

²⁰ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 92.

²¹ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 92.

communications between the village and the central government.”²² However, although the position of malik is mostly hereditary, there is some flexibility. If the malik’s son proves to be incompetent or lacks village support, for example, he can be replaced by someone else of high status.²³

In Afghan communities, the display of respect for a village leader is governed by strict tribal codes, which the people recognize as necessary to uphold the legitimacy of the leader’s position. Many expect to be leaders themselves someday, and they too will demand total respect and obedience in keeping with their high status.²⁴

However, because tribal societies are basically egalitarian with respect to the equal rights and privileges of all members, the leaders cannot base their power on tribal structure alone.²⁵ A leader must work continually to convince the village that he has superior personal qualities, is able to procure and redistribute resources from outside the village realm, and can provide maximal security. If the villagers become dissatisfied with the malik, they may decide to replace him.²⁶

A similar dynamic existed in the Philippines at the onset of American rule in the late nineteenth century. Aspects of the Philippines Insurrection show that by accepting the status and respect of the *principals* in the villages—the elite class of landowners, local chieftains, and businessmen who governed the districts and controlled local politics—U.S. forces were successful in influencing local powerbrokers. Their challenge was to prevent these principals from opposing American annexation of their country.²⁷ Employment of the *Manila ilustrados*, former revolutionary officers and Filipino members, was seen by these leaders as personal advancement, a step toward becoming

²² Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 93.

²³ Noah Coburn, “Quam: Conceptualizing Potters in the Afghan Political Arena” (September 2008), accessed February 28, 2011, <http://128.197.26.35/aias/coburn.pdf>

²⁴ Christine F. Ridout, “Authority Patterns and the Afghan Coup of 1973,” *Middle East Journal* 29:2 (Spring 1975): 166.

²⁵ Bernt Glatzer, “The Parshtun Tribal System,” in G. Pfeffer and D.K. Behera, eds., *Concept of Tribal Society, Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*, 5 (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 272.

²⁶ Glatzer, “The Parshtun Tribal System,” 272.

²⁷ Deady, “Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency,” 6.

part of a representative government, which would increase their status with the people.²⁸ The United States also made cooperation a lucrative proposition. As Filipino participation in government increased, so did the autonomy granted them by the United States.²⁹ As a result, the principals convinced the population that it paid to be loyal to U.S. forces.

Colonel Ralph O. Baker, former commander of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st Armored Division, describes similar lessons learned in an article entitled, “The Decisive Weapon,” about the use of information operations during his deployment in Iraq. He identifies “five groups of Iraqis that had considerable influence among the population: local imams and priests, local and district council members, staff and faculty from the universities, Arab and international media, and local sheiks and tribal leaders.”³⁰ By approaching the most trusted and influential community members, as well as social and cultural leaders, he hoped that they would be able to convince the silent majority to cooperate with the U.S. coalition. The sheiks and other local leaders wanted outside support for a variety of key goals—among them security, development, and justice. If they could get this support from U.S. forces, the tribal leaders, in keeping with the tribal system, would increase their status and respect as leaders within their villages. Therefore, in counterinsurgency (COIN) operations, in order to increase respect for LPBs, outside resources must be channeled through the village leaders.

2. Power

“Power involves the exercise of influence over others; leadership involving inducing a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers.”³¹ A tribal leader’s power is of vital importance to him, and he will try at all times to maintain or increase his power:

²⁸ Deady, “Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency,” 5.

²⁹ Deady, “Lessons from a Successful Counterinsurgency,” 5.

³⁰ Ralph O. Baker, “The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander’s Perspective on Information Operations,” *Military Review* (May–June 2006): 22.

³¹ Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Managing with Power, Politics, and Influence in Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1994), 171.

In a tribal setting, a leader can gain power by (1) controlling tenants; (2) attracting many regular guests through lavish hospitality; (3) channeling resources from the outside world to one's followers; (4) superior rhetoric qualities and regular sound judgment in the shuras and jirgas, and (5) gallantry in war and conflict.³²

A local powerbroker must constantly prove himself worthy as village malik, or he will be replaced by one of his ever-present competitors.³³ Throughout history, Afghan tribal leaders have contributed to the most powerful military forces, and the support, or lack of support, of Afghan kings has been crucial in maintaining national stability. In their respective territories, the power of tribal leaders was not generally contested by the government; they, rather than the central government, commanded the loyalty of their followers.³⁴

As the Afghan army and national police have increased in number, the government's dependence on tribal military support has declined, but tribal leaders still continue to retain power in their respective communities.³⁵ Thus, to enlist the cooperation of the powerbrokers in local villages, the government often appoints tribal leaders to leading positions in the districts. "The villages usually provide their own security and governance within the larger and generationally volatile swings of central government. The village will accept the basic provision of security and justice as the mark of the ruling power." Thus, local powerbrokers gain personal power by providing security and justice to the village.³⁶ Today, "lineage is no longer the singular source of power; the central control and coordination of economic, military, and religious resources now matters increasingly."³⁷

³² Glazer, "The Parshtun Tribal System," 272.

³³ Glazer, "The Parshtun Tribal System," 273.

³⁴ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 214.

³⁵ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 214.

³⁶ Brian Petit, "The Fight for the Village," *Military Review* (May/June 2011): 3.

³⁷ David Ronfeldt, "In Search of how Societies Work: Tribes—The First and Forever Form," *RAND Pardee Center* (December 2006): 46, accessed 22 September, 2011.
http://www.rand.org/pubs/working_Thesiss/2007/RAND_WR433.pdf.

In the Philippine Insurrection, in addition to an increase in their military power due to alliance with American troops, local powerbrokers gained power at the village level by obtaining clean water, waste-disposal systems, and vaccines for malaria, smallpox, cholera, and typhoid for their communities.³⁸

The same is dynamic is cited in Baker's "Decisive Weapon," where he describes initiating weekly and biweekly meetings with local Iraqi leaders to find out what they wanted and listen to their complaints about things they felt his unit was not doing well. That they were sought out and invited to influence Baker's efforts made the local powerbrokers feel important. In addition, their newfound ability to obtain outside resources for their villages—such as electricity, water, medicine, and protection from crime—resulted in their acquiring greater power and respect in their communities.³⁹

3. Legitimacy

As John A. McCary describes in *The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives*, "each tribe is headed by a sheik, whose legitimacy is based on the ability to provide for his village, which engenders patronage to his will" and "once a tribal leader flips, attacks on American forces in that area stop almost overnight."⁴⁰ If the government out-loops the local powerbrokers, they may undermine their legitimacy, but by involving and including the powerbrokers in the local government, instead of neglecting them, the government adds to the LPBs' legitimacy, which gives them further incentive to cooperate with the government.

To be able to understand how legitimacy in an Afghan tribal society works, it is important to know how the tribes are organized. Particularly in Pashtun tribal

³⁸ Deady, "Lessons from a successful counterinsurgency," 14.

³⁹ Ralph O. Baker, "The Decisive Weapon: A Brigade Combat Team Commander's Perspective on Information Operations," *Military Review* (May–June 2006).

⁴⁰ John A McCary, "The Anbar Awakening: An Alliance of Incentives," 52, accessed September 14, 2011, http://www.twq.com/09winter/docs/09jan_mccary.pdf, 46.

organizations, “jirga usually refers to either a council of the elders, tribal leaders, lineage leaders, or heads of families.”⁴¹ In his study of the war in Afghanistan, Sean R. Slaughter found that:

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 *quam*.⁴²

The term *quam* can mean “tribe,” “people,” “ethnic group,” “clan,” “lineage,” or even “profession”⁴³ in different parts of Afghanistan. Together with lineage leaders, tribal elders, and local powerbrokers, the jirga can facilitate justice and legitimacy by using a local approach.⁴⁴ The khan—a Turkic word meaning “lord” or “chief” of a tribe or local component of a tribe⁴⁵—has great social currency in the village patronage system. “Khans, in short, traffic in patronage, respect, service, and influence, joining personal charisma to collective legitimacy in all their paradoxes and ambiguities.”⁴⁶ Thus, they are important powerbrokers to influence.⁴⁷ A khan must do things to deserve and retain his title, lest it will be taken away. Therefore, khans tend to seek ways to achieve even higher status and greater legitimacy, which, however, makes them vulnerable to government exploitation, because the government can offer incentives to support its goals.⁴⁸

“*Pashtunwali* (Pashtun law) shapes daily life through such concepts as *badal* (revenge), *melmastia* (hospitality), *ghayrat* (honor), and *nanawati* (sanctuary).”⁴⁹ *Pashtunwali*, a form of customary law, can be defined as the way in which local

⁴¹ Smith et al., *Area Handbook for Afghanistan*, 427.

⁴² Sean R. Slaughter, “Expanding the Quam: Culturally Savvy Counterinsurgency and Nation-building in Afghanistan,” *School of Advanced Military Studies* (2010): 33, accessed March 11, 2011, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA523215>.

⁴³ Coburn, “Quam: Conceptualizing Potters in the Afghan Political Arena,” 12.

⁴⁴ Jim Gant, “A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time,” 26, accessed April 22, 2011, <http://blog.stevenpressfield.com>.

⁴⁵ Jon W. Anderson, “There are no Khans anymore: Economic Development and Social Change in Tribal Afghanistan,” *Middle East Journal* 32, no. 2 (spring 1978): 168.

⁴⁶ Anderson, “There are no Khans anymore,” 170.

⁴⁷ Anderson, “There are no Khans anymore,” 170.

⁴⁸ Anderson, “There are no Khans anymore,” 170.

⁴⁹ Seth G Jones and Arturo Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War: Building Local Defense Forces* (Santa Monica: Rand National Defense Research Institute, 2010), 21.

communities resolve disputes in the absence of state authority (or presence of corruption).⁵⁰ The jirgas or shuras in local districts are instrumental in enforcing these local laws.⁵¹ One local group, the *arbakai*, is “essentially a community police force; this group implements the local jirga’s decisions and has immunity for these decisions.”⁵² The *arbakai* are generally most effective when legitimate local institutions, such as jirgas or shuras, establish them.⁵³ The second most widely practiced tribal code is that of the Hazara. In Hazara tribes, the elected malik performs the same role as jirgas among Pashtun tribes.⁵⁴ And, in Tajik tribes, it is the mullahs and village government that have legitimacy.⁵⁵

In their study, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, Seth G. Jones and Arturo Munoz state that *arbakai* forces, together with an impending resurgence of warlords and Afghan national army and police, will eventually comprise a legitimate, official power structure that is able to give the population justice⁵⁶ and prevent local powerbrokers from joining the Taliban. However, if local powerbrokers are not included, they will most likely desert their communities and join the Taliban in order to retain some form of power base. Therefore, the government must acknowledge the existing powerbrokers in a local area and include them in district government. As Jones puts it:

The current top-down state-building and counterinsurgency effort must take place alongside bottom-up programs, such as reaching out to legitimate local leaders to enlist them in providing security and services at the village and district levels. Otherwise, the Afghan government will lose the war.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Jones and Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 21.

⁵¹ Jones and Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 21.

⁵² Jones and Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 27.

⁵³ Jones and Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 61.

⁵⁴ Smith et al., *Handbook of Afghanistan*, 387.

⁵⁵ Smith et al., *Handbook of Afghanistan*, 387.

⁵⁶ Jones and Munoz, *Afghanistan’s Local War*, 61.

⁵⁷ Seth G. Jones, “It takes the villages: Bringing change from below in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* (May 2010): 1, accessed October 06, 2010, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66350/seth-g-jones/it-takes-the-villages>

In Afghanistan, individuals normally respect authority, but their respect is shown first and foremost to their tribal chief or head of family.⁵⁸ Therefore, the cooperation of local powerbrokers, who are often the tribal chief or village elder, is important in the exercise of legitimacy and authority by government forces. Moreover, it is critical that powerbroker legitimacy be recognized by the government to gain their support. This recognition of their power will increase powerbroker legitimacy among the villagers, which is a major motivation for these men to cooperate.

An example of the importance of recognizing and empowering powerbroker legitimacy in order to motivate them and provide an incentive to support the government is the Philippine Insurrection in 1899–1902. There, the *principals* were assigned as part of the government, which gave them legitimacy and approval in their villages.

Similarly, in Iraq, as James A. Gavrils demonstrates in his article, “The Mayor of Ar Rutbah,” U.S. forces in Al Rutbah included local powerbrokers in the political process and made them members of the city council, which gave them increased legitimacy in their villages. Also, humanitarian rations went through local leaders, such as sheiks and imams, as a way to empower them and add to their legitimacy, since the government recognized them as leaders and as those who knew best who the neediest in their village were.⁵⁹

If the local powerbrokers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Philippines had not been recognized as legitimate leaders—by both their own people and the government—they would most likely have fought the government in order to maintain their powerbase. By being recognized and by acquiring more legitimacy, local powerbrokers get an incentive to cooperate with the government and not the insurgents.

In sum, if the LPBs provide development, they increase their status; if they provide security, they increase their power; and by providing justice, they increase their legitimacy.

⁵⁸ Smith et al., *Handbook of Afghanistan*, 395.

⁵⁹ James A. Gavrils, “The Mayor of Ar Rubah,” *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2005): 4, accessed September 14, <http://karakapend.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/gavrilis-arrutbah.pdf>.

D. VILLAGE EXPERIENCES WITH THE OLD TALIBAN VS. THE NEO-TALIBAN

After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, a brutal civil war between rival mujahedeen groups started, ⁶⁰ and rape, pillage, and extortion became commonplace.⁶¹ Each faction leader (mujahedeen/warlord) realized that if he did not obtain power immediately, he never would, and that “unlike earlier Afghan civil wars that were restricted to small sets of tribal competitors, this struggle was a free-for-all, potentially open to anyone.”⁶²

Some leaders, particularly in Kandahar, formed armed gangs that fought each other. There was widespread corruption and theft, and there were roadblocks everywhere. Women being attacked, raped and killed. Therefore, after these incidents, a group of students from religious schools decided to rise against these leaders in order to alleviate the suffering of the residents of Kandahar Province.⁶³

“Marrying extreme piety with a humanitarian impulse, the Taliban emerged, then, as a moral project.”⁶⁴ “Despite differences with the fundamentalist religion espoused by the Taliban, people gathered beyond them because they promised to deliver peace by eliminating the menace of the warlords and narcotics.”⁶⁵ “The people’s optimism soon turned to fear as the Taliban introduced a stringent interpretation of sharia, banned women from work, and introduced punishments such as death by stoning and

⁶⁰ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency,” 3, accessed November 09, 2010, http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=MiamiImageURL&_cid=272156&_user=3326500&_pii=S0030438706001104&_check=y&_origin=&_coverDate=29-Feb-2008&view=c&wchp=dGLbVIB-zSkWz&md5=e5d2bd66ff927805d6bd4808f2ad99df/1-s2.0-S0030438706001104-main.pdf.

⁶¹ Alia Brahim, “The Taliban’s Evolving Ideology,” *LSE Global Governance*, Working Paper (02/2010 July 2010): 2, accessed October 15, 2010, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/29970/>.

⁶² Tom Barfield, *A Cultural and Political History*, 251.

⁶³ Quoted in Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 61.

⁶⁴ Brahim, “The Taliban’s Evolving Ideology,” 3.

⁶⁵ Shahid A. Afsar and Christopher A. Sample, “The Evolution of Taliban” (Master’s Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), 21.

amputations.”⁶⁶ Therefore, the Taliban regime gradually lost their support of the international community and the Afghan population, due to the very strict enforcement of its version of Islamic law.⁶⁷ Because of the diminishing support for Taliban, after 9/11, they started a social easing.

In his book, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Neo Taliban*, Antonio Giustozzi reports that as the neo-Taliban grew in strength in late 2006–early 2007:

They seemed intent on capitalizing on a certain shift of opinion in their favor by relaxing their ideological strictures. At least in some of the areas under their control, such as Musa Qala, they were no longer demanding that men grow a beard, keep their hair short or refrain from watching movies. This appears to have broadened their appeal, particularly in the towns. Taliban commanders were telling journalists that they were not going to impose their convictions so “harshly” as when they had previously been in power.⁶⁸

Moreover, the Taliban’s attitude toward female education and women’s right to work has changed.⁶⁹ However, most important, Taliban’s attitude on narcotics has changed from banning to legalization.⁷⁰ Poppy cultivation is one of the major income sources for Afghan farmers. Legalization makes it easier for the population to support the Taliban, because they will not lose all their income when the Taliban takes over their village. Not only do the Taliban now accept poppy cultivation, they also stepped in to protect the farmers and offer financial assistance against the government’s poppy-eradication program. The transition from harsh rule, beginning in the mid-1990s, to more moderate views from late 2006, has changed people’s perception of the Taliban as a group, thus increasing population support. Giustozzi explains that when the Taliban approach a village, they first get permission from the elders and village leaders to enter tribal territory. If they are granted entry, they either work with the elders or gradually

⁶⁶ Johnson and Mason, “Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency,” 74.

⁶⁷ Afsar and Sample, “The Evolution of Taliban,” 22.

⁶⁸ Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 72, as cited in Alia Brahimi, “The Taliban’s Evolving Ideology,” *LSE Global Governance*, Working paper (02/2010): 9.

⁶⁹ Brahimi, “The Taliban’s Evolving Ideology,” 9.

⁷⁰ Brahimi, “The Taliban’s Evolving Ideology,” 10.

marginalize them.⁷¹ “If unsuccessful in being allowed into a village’s territory, or when facing resistance from a section of elders, the insurgents would start targeting elders in a campaign of intimidation and murder, usually accusing the victims of being U.S. spies.”⁷²

⁷¹ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and laptop*, 50.

⁷² Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and laptop*, 51.

II. CASE STUDY: “BLEEDING” FOR LOCAL POWERBROKERS

We must also recognize the new realities of modern warfare and the modern landscape of a battlefield. –Susan Davis



Figure 3. Meeting with the local powerbrokers in Senjetak village.

Military Observation Team “November” (MOT Navy), which I led in 2007, consisted of seven Norwegian Coastal Rangers deployed to Meymaneh, Farjab Province in northwest Afghanistan, where an ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) was based. For weeks at a time, we operated primarily in three districts: Almar, Qaysar, and Ghormach, where the Taliban had not yet achieved a strong foothold. Taliban activity was increasing, however, due to demands from Taliban leadership. The instructions were clear: Taliban forces must increase their activities in the northwest. The most vulnerable district was Ghormach because, in 2001, when the Northern Alliance defeated the Taliban, a number of their fighters remained in Ghormach as a local safe haven. However, when my team arrived in the spring of 2007, they existed only as a sort of “sleeper cell,” performing very few operations in the area. The ethnicity in our area was a mix of Uzbek and Pashtuns. Nevertheless, we mostly focused on the Pashtun area in west Qaysar and Gormach. It was in these Pashtun areas that the Taliban gained strength and therefore became our first priority.

A. OUR ROLE: TO CREATE INCENTIVES FOR LPBS TO COOPERATE WITH US

Our basic mission was broad and nonspecific, designed primarily as an intelligence-gathering operation in this relatively small, largely unfamiliar area of Afghanistan. As with most missions aimed at acquiring dependable information about the Taliban's increasing role in a particular neighborhood, our first challenge was to win the trust and confidence of local powerbrokers. As Dorothy Denning, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School, puts it, "brokers are in a powerful position to facilitate trust."⁷³ We soon realized that, while they were willing to talk with us, they shared little pertinent information because of mistrust. It was obvious, also, that without the approval of their leaders, none of the villagers would provide any information. We decided, therefore, to concentrate our efforts in the district where the threat from Taliban activity was greatest: Qaysar. In this district, several villages had started to receive night letters from the Taliban, demanding cooperation. We also observed the same problem as Colonel Ralph O. Baker described in his article. Both Col. Baker in Iraq and my MOT in Afghanistan realized that the Afghan expectation of a better and more secure life, as promised by ISAF, was different from the coalition's perception, which was simply that their life would be automatically better when there was no longer a Taliban threat. To the Afghans, however, a better life meant a reliable supply of electricity, food, medical care, jobs, and safety from criminals.

We soon realized that if we were going to have any chance of success, the Afghans had to experience action from my team, either in the form of development or better security. Either way, we had to act, not only talk. I knew that if we did not use any coercion, the LPBs would "play both sides," since the Taliban had told them to cooperate and even at one outpost had engaged the local police force in guarding a Chinese road-construction site. Therefore, I used a mix of coercive methods to give the LPBs incentive to refuse the Taliban and support the government and my unit (ISAF). First of all, we communicated to the LPBs that an area had to be declared safe before the PRT could do any reconstruction work in that area. When the area was safe, humanitarian organizations

⁷³ Dorothy Denning, lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, August 1, 2011.

would come and build schools, wells, and clinics. If the local population realized that the reason ISAF was not doing reconstruction work in their area, but in the neighbor village instead, was that the LPB had been uncooperative with my unit, these powerbrokers would lose support among the people. Secondly, we communicated to the LPBs that if they did not support our work, their poppy fields would be eradicated. The threat of lost income was a powerful deterrence toward the LPBs, since they would lose status and power among their people if they did not prevent eradication. However, what the powerbrokers did not know was that it was PRT policy not to participate in the governmental poppy-eradication program. The last effective coercion we used against the powerbrokers was to let them know that if they joined the Taliban side, they had to fight against my unit, and the chance of being killed was very real. Also, we let the LPBs know that the cost of acting against us would be higher than the cost of cooperation or neutrality. The LPBs knew that if they joined the Taliban, they would lose some status, power, and legitimacy in the village, but by cooperating with us, or being neutral, they would maintain their position.

B. DETERMINING HOW TO MEET LOCAL LEADERS' NEEDS FOR STATUS, POWER, AND LEGITIMACY

Operating on the premise that gaining local leaders' cooperation depended largely on demonstrating that doing so would increase or enhance their status, power, and legitimacy, my unit's first move was to initiate meetings with three of the influential groups involved: tribal leaders, other local powerbrokers, and the Afghan National Police (ANP). Our purpose was threefold: to find out what was happening in the area, to build a sense of mutually beneficial cooperation, and, most of all, to make them feel that they were included, important, and powerful components of the decision-making process. We deliberately and publicly recognized the legitimacy of each local powerbroker, which seemed to have the desired effect. It made a strong impression on the villagers in general, thereby enhancing the leader status in their villages. However, there was one local powerbroker that we did not officially recognize since intelligence reports pointed to

his involvement in small criminal activity, which was a mistake of mine. We should have recognized him, because later it became obvious that he was an important and influential powerbroker.

In addition to increasing leader legitimacy and status by recognizing them as powerbrokers, I asked the three groups what kind of help the area needed and, more specifically, what assistance they thought my group, ISAF, or the Afghan government could provide. One of the first suggestions we acted on was from the national police and a village powerbroker. They asked for money to build a defense position on a hilltop, from which they could better survey the area and defend the village from Taliban attack. They knew that since they were mainly an Uzbek village, and many had fought against the Taliban in 2001, they would be targeted. Providing the finances to improve village security served a double purpose. It demonstrated the village leader's ability to procure outside resources, and because both the police (representing the Afghan government) and coalition forces were involved, it also reinforced the local powerbroker's legitimacy. My team also benefited, as villagers began to approach us in a different way and provide some dependable information about insurgent activity in the area.

Another example of our success in enhancing the influence and position of a local powerbroker resulted from his request that we implement a medical vaccination and treatment operation. We brought in the necessary medical resources—doctors, equipment, and medicine—from the Meymaneh provincial-reconstruction team. When the villagers realized that if it had not been for their local leader, the medical operation would not have occurred, their perception of his power and ability to benefit their lives changed. The powerbroker's status was increased, and as we publicly acknowledged his efforts and cooperated with him, he gained legitimacy. The powerbroker himself told me later that we now had his and the village's support "forever." In some villages, we donated school supplies and school tents for the local leaders to distribute; in another, we gave the local powerbroker money to dig and build water wells, employing local contractors, thereby accomplishing like results: enhancing and increasing local leader's status, power, and legitimacy.

This dynamic has been reported elsewhere in Afghanistan. U.S. Army Special Forces Jim Gant describes in his article “One Tribe at a Time,” which has circulated widely within the U.S. military, the Pentagon, and Congress,⁷⁴ that “the natural governance of Afghanistan is tribal. Through its councils, jirgas, and shuras, tribal members have been dispensing justice and the means of conflict resolution for centuries.”⁷⁵ “These traditional institutions can facilitate justice and legitimacy through a local approach to resolve conflicts.”⁷⁶ Because Gant did not act in ways that undermined the authority of the tribal leader in Mangwel and supported the village in its dispute with a neighboring village, the legitimacy of the tribal leader was confirmed and, “with that, a relationship was born.”⁷⁷ Jim Gant’s strategy in Konar Valley, Afghanistan, in 2003 mirrors the strategy used by my unit, where cooperation can improve relationships with local power brokers. Although Afghan tribes are known for their resistance to foreign intervention in their affairs, guided by a basic understanding of the culture and hierarchy of Afghan tribal societies, Gant’s team made progress and had some success in the village of Mangwel. In his article, he argues that by gaining “the respect and trust of one tribe in one area, there will be a domino effect that will spread throughout the region and beyond. One tribe will eventually become 25 or even 50 tribes.”⁷⁸ In Mangwel, it worked because mutual cooperation and the acquisition of resources from outside the area increased the tribal leader’s status within the village. It also influenced the villagers to cooperate with Gant’s unit as well.

In a similar way, as described “The Fight for the Village,” Brian Petit explains how Afghan maliks became responsive to U.S. coalition and governmental measures, for example by the promise of local construction projects, representative shuras (council of

⁷⁴ Ann Scott Tyson, “Jim Gant, The Green Beret who could win the war in Afghanistan,” *Washington Post*, January 17, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/01/15/AR2010011502203.html>.

⁷⁵ Gant, “One Tribe at a Time,” 26.

⁷⁶ Gant, “One Tribe at a Time,” 26.

⁷⁷ Gant, “One Tribe at a Time,” 17.

⁷⁸ Gant, “One Tribe at a Time,” 9.

respected elders), and conflict-resolution mechanisms.⁷⁹ Petit gives the example of a special-forces team’s sponsorship of Afghan community elders, which provided them with the means to implement more than fifty-five small projects in their village cluster, at a total cost to the U.S. coalition of \$250,000⁸⁰ but of higher value in their results. Given the means and authority to implement the projects galvanized the villagers against the insurgent encroachment, and local powerbrokers increased their status by their ability to gain such beneficial resources from outside the village.

C. HOW COMMANDER RONNY BECAME A POWERBROKER



Figure 4. Meeting with local powerbrokers.

In my primary area of responsibility, Almar and Qaysar districts, or otherwise in the vicinity of our team, there were sometimes other military units acting together in joint operations. However, since it was officially my area, they all told the local communities that “Commander Ronny” (as I was known locally) had sent them. In Qaysar district, a very large ISAF contingent consisting of two hundred soldiers from Norway, Germany, Latvia, and the United States, including my seven-man group, launched what was primarily a major intelligence-gathering operation, which I led as on-scene field commander. But we also focused on initiating small, quick, development projects, all

⁷⁹ Brian Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” *Military Review* (May/June 2011): 28.

⁸⁰ Petit, “The Fight for The Village,” 28.

ordered and organized by Commander Ronny. Thus, as time went by, I also became recognized throughout the area as a powerbroker. Local leaders of all kinds now knew me, had seen my ability to draw on outside resources, and perceived my role as team commander as a position of great power. For example, during the major intelligence-gathering operation, a local powerbroker approached one of the other teams with a request. Having observed the F-16 fighter planes that we used as operational overwatch, he stated: "Please tell Commander Ronny to spare our poppy fields from being bombed." In response, the team leader told him that they would pass on the request to Commander Ronny, but it was he who would make the decision. Of course, our plan was not to bomb the poppy fields, but the locals did not know that, so therefore they were grateful for our forbearance. Furthermore, the local powerbroker could tell his village that he had influenced us not to bomb the fields, thus gaining more status and power in his village.

Eventually, instead of our going to their local leaders, they began coming to us; and since we usually posted on hilltops, especially at night, we were easy to find. We had successfully demonstrated that their cooperation with us would increase their status, power, and legitimacy and ability to draw outside resources and security to their village. Now they wanted me to come to a meeting to assist them with different issues, particularly village security. Thus, my own experience in Afghanistan convinced me that gaining the local powerbroker's trust, and even becoming recognized as a powerbroker myself, greatly increased the possibility of mission success. It was when that all came together that I saw the greatest difference in the villagers' support.

“Bleeding” for the protection of the local people



Figure 5. Receiving first aid in camp before evacuation to the military hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Our most effective operations in gaining the cooperation were when we stood with them in combat against the Taliban. Those shared experiences showed me that, for local leaders, the security of their villages was their most pressing concern. I also learned that local powerbrokers had long since grown tired of giving information to a government that failed to act on it. It was something we tried our best not to do and not to forget. By fighting together with the powerbrokers and their villages, they could set aside their fear of coercive approaches by the Taliban, because my unit’s strong military force would defeat any Taliban attack.

There was another significant aspect to my team’s operations in Afghanistan. Military Observation Team Navy went into areas where few, perhaps no, previous MOT teams had gone before. This happened because a local leader from Sakh village reported that there were possible Taliban training camps in Sadhi Kham area. By approaching villages perceived as dangerous by the local people, we showed them that we took their leader’s reports seriously and were willing to trust and act upon their information. This enhanced powerbroker legitimacy. One meeting in a designated dangerous village stands out in particular, because my interpreter, who came from Kabul, was terrified by the presence of several possible Taliban commanders. He feared for his life. As for me, as a result of this meeting, I got a price on my head: a mere \$10,000. The reason was that my

influence and position in the area became a threat to the Taliban. Similarly, local powerbrokers that did not comply with Taliban demands were eliminated, by either the Taliban or others who wanted a reward for killing them.

Back at the Meymaneh Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) camp, one night we received a phone call from the chief of police in a nearby village, asking that we come and help because he feared that the Taliban was planning a night attack on his village. My team immediately drove out to the village, a five-hour drive, to help the chief of police and local powerbrokers defend their village. We took defensive positions on the roof of the police headquarters, whence we could control the rest of the village. No attack came that night, but the response from the local powerbroker was overwhelming. He knew that if the Taliban took over his village, he would lose power; thus he needed our help. After seeing that we were willing to fight for his village, he gave us his total support.

Two days later, we got orders from the ISAF PRT commander that we had to go to the home village of the provincial governor, because it was rumored that fifty Taliban fighters would attack his village during the night. As provincial governor, he was the most powerful and influential powerbroker in our area. He came from the village of Senjetak Jinab, on the border of Bagdis Province. His younger brother was in charge in the village, since the governor mostly lived in Meymaneh; the brother had a big influence on nearby villages as well, because of his brother's high position.

We went to the village, talked to the elders and the governor's brother, and agreed that we would help them during the night. People were ordered to stay inside, and we would fight the Taliban if they came. The village was difficult to defend because of the surrounding hills, and we had to make tough choices regarding our own security versus the ability to oversee the entire village. That night, Taliban forces tried to ambush us, coming from an unexpected direction, and it was then that I was wounded, as described in the introduction.

Nevertheless, good things came from that, because by "bleeding for the village," as the Afghans phrased it, we gained the local powerbrokers' total cooperation and

support. As the governor's brother told my second in command, the next time they went into Senjetak village, "if you guys are willing to take a bullet for us, and are willing to die for us, why should we not trust you?"⁸¹ The fact that we had defeated the attack and that Commander Ronny himself was injured made a huge impact on surrounding villages. The LPBs understood that by supporting the government, they would increase their own position and power as powerbrokers, thus they had positive incentive to support the government.

My unit's experience is similar to Jim Gant's. When he offered to support the village leader and his tribe in the fight against highland tribes, a relationship between Gant's unit and the Mangwel tribe was born. Furthermore, he found out that "tribes understand power,"⁸² which they perceive, however, in these terms:

How many guns do we have? How many warriors can I put in the field?
Can I protect my tribe? Can I attack others who threaten my tribe? Can I
back my words or decision up with the ability to come down the valley
and kill you? Can I keep you from killing me, and can I project my power
across the valley?

Gant believes that "training and building relationships with the leaders of the tribe will be permanent fixes in large areas of rural Afghanistan."⁸³ Gant operated on the basis of that belief in his transactions with Malik Noorafzhal, the tribal leader in Mangwel. Noorafzhal sought power, and "power in this area was about the ability to put armed men on the ground to attack an adversary or defend their tribe. Guns were the ultimate currency."⁸⁴ By acknowledging him as the local powerbroker, giving him weapons, and offering to fight with him against his enemies, Gant provided the necessary means for Noorafzhal to increase his power: he showed the villagers that he had access to outside resources and could protect the village. In addition, Gant and his team benefited reciprocally because Noorafzhal could then assure the villages that the Americans could be trusted and that they should welcome and support coalition efforts.

⁸¹ MOT Navy, Afghanistan, August 2007.

⁸² Gant, "One Tribe at a Time," 14.

⁸³ Gant, "One Tribe at a Time," 26.

⁸⁴ Gant, "One Tribe at a Time," 22.

D. THREE YEARS LATER (2011)

In Senjetak and other villages nearby, for the two months immediately following my wounding, the villagers gave us their full support. No Taliban managed to get a foothold in the area, and the villages gave us good information regarding Taliban activity.

Because of the good situation in those villages, military teams began to prioritize additional villages, and that meant, often, that it could be one or two months between a military team's presence in Senjetak and the villages nearby. After three months, therefore, they started to show signs of hesitation when it came to their willingness to give us information. And the LPBs did not want to meet us anymore. Also, when my own unit's team, MOT Navy, went into Tez Nawa, a village near Senjetak, to meet some elders, they were caught in a deadly ambush, which lasted for six hours. One Afghan army soldier was injured and had to be evacuated by helicopter. Before this attack, my team had always received information from the LPBs about possible ambushes, either by phone or in meetings, but now there was no "heads-up." Later in the same area, a Norwegian soldier was killed in an IED attack, having received no information about the danger from local powerbrokers. Also in that same area, six of the eight MOT Navy team members were injured in another major ambush in the same valley where I was wounded.

What happened? Clearly, when our units moved out the Taliban moved in. It soon became impossible for coalition forces to move into those villages where we had once built up a good relationship with the local leaders and won their and the people's support. More recently, in June 2009, a joint force consisting of one-hundred fifty soldiers tried to get into the villages, but the Taliban proved too strong and the joint force had to pull back. Also, in one of the villages, ISAF and the government had established an Arbakee force to protect their own village. After ISAF left the village, the Taliban came in, decapitated the commander of the Arbakee force, and told the soldiers that they would do the same with everyone if they did not put down their weapons. It is no use in arming

twenty people as an Arbakee force when the Taliban come in with one hundred fighters.⁸⁵ As Mao Tse Tung observed many decades ago, “Political power grows from the barrel of a gun.”⁸⁶

What had happened was this: Since we could not be in the villages for long periods due to other priorities and missions, the Taliban seized the opportunity to coerce the LPBs into joining them. They knew exactly which leaders were most susceptible to influence—for example, a village elder that had a lot of influence, or a local powerbroker. In this way, their coercive power was very effective. In order to survive, the LPBs surrendered to the Taliban, allowing them to get a foothold in their villages. The brother of the provincial governor in Senjetak, where I was shot, for example, is now trying to hold on to his reputation and position, and therefore is “playing both sides,” meaning that he supports both the government and the Taliban. The same is true in the village of Khwaja Kinti. They have an Arbakee force, but it turns with the wind: sometimes it fights against Taliban forces, sometimes against ISAF. It all depends on which side they believe has the best chance of winning the battle. In another village, the local powerbroker has moved away to Meymaneh, where he now sells weapons from his personal arsenal to the Taliban.

1. Consistency

“Villages and villagers principally aim to survive and prosper. To do so, they will visibly align or subjugate themselves to the dominant, lasting presence.”⁸⁷ That means that the consistent presence of ISAF military forces to maintain the security of a village until it is able to take care of its own, is of critical importance. The people must be shown that a more dominant and lasting authority than the Taliban will prevail.⁸⁸ If ISAF or Afghan government forces do not maintain consistency in an area, the Taliban will take it. This was the case in several of the villages in Qaysar and Ghormach district in Farjab

⁸⁵ MOT N, Personal experiences from Afghanistan, 2007

⁸⁶ Mao Tse-tung, “Problems of War and Strategy,” *Selected Works II* (November 6, 1938):224, accessed 19 May 2011, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch05.htm>.

⁸⁷ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 27.

⁸⁸ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 27.

and Bagdis Provinces, northwest Afghanistan. Our area of responsibility as MOT N was three districts—Almar, Qaysar, and Ghormach—with a population of approximately 200,000. There are many villages in these districts, and a presence in all of them was impossible under the current force structure. My unit, MOT N, was seven soldiers with little support from other units; therefore, we could not consistently be present in the village.

Overall, as these examples show, the support of local powerbrokers is paramount and should be our first priority. Moreover, once their support is won, there must be a consistent presence of NATO military forces in their villages until they are strong enough to protect themselves. This can be accomplished by establishing either local security forces or strong government forces, sufficient to defeat Taliban attempts to take over. If not, the Taliban will succeed in controlling villages, local powerbrokers, and populations.

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III. THE TALIBAN STRATEGY OF TAKING A VILLAGE

Some of the generals are saying, “We’re making progress. We are clearing an area.” But you really don’t defeat the Taliban by clearing an area. They move. –Colin Powell

The Taliban works in many of the same ways the government and ISAF do. They take one village at a time, using the LPBs, and gain their support through coercion. Influencing the village leaders is a key component of the Taliban strategy to “prolong the conflict, drain international resources, test the will of the United States, and deny access to the rural population, which usually rejects the Taliban ideology.”⁸⁹ “To implement this strategy, the Taliban co-opt and coerce villagers outside the reach of Afghan government protection capabilities.”⁹⁰ As Ivan Arreguin-Toft concludes in the article “How the Weak Deter the Strong”:

The key determinant of unconventional deterrence success turns out to be a function of the strategic interaction of adversaries. This is because strategies contain a mix of cultural, historical, technological, and ideational elements (including conditions).⁹¹

Gordon McCormick argues that both the way the Taliban is organized and their strategy are mostly effective.⁹² This is because, “in order to control the population, you have to be there.”⁹³ With the Taliban’s “shadow government” organization, they are present among the population all the time.

A. THE SHADOW GOVERNMENT

Thomas Joscelyn finds, more specifically, that the “Taliban has two primary objectives in Afghanistan: controlling the Afghan people and breaking the coalition’s

⁸⁹ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 26.

⁹⁰ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 26.

⁹¹ Paul, Morgan and Wirtz, *Complex Deterrence*, 218.

⁹² McCormick, “Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgent Process.”

⁹³ McCormick, “Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgent Process.”

will.”⁹⁴ To do this, they have been slowly building up a shadow government that mimics the structure of the official Afghan government.⁹⁵ This shadow government is an essential element of the Taliban’s central strategy and gives the Taliban many advantages.

There are shadow-government people in all possible positions, from the federal down to the village level,⁹⁶ positions that are held by locals who know their own villages, areas, and districts. In this way, the Taliban gains extensive knowledge of local populations. In addition, because they know what individual villagers have to lose or gain, they can choose the most appropriate means to influence them to support the Taliban.⁹⁷

The Taliban and associated criminal enterprises burrow into village clusters, becoming difficult to identify and even more problematic to decisively defeat. Villagers are “insurgent’s camouflage.”⁹⁸

During daylight hours, when ISAF troops move into a village, Taliban members remain hidden; when the ISAF leave at night, the Taliban come out. They also know which villages are controlled by the government and are therefore strong and difficult to deter. They choose only non–state-controlled villages, those weak and vulnerable, which are easier to influence and control.⁹⁹ Their goals are to deter local populations from talking to state officials and thus prevent the state from gaining information about where and who Taliban are. This allows the Taliban to maintain its influence over the population without danger of being captured or killed by either the Afghan army or ISAF. They are also aware that, eventually, the coalition will lose its motivation and leave. Therefore, they do not necessarily have to win the war; they only need to make it costly

⁹⁴ Thomas Joscelyn, “Threat Matrix: The Taliban’s Shadow Government,” (September 24, 2009), accessed October 1, 2010, http://www.longwarjournal.org/threat-matrix/archives/2009/09/the_taliban_shadow_government.

⁹⁵ Mike Mount, “Analysis: Taliban governs Afghanistan from the shadows,” CNN.com, accessed October 2010, <http://cnn.site.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt%title=Analysis%3A+Taliban+g>.

⁹⁶ Mount, “Analysis: Taliban Governs Afghanistan from the Shadows.”

⁹⁷ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 26.

⁹⁸ Petit, “The Fight for the Village,” 26.

⁹⁹ McCormick, “Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgent Process.”

for NATO forces to be in Afghanistan, so that public opinion in their home countries will demand their withdrawal. This is one of the main aspects of Taliban strategy.

After they coerce the village leaders and convince them that Taliban forces now control the village, they leave a few fighters in the village or use Taliban sympathizers to maintain their control. In sum, so long as the LPBs support the Taliban, the effect of influencing other villagers—the nan-bread baker, the shopkeeper, the teahouse owner—is zero. If the government can influence and gain the support of the LPB, however, the rest will follow.

In Qaysar District in Farjab province, the Taliban approached and won the villagers by targeting three groups: religious leaders, leaders in the jirga and shura, and leaders of the village military power (although sometimes the identity of these leaders is overlapping).¹⁰⁰ We now know that among those calling themselves Taliban, there is a wide variety of motivations, such as self-realization, ideology, religious belief, employment, or loyalty to tribe or village. Still others are after personal power, to be in a better position in relationship to opponents. There are myriad motivations, some cultural, some tribal, some neither. The point is that not everyone who calls himself a Taliban is a hard-core fighter. Many only want to provide for their families and put food on the table. They see the Taliban as a “source of benefits.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ PRT Mey, Personal experiences in Farjab Province, e-mail correspondence with an ISAF intelligence cell, July 23, 2011.

¹⁰¹ Dorothy Denning, lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, July 27, 2011.

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IV. STATE-BUILDING VS. EMPOWERING LOCAL POWERBROKERS

According to Joel S. Migdal, there is a conflict between empowering local strongmen and building a state institution.¹⁰² Migdal argues that state leaders in weak states “may purposely weaken their own state agencies that could apply and enforce rules, and that the state may purposely strengthen those who apply and enforce rules in contradiction to those of the state.”¹⁰³ In Afghanistan, it is the tribes and local powerbrokers that make the rules in the villages, which puts them in conflict with the state organization’s wish to be in charge of the society. Migdal argues that “focusing on these struggles within society, between states and other social organizations such as clans, tribes, language groups, and the like, will give new insight into processes of social and political change.”¹⁰⁴ As long as the LPBs in the villages are in control, there “will be no channels for state leaders to marshal public support, make the rules, and create a stabile state.”¹⁰⁵ Migdal argues that this paradox is a “dilemma of state leaders.”¹⁰⁶ So, according to Migdal, if the LPBs get too strong for the government to handle, it can create a situation that can lead to the state’s demise. Tom Barfield argues that:

One of the hard things about looking for local leaders is that we can create them with money and weapons without realizing we are doing so. This is how you get warlords whose power comes from their ability to mobilize force. Afghans have been quite good at gaining outside support in their own power-seeking games.¹⁰⁷

As Migdal argues, “while in some respects they would like to enhance the state, or at least the resources it can make available for them, they must also thwart the state from achieving its leaders’ most fundamental purposes and from achieving a position from

¹⁰² Glenn Robinson, personal communication, July 27, 2011.

¹⁰³ Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 64.

¹⁰⁴ Migdal, *State in Society*, 65.

¹⁰⁵ Migdal, *State in Society*, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Migdal, *State in Society*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ Tom Barfield, e-mail correspondence, July 7, 2011.

which to offer viable strategies of survival to the population directly.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Migdal argues that “the local stability that strongmen can guarantee—as long as they provide workable strategies of survival to the population—is critical to the overall stability in the regime.”¹⁰⁹ As one of the local powerbrokers in Qaysar told my unit, “if it was not for me, Taliban would control this area a long time ago.” The local powerbrokers are in a bargaining position in the village itself, and therefore can influence decisions about the allocation of resources and the application of policy rules. As Migdal concludes, “reshaping society, whether through an independent position in alliance with foreign and domestic capital or through reformist social policy, is way beyond the capabilities of many third-world states.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, states in fragmented societies, such as Afghanistan, are more likely to remain areas for accommodation than to become sources for major changes in the people’s social behavior.¹¹¹

Successful counterinsurgency examples, such as the Philippines Insurrection and Malayan Emergency, Jim Gant’s experience in a village in Afghanistan, and Baker’s experience in a village in Iraq, show that if the LPBs are co-opted into the government, or recognized as legitimate leaders, they will cooperate. Seth Jones argues that:

Historically, doing this effectively in Afghanistan, has required both co-option and coercion – providing incentives to tribes and communities to support the government, and sticks to keep them in line. The Musahibans (Nadir Shah, Zahir Shah, Daoud Khan) in Afghanistan were masters of co-option and coercion.¹¹²

Unfortunately, the central government, which has always been weak, has not become any stronger under the administration of President Hamid Karzai. As a result, most Afghan tribes and villagers continue to rely on local powerbrokers that provide not only security and justice, but also their basic needs. In addition, because these local leaders cannot be expected to relinquish their hard-earned influence over the people, it is not only

¹⁰⁸ Migdal, *State in Society*, 91.

¹⁰⁹ Migdal, *State in Society*, 92.

¹¹⁰ Migdal, *State in Society*, 94.

¹¹¹ Migdal, *State in Society*, 94.

¹¹² Seth G. Jones, e-mail correspondence, August 7, 2011.

important, but also necessary, that both the government and coalition forces first acknowledge, then legitimize them. Failure to do so may result in district leaders being easily recruited by the Taliban instead, with their local populations soon to follow suit.

The LPBs are critical actors at the local level. They are able to provide social control and influence that the government cannot bring about on its own.

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V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I think the central mission in Afghanistan right now is to protect the people, certainly, and that would be inclusive of everybody, and that in an insurgency and a counterinsurgency, that's really the center of gravity.

—Michael Mullen

Gaining the support of local powerbrokers—without doubt the most important approach to take in order to win the villages, thus the war in Afghanistan—is currently a prominent theory promoted by writers knowledgeable about Afghanistan’s culture, history, and development. As stated in the introduction and demonstrated by the case study, this thesis concludes that to achieve the support of local powerbrokers, the government and international forces must first understand his incentives. A local powerbroker will have a “what’s in it for me” mentality and, as argued in the thesis, the LPB is seeking status, power, and legitimacy.

Nevertheless, as both the Malayan and Philippines insurgencies show, coercion is also necessary. A mixture of negative and positive inducements is best for achieving local cooperation. If local powerbrokers do not support the government, they should be persuaded and convinced that it is in their best interests not to join the Taliban. To accomplish this, the cost of not supporting the government must be greater than the benefit of joining the insurgency.¹¹³ Without coercion, LPBs have no incentive to choose the state. The threat from the Taliban and the costs of not choosing them will be greater and more effective.

If the state does not pressure the LPBs, they will play both sides, telling both that they have their support. But, as my case study shows, in the long run, it is not enough to win the local powerbrokers. There must be something more. The security apparatus in the villages must be strong enough to stop Taliban attempts to gain control as soon as international forces leave. First and most important, the government must win the local powerbrokers. Second, the local powerbrokers must influence the population to support

¹¹³ McCormick, “Operationalizing the Insurgents/Counterinsurgents Process.”

the government. Third, the government must establish a strong-enough security apparatus in the village to resist Taliban takeover when international forces vacate. There is a need for local defense forces, since the U.S. coalition is drawing down its forces, but it must be closely monitored to prevent a new civil war, as happened when warlords arose after the Soviet withdrawal. “The end state for the local defense forces is when the local governance and village elders/leaders are strengthened, the Taliban powerbase and the shadow government have been subverted, the village can defend itself from insurgents, and the village is successfully tied into the district.”¹¹⁴ However, as Seth Jones puts it, the early-1990s era in Afghanistan demonstrated that local defense forces that are large, offensive, controlled by individual commanders, and without a strong national army/police force tend to be destabilizing. But, as the 1929–1978 period suggests, local defense forces that are small, defensive, under immediate supervision of village elders/leaders, and with a competent national army/police have contributed to stability.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Eric T. Furey, “A comprehensive Approach to Local Engagement in Afghanistan, That may also Mitigate IEDs,” *Small Wars Journal* (October 2010): 25, accessed January 5, 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/a-comprehensive-approach-to-local-engagement-in-afghanistan>.

¹¹⁵ Seth Jones, e-mail correspondence, July 8, 2011.

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