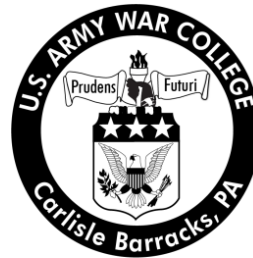


**Civilian Research Project
USAWC Fellow**

SOF/Convention Force Light
Footprint Interdependence in Asia
and Beyond

by

Lieutenant Colonel William J. Carty, Jr.
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2013

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) xx-04-2013		2. REPORT TYPE CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE SOF/Convention Force Light Footprint Interdependence in Asia and Beyond				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel William J. Carty, Jr. United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Dr. Richard H. Shultz, Jr. Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Mr. Anthony Lieto U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 11,922					
14. ABSTRACT Full spectrum engagement under a "Light Footprint" strategy using lessons learned from Afghanistan can shape and influence new threats to security that have already emerged around the globe as the United States completes the withdrawal from its 12-year commitment to major operations. This engagement can be accomplished on a small-scale, short of war, and at a lower cost than seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through the complimentary effects of direct and indirect approaches, referred to as surgical strike and special warfare respectively within the context of the SOF Light Footprint approach, measured application of US Military and Interagency assets in Security Force Assistance and Security Sector Reform can continue to set the conditions for governance, development, and security that deny insurgents and Violent Extremist Organizations the environment they need to grow and project their influence. As was done in conflict by highly enabled interdependent SOF/Conventional Forces, so too can it be done in peacetime.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Light Footprint, SOF Conventional Interdependence, SOF Integration, COIN, Counterinsurgency, SFA, SSR					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 56	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)

USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

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Title: SOF/Convention Force Light Footprint Interdependence in Asia and Beyond

Report Date: April 2013

Page Count: 56

Word Count: 11,922

Key Terms: Light Footprint, SOF Conventional Interdependence, SOF Integration, COIN, Counterinsurgency, SFA, SSR

Classification: Unclassified

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SOF/Convention Force Light Footprint Interdependence in Asia and Beyond

Full spectrum engagement under a “Light Footprint” strategy using lessons learned from Afghanistan can shape and influence new threats to security that have already emerged around the globe as the United States completes the withdrawal from its 12-year commitment to major operations. This engagement can be accomplished on a small-scale, short of war, and at a lower cost than seen in Afghanistan and Iraq. Through the complimentary effects of direct and indirect approaches, referred to as surgical strike and special warfare respectively within the context of the SOF Light Footprint approach,¹ measured application of US Military and Interagency assets in Security Force Assistance (SFA) and broader Security Sector Reform (SSR) can continue to set the same conditions for governance, development, and security that deny insurgents and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO) the environment they need to grow and project their influence.

Recent experience in Afghanistan has led to extraordinary levels of cooperation among military conventional and Special Operations Forces (SOF)², interagency civilians, and contractors. Notably, Village Stability Operations (VSO) resulted in the formation of highly interdependent joint/combined/interagency teams that have achieved success in austere, rural environments³ similar to where security threats elsewhere have begun to emerge. So successful and necessary was this interdependent relationship that US Special Operations Command’s Admiral Eric Olson added the fifth “SOF Truth” stating, “Most Special Operations require non-SOF assistance”⁴, and Chief of Staff of the Army General Raymond Odierno in the Army’s 2012 Strategic Planning

Guidance that he directed the further enhancement of Conventional Forces through increasing their integration with Special Operations Forces.⁵

VSO methods, the result of years of evolving lessons hard won on modern battlefields, are at risk of being abandoned by a security community that has grown weary of the years of commitment to the effort that has been required in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the wake of the failure to achieve all outcomes desired in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with the cost of the wars in lives and dollars in a period of fiscal uncertainty, a growing chorus has arisen across many fronts condemning counterinsurgency (COIN) and US involvement in complex and long-term conflicts not seen to be directly affecting vital US national interest.⁶ Retired General Paul K. Van Riper of the United States Marine Corps, a leader in the understanding of the application asymmetric capabilities, commented on the abandonment of Effects Based Operations (EBO) by another great modern asymmetric warrior, General James Mattis at US Joint Forces Command. He stated that abandonment of EBO was not a matter of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, as there never was a baby in the bathwater.⁷ This is not the case with COIN. Most critics fail to understand what was always known within the military to be the limitations of COIN, while also failing to recognize the changing nature of conflict around the globe. In critics' condemnation of COIN, they generally do not or offer any alternative to COIN to address what are the most likely and already emerging threats to US Security. When looking at the elements of national power as Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME), COIN has components of all of them, but forms the military component in fighting an insurgency. Condemning COIN that was a qualified success as a military strategy for the failures of

efforts in the Diplomatic, Informational, and Economic realms inaccurately places blame on the military component that was never the lead agent in these areas, and fails to identify shortcomings that need to be addressed elsewhere.

Within the COIN military strategic construct, the close interdependence of US Special Operations Forces and their Conventional Counterparts in Iraq and to an even greater extent Afghanistan made significant strides in the establishment of post-conflict governance, security, and development, applying DIME to varying degrees across the Interagency spectrum. Similar approaches achieved even greater and often unnoticed effects in the areas of lesser conflict of Columbia and the Philippines.⁸ This COIN application can still be done in a pro-active conflict prevention approach using COIN doctrine in which US policy and resources shape and influence the conflict environment at a relatively low cost rather than the higher-cost, reactive, post-conflict scenarios driven by enemy actions.

Although involvement in complex internal conflicts or fighting transnational violent extremist organizations in areas that favor their advantages may not be what the US would choose to do again, as has so often been stated and needs to be remembered, the enemy gets a vote. The US Armed Forces and Interagency partners are at present the most highly trained and experienced force in history for this type of engagement. Failing to employ these current capabilities, or worse, rejecting the lessons learned from recent experience will only result in greater commitments required in the future.

Strategic Context

Frequently stated in discussions on US security policy, the challenges associated with costs in lives, dollars, and popular will of the people in sustaining a 12-year war

effort have become too much for the country to bear. Whether discussed in Sun Tzu, Thucydides, or Clausewitz, studies on protracted war shows it does not favor the state, while Mao, Che Guevara, and even US Unconventional Warfare doctrine all call for indirect engagement and the wearing down of the state by insurgents through asymmetric approaches. The days of wars being decided by large scale maneuver of conventional formations in decisive battles are waning. Although there is frequent discussion of peer competitors to the US, those most likely to find themselves engaging in armed conflict contrary to US interests are not among them. Even those in competition with the US who have peer capabilities in some areas (China and Russia), they are not true peer competitors.

As the United States follows a two pronged approach for security engagement, one is designed to address the challenges of these asymmetric threats, while the other is focused on peer competitors. In the Army Operational Concept (AOC) which provides Army planning guidance, both of these scenarios are addressed⁹, but in a very divergent manner.

The risk of a rogue state, regional actor, or non-state actor that threatens US interests through an attack on our allies or in the form of terrorism against US interests themselves is assessed as the most probable risk the US will confront. The US light footprint approach is a strategy designed to mitigate this risk, which is said to not be a direct threat to vital national interests.¹⁰

The most dangerous is assessed as conventional war against a peer competitor that possesses weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in a conventional environment.¹¹ This is seen as most dangerous because of the risk to US vital interests and the

potential cost in lives and money and the effort required to defeat it, although holding a lower risk of probability. This threat scenario includes concerns over access to the global commons of sea, air, and space that factor into this risk,¹² as this threat poses the greatest potential loss to US opportunities in the global political and economic community and US vital interests. US strategic policy of guaranteed access countering anti-access/area denial (A2AD)¹³ efforts is the cornerstone of the emergent Air-Sea Battle Doctrine, and when applied to the area representing the greatest US opportunities for the future, forms the foundation of the Pacific Rebalance with forward positioning of Naval and Air Force assets in the Pacific Theater. A further component still of this peer competitor risk is identified as the use of sponsored proxy organizations that act outside of the state system to attack US interests.¹⁴ This component of the threat calls for the employment of a light footprint approach as well.

Lastly, the Army Operational Concept identifies a most dangerous alternative. “Though neither most likely nor most dangerous, the threat of an individual or extremist organization employing a weapon of mass destruction in the U.S. is the most dangerous alternative. As worldwide proliferation of nuclear capabilities continues, adversarial regimes and extremist groups are likely to gain control of nuclear materials that, in turn, could be made available to rogue scientists.”¹⁵ Large conventional formations, carrier battle groups, and strategic bombers offer little defense in this regard. The means to mitigate this most dangerous alternative again is through the light footprint that either through special warfare removes the conditions in which an extremist can hide and move in a supportive populace, or absent that upon development of intelligence gained through networked special warfare and interagency efforts, apply surgical strike

capability to prevent an attack. This is consistent with General Stanley McChrystal's successfully executed theory in Iraq that it takes a network to defeat a network.¹⁶

The above threat scenarios form the basis for Army strategic planning, but a distinction of threats and opportunities must be made for planning purposes. First, the above model presumes that where greatest opportunity lies, the loss of this opportunity represents the greatest threat. As such, when looking at the Asia-Pacific region, with competing interests of the US, China, and Russia, on the surface the loss of access to the global commons or confrontation among these actors poses the potential for the greatest loss. However, when factoring in probability, taking into consideration global markets of imports and exports, holders of US foreign debt and foreign direct investment, Chinese oil consumption and Russian and US growth as oil exporters, to name but a few considerations, the likelihood of a military confrontation among these actors, or among allies that would put economic and therefore national interests at risk is very low. Yet, enormous investment is being made by the US under Air-Sea Battle doctrine in the Pacific Rebalance to have the military capability to confront peer competitors with conventional strength. These competitors' self-interest would be undermined by such a confrontation. The A2AD doctrine calls for preservation of access and, absent that, its forced imposition. However, if gained by force, the question becomes "to what end?"¹⁷ The imposed access that would be gained by Air-Sea Battle Doctrine cannot be exploited with anything less than a large scale land operation on the Asian continent, the very type which the US is expressly seeking to avoid. Although indeed the greatest opportunities for US economic growth lie in the Asia-Pacific region, this does not automatically correlate to the greatest threat being its potential loss.

When viewed as a matter of probability, as already identified in the Army Operational Concept, the threat that the US will most likely and with almost certainty confront is the threat of a non-state actor or violent extremist organization.

In these cases, with growing frequency, parties to conflict are not even states themselves, but ideological, ethnic, or criminal organizations that seek to achieve their aims through violent extremism in which territorial integrity, Westphalian concepts of state sovereignty, and international law hold little to no meaning. Whether it be the threadbare colloquialism of hearts and minds, population centric COIN, or as British General Sir Rupert Smith called it, “war among the people”,¹⁸ the current battlefield is one in which the outcome sought is recognition by the populace of the authority to rule, whether that be by might or legitimate mandate. The support of the people themselves is the objective, whether earned or compelled. When states are unable to achieve this, Violent Extremist Organizations come in to fill the vacuum. The focus of these organizations goals determines the nature and magnitude of the threat they pose. Criminal organizations such as drug cartels are generally driven by financial gain, and use violence as a tool to achieve their economic goals. Ethnic and regional actors use force for political gain over competing groups. Transnational ideological organizations, as illustrated by Al Qaeda seek to establish themselves as ideological rulers over wide swaths of people and territory, using violence to oppress local populations and terrorize enemies. To classify a group such as this as not a direct threat to vital national interests, as the Army Operational Concept does, misses the impact that the network that supported 19 hijackers in four commercial airliners has had over the 12 years since September 11, 2001. The answer to this threat, the most probable and in the context of

9/11 the most dangerous, is a whole-of-government, joint/combined/interagency approach based around US Special Operations and Conventional Force interdependent engagement described below. This strategy is built from the lessons learned from successes in Afghanistan and Iraq that are directly applicable to the threat environments that exist in Asia, North and South America, and Africa from which the most likely threat to US interests will rise asymmetrically. Air-Sea battle doctrine will continue to protect the global commons and guarantee access in the Sea, Air, Space, and Cyber Domains, but the conflicts of the future will continue to be fought in the Land Domain, among the people who form what is increasingly referred to as the Human Domain.¹⁹

As a final point of reference in context, discussion of US entry into a post-war period continues, which in itself glosses over the fact that the US is still fighting the war in Afghanistan, with a further consideration missed. Talk of the impact of 12 years of war fails to account for the reality that the US has been engaged in armed conflict far longer than that. From the 1989 invasion of Panama, during which time assistance to the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan was still ongoing, followed by the 1990 Gulf War and subsequent supporting security operations, armed Humanitarian Operations leading up to the withdrawal from Somalia in 1994, the failed response to the Rwandan Genocide also in 94, then Operation Restore Hope in Haiti, Bosnia in 1995, and Kosovo in 1999 all created an unbroken string of US Military deployments in combat, Security Assistance, Peacekeeping, and Humanitarian and Civil Assistance Operations . Also included in this timeline are the first World Trade Center Attack in 1993, the US Embassy Bombings in Africa in 1998, and the attack on the USS Cole in 2000. The US

was still supporting Security and Stability Operations Iraq, Kuwait, Bosnia, Kosovo and Haiti on September 11, 2001. As was stated recently by a former senior US Army Official, "The United States has been at war not for 12 years, but in some form of armed conflict for 25. It isn't entering a post-war period. The United States is entering the next pre-war period."²⁰ It is in this context that lessons learned from Afghanistan will be examined for applicability in future wars among the people.

Background of the Modern Asymmetric Environment

In October 2001, small teams of US Army Special Forces and Interagency personnel infiltrated into Afghanistan to link up with Northern and Southern Alliance militias willing to fight against the extremist Taliban Government and the Al Qaeda foreign fighters they hosted. Partnered with these Afghan forces, US teams numbering fewer than 300 personnel total, supported by close air support and aerial logistics, effectively coordinated and employed thousands of allied Afghan fighters into a force that in 49 days drove the Taliban from power.²¹ What followed was years of SOF and Conventional Force counterinsurgency operations.

Simultaneous to these operations in Afghanistan, US Special Operations engaged in an increased Counterinsurgency effort in the Southern Philippines. As a result in the ensuing years, Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf insurgents lost almost half of their identified leadership²², and the Muslim separatist Morro Islamic Liberation Front negotiated in earnest with the Philippine Government, concluding peace accords in 2012.²³ Additionally, Indonesia-born Hambali (Riduan Isamuddin) who had been dubbed by the Central Intelligence Agency the "Osama Bin Laden" of South East Asia was captured in 2003 in Thailand in a combined operation. He is believed to have been

the operations chief for the shadowy militant group Jemaah Islamiah (JI), and has been named as a key suspect in a string of bombings across the region.²⁴ Further, the Indonesian Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Bashir, known as the spiritual leader of JI who carried out the 2002 Bali bombings has been neutralized by the Indonesian government through a string of prosecutions and imprisonments, most recently being sentenced to 15 years in prison for supporting an extremist training camp uncovered in 2011.²⁵

Also in 2003, the focus of US Military effort shifted to the Iraq, where again US and allied forces, this time largely led by conventional forces and facilitated by SOF in the north and west²⁶, dealt a final crushing blow to Saddam Hussein's Regime. Years of lessons hard fought and learned led to the wide adoption of updated COIN tactics captured in the US Army and Marine Corps Counter Insurgency Manual.²⁷ Written under General David Petraeus' oversight, these tactics employed in the operational theaters of Iraq and Afghanistan became the overarching population-centric US strategy for combating the lingering terrorist and insurgent threats in Afghanistan and Iraq. This method has sometimes been derided as more a strategy of tactics,²⁸ prompting some to use the ad hominem moniker of COINdinistas for those that advocated it. This criticism fails to account for the changing and predominant nature of warfare fought with increasing regularity among the populace, often against non-state actors and, frequently for the internal legitimacy of the state. This battle for the Human Domain²⁹ is what has defined most modern conflicts, and will continue to do so for years to come. Engaging the populace at the local level, for whom the decisive influence in these conflicts is ultimately fought, indeed forms the tactics that generates an operational campaign plan, that when applied across the boundaries of military theaters to transnational or similar

regional threats does accurately and correctly in a nested concept form a strategy of tactics.

When General Stanley McChrystal assumed command in Afghanistan in 2009, he immediately instituted a redesign of the Afghan Campaign that emphasized protection of the populace using COIN and networked counter terrorism capabilities, similar to that used with success in Iraq.³⁰ With General McChrystal's unanticipated departure from Afghanistan, what became evident was that this population protection focus in cities was more a population center-centric concept in its early stages. Large-scale operations seized major Taliban strongholds, such as in Helmand , and there was an increase in insurgent leaders killed by SOF strike capability.³¹ However, much of the rural populace in the compartmented and difficult desert and mountain regions of the country remained unaddressed and still under the influence of the Taliban until late 2010.³²

Village Stability Operations as an Engagement Model in Rural Afghanistan

Prior to the arrival of General McChrystal, SOF in Afghanistan had already begun analyzing this very problem of rural sanctuary engagement. Theater SOF in Afghanistan recognized the challenges to conducting missions in the rural and remote areas of Afghanistan. Conditions forced units to operate far from traditional support bases, in a non-contiguous battlespace, under austere conditions, in culturally complex environments, with greatly increased risk of attack because of their distance and isolation, and for long periods.³³ The problem posed by rural COIN in Afghanistan was a scenario almost purpose-built for a US Army Special Forces and Joint SOF solution,

as it was at the very heart of their defined role.³⁴ Within this context, SOF leadership in Afghanistan pursued a new option.³⁵

The SOF plan for rural engagement developed into Village Stability Operations (VSO).³⁶ The VSO concept was that small elements of purpose-built coalition and partnered forces would establish embedded camps in villages in remote areas of Afghanistan where the Taliban's influence and sanctuary still remained. By assessing the indigenous population, terrain, enemy patterns, and available coalition, joint, and interagency capabilities, SOF identified key areas in which to establish these VSO sites to project Afghan governance, security, and development into insurgent sanctuaries.³⁷ The Special Forces Operational Detachment-Alpha, or A-Team served as the core of these VSO elements, which were subsequently expanded to include Marine Special Operations Teams (MSOT) and Navy SEAL platoons.

In the Army Special Forces, these 12-man teams possess a wide range of capabilities that make them particularly well suited to this type of mission. Before serving in a Special Forces unit, Soldiers must first serve elsewhere in the military and then compete through a demanding selection process to be trained for service in Special Forces, a process that can take as long as two years. Areas of expertise include weapons, engineering, medical, and communications training. More experienced members serve in intelligence and leadership positions on the teams. This selection and training process effectively creates a mature and highly-skilled force of volunteers who receive language and cultural training to better facilitate their role as trainers of partner nation forces in austere, physically dangerous, culturally complex,

and politically sensitive environments. These same capabilities have been trained and applied in MSOT and SEAL Platoons.³⁸

Started in October 2009, VSO has grown to support every Regional Command in Afghanistan. VSO Teams, often living in Afghan mud-walled compounds called kalats faced an early challenge in gaining support from intimidated locals. By using a non-linear bottom-up approach to what had traditionally been viewed as a sequential top-down progression of governance, security, and development, VSO Teams facilitated low-cost, quick-impact development projects that grew over time³⁹. They also gained the vitally important influence of key local tribal leaders serving in the village governmental “Shuras”⁴⁰ facilitating simple local quality of life improvements. When the battle is for the Human Domain, as much of that domain as possible must be engaged both from the top down and bottom up to insure parallel progress consistent with the old adage that “all politics are local.”⁴¹ In December of 2012, VSO had grown to 56 SOF teams (anticipated to grow to 61) that since the inception of VSO had worked in 674 villages in 76 districts across Afghanistan conducting this engagement, with further representation of SOF coalition advisors at the provincial and national level.⁴²

Traditionally, the belief held that upon entering a new area, governance must first be established linking the village to the district government, then on to the province and national level. Once governance is established, the idea was that security would then follow, allowing for development to prosper. Although the Shura itself represents a nearly pure form of democracy at the village level, with respected elders representing family and tribal interests in discussions that seek consensus among competing interests, few were willing to commit to any external form of government for fear of

Taliban retribution. Many of these remote locations into which VSO teams inserted had minimal contact with outsiders, and had little reason to believe that promises of security and development would be kept. This is why the embedded concept was so important.⁴³ By staying in the communities themselves, the VSO teams slowly became part of the village landscape. In so doing, an important lesson evolved through experience that created a paradigm shift in the top-down linear governance, security, and development model.

Evidence bore out repeatedly that rural villagers, although not supportive of the Taliban, also did not want to risk retribution from them if seen as aligning with a government that they were not confident could keep its promises. This is where some creative engagement by Special Operations teams on the ground began to turn the tide.⁴⁴

US Army Special Forces, whose nickname is “The Quiet Professionals”, subscribed to the “two ears and one mouth” approach to engagement. The idea is for one to listen twice as much as they talk. Upon arrival and establishment of local security around a village by the presence of their base camp, Special Operations Teams began interacting with locals and asking what they needed, rather than telling them what they would be getting or what was needed from the villagers first. Cultural barriers slowly began to come down. Setting a generalized description of the scene of one of these typical rural villages is useful to demonstrate how these engagements were built upon to eventually establish the linkages for security and governance that followed.

In many villages, most families live in small mud huts surrounded by a wall where family life largely goes unchanged on a day to day basis except for seasonal adjustments. Afghanistan has a literacy rate of only 28%,⁴⁵ lower in rural areas, and the ninth highest birthrate in the world, coupled with an infant mortality rate of 124 per 1,000 (the worst in the world). Life expectancy among males is approximately 49 years, ranking sixth and fourth lowest respectively. It is among the poorest countries on earth, ranked 15th from the bottom with a per capita annual GDP of \$500.⁴⁶ Disease and malnutrition are common, with Afghanistan rated as at high risk for food and waterborne illness.⁴⁷ In many of these isolated rural areas, farming of crops is barely at a subsistence level, and livestock, mostly sheep and goats, compete for food with people. After thirty years of warfare, most modern infrastructure and many traditional institutions were in a state of collapse.

Women may spend hours in the morning and evening traveling to and from local water sources for cooking and cleaning needs. These water sources are often of questionable quality, with animal and human waste run-off contaminating many of them. Men work farm fields to grow crops to feed their families, or worse in areas such as Helmand and Kandahar Provinces, poppies that can be sold for opium production as a source of meager income to purchase life necessities. Those that can afford to leave for larger cities often do, leaving only the poorest behind. It is in these villages where the Taliban can exploit this isolation and poverty for sanctuary. In these places, where the only thing of value that a person has is their life, they will not risk that only possession to resist oppression. Enter into this environment the highly enabled micro-

task forces initially led by Army Special Forces with their motto of De Oppresso Liber—to free the oppressed.

A Joint/Combined/Interagency Micro-Task Force at the Local Level

The key to SOF success was the construct of the VSO methodology. US SOF supported and advised Afghan partner forces and local governmental and tribal representatives to shape and influence local perceptions. SOF lived and worked among the villagers to help foster the desire to stand up against the Taliban and the ability to do so.⁴⁸

Built around the already highly capable US SOF Teams, further enablers were added to increase the breadth and depth at which these SOF-led elements could engage. As part of the US SOF Task Forces, Civil Affairs (CA) and Military Information Support Operation (MISO) Teams participated at the village level to improve living conditions and assist in communicating the message of the Afghan Government and local governmental and security officials, as well as opening schools and radio broadcast literacy programs. Where there were Afghan National or Border Police, Department of State Police Training Teams frequently participated. Advisors from USAID and the Department of Agriculture assisted in improving irrigation and farming practices, with the later integration of long-term farming advisors. Veterinary programs led by Special Forces Medics allowed for outreach to livestock farmers.⁴⁹ Pilot programs of Female Treatment Teams from the US Military to bring medical care to the female populace of these rural areas often were the very first female medical capability ever seen in these areas, opening up access to a half of the population that had previously been isolated from engagement. So successful were these female

engagements that a formal process in both Conventional and Special Operations Forces was implemented resulting in the establishment of Female Engagement Teams and Cultural Support Teams respectively.⁵⁰

Soon, under this whole-of-government full-spectrum approach, demand for these forces rapidly exceeded supply. A limiting factor was a matter of the personnel required to establish initial local security and meet the immediate expectations of the villages for personal engagement in the contested rural areas. It was at this pivotal point, when the value of these efforts was becoming so evident, that the SOF chain of command in Afghanistan made an unconventional request to the theater command and asked for augmentation by conventional military units. In the winter of 2010, an entire infantry battalion was attached to the Combined Joint Special operations Task Force-Afghanistan (CJSOTF-A) as a reinforcing element for the VSO mission, often referred to as a thickening force.⁵¹ With the addition of these troops, that once assigned the mission went through a specially focused pre-mission training cycle to support the CJSOTF-A VSO mission, the effort rapidly expanded under these combined/joint/interagency micro-task forces that continues to be employed.

Development as a Driver for Security and Governance⁵²

All across Afghanistan a pattern began to repeat itself. After assessing potentially viable areas for VSO, SOF teams would develop the area through engagement until they established themselves in a village. Once established, they would set about creating immediate progress through low-cost, quick impact cash for work programs under Money as a Weapons System (MAAWS)⁵³ guidance. Simple programs, such as trash collection or clearing drainage culverts in the local bazaar put

small amounts of much needed Afghan currency in the hands of impoverished villagers, becoming the first tangible impact of government presence as part of the program. These civil assistance programs, determined and prioritized by the local Shuras, in which the Afghan and Coalition troops worked alongside villagers, further established their relationship. Larger, longer lasting projects soon followed, in which villagers were expected to participate to develop a sense of community ownership. One of the first was often the digging of local wells. Easy access to clean water, that reduced the daily, often multi-hour effort to get it, created a significant change in the villages. Health improved. Women were able to provide more assistance to the household with reduced time for gathering water. Closer water allowed for better subsistence irrigation, with better farming techniques demonstrated by VSO agricultural advisors. As these conditions improved, neighbors began exchanging crops and livestock products with each other through bartering, while in some cases money was paid that had been earned in cash for work programs. Specialization followed, based on the premise of comparative advantage, and village-level economies of scale developed.

With the exchange of agricultural goods growing, there was a reason to go to the local bazaar, driving the bazaar's improvement as the next cash for work program. As local interest grew, participation in local Shuras increased, and the village and district center Shura Halls were renovated. Locally enterprising individuals were identified by the VSO teams for micro-grants. Commonly, this started with the family known for baking the best bread in the village, a staple of Afghan daily diets. With the arrival of Afghan troops and police, to say nothing of coalition forces, local demand for bread increased. A local baker would coordinate with the Civil Affairs team for a grant to

either buy or improve his oven, and acquire a supply of baking material. Once done, and being paid by both the VSO elements and local villagers for bread, the new village baker was quickly exceeding demand. He would, sometimes with coaching from the VSO team, hire a relative with a motor cycle or car to sell bread in surrounding villages as the VSO effort expanded. Next, as keeping a vehicle running in rural Afghanistan is difficult yet important, a talented local handyman would be found, and a micro-grant would follow for a vehicle repair shop. More reliably working vehicles meant more people to deliver goods to surrounding villages, or to drive goods to the district center for sale at a larger bazaar for even more money. This would create disposable income to purchase items to improve life back in the village. Sometimes an enterprising individual with capital, or another micro-grant, would return to the village with excess items to open a shop in the village bazaar as well, reducing travel time to the district center for such goods, making them available as a matter of routine. Shoe repair stores, packaged goods, and small electronics shops followed. Although limited cell phone service existed, sometimes when brought in by the VSO teams, a cell tower became a modern link to the outside world. Absent this, even satellite phones made appearances among more enterprising villagers. As former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff retired General James Cartwright stated, the greatest contribution for the future made to Afghanistan by the coalition may be cell phone service.⁵⁴ It opened up the villages to the outside world and modern era.

These advancements then became the catalyst for exponential growth and social change. Up to this point that which would have been minor investments in the village, often under \$10,000.00 total, drove major changes that would follow. The Shura,

speaking for the people of the village, would then often want a medical clinic. The Special Operations Medics trained local men who demonstrated aptitude in basic health care and sanitation, while Female Treatment Teams taught midwives. The success of these programs, challenged by a lack of literacy, became the impetus for requests for schools. Shared contribution of funds and work, with the agreement that if built the villagers would have to find teachers were virtually always met. All of these projects were implemented by the Afghan Police and Army units that accompanied the VSO teams, alongside the recognized Shura, often coordinated with the presence of the District Governor and Chief of Police. Ministries of Health, Education, Interior, and Defense all visibly supported these efforts facilitated through the VSO program. In the long term, improvements such as girls schools, solar lights in the bazaar, and tailored radio programs with call-in shows using crank generator radios distributed by MISO Teams frequently followed. So much a part of the village did these teams become that when festivals and weddings were held, local villagers would arrive at their VSO site to request music to be played at a given time for the festivals, and sometimes even invite the Afghan and Coalition VSO occupants as guests.⁵⁵

Cash for work, wells, medical training, agricultural support and advice, micro-grants for shops in the local bazaar, infrastructure improvement, and most significantly schools and literacy programs broke the village inertia and shifted the momentum of the local populace toward the government⁵⁶. From there, the growing ring of governance, security, and development incorporated other villages in a hub and spoke or oil spot approach. Drawn by word of mouth of the prosperity of a village hosting a VSO site, neighboring villagers would come to seek similar improvements for their homes. To

meet this demand, the final step of the process, in the now broken linear paradigm, was implemented—locally provided security.

The inertia created once these programs got a village moving had to be supported. As the law of inertia states, a body in motion tends to stay in motion. The best way to accomplish this was through momentum. In order to retain and expand upon the gains made in these villages, there had to be a means to prevent a counterforce from being applied from the Taliban. Afghans are not a people shy about fighting. When trained and supported, they will do it, if they have a reason to. The day to day subsistence that had been so prevalent in these villages once replaced with the simple personal progress that VSO facilitated gave many of these villagers something worth fighting for. Clean water, enough food, some disposable income, minor conveniences, access to medical care, and education for their children provided by a government they had previously seen so little from gave them the greatest reason to stand up for their village—hope. Trite as it may sound, hope, something the Taliban did not provide, was something that grew in places where it did not exist before. A rural Afghan father who sends his daughter to school under risk of her finding her school burned, her teacher murdered, or having acid thrown in her face or being poisoned,⁵⁷ does so by rejecting the Taliban with the hope that with an education his daughter will have a better life in the future than he had himself. A better life for one's child is a unifying principle. This he will fight for.

Through ongoing assessments and the promise to support the village, but always with the information that the VSO site was not permanent, the VSO teams would begin recruiting for the Ministry of the Interior's Afghan Local Police (ALP) Program.

Authorized as part of VSO by a decree from President Karzai, the Afghan Local Police are a defensive village-level force trained by Afghan VSO forces under the oversight of the US SOF elements at the VSO sites.⁵⁸ Contrary to popular misunderstanding, the ALP were not like the secular Sunni Militias that formed the Sons of Iraq, even though the assessment of tribes was similar to what the Marines did in Anbar, Iraq⁵⁹. Employed as forces within the Ministry of the Interior under the authority of the District Chief of Police, local men were nominated, vetted and validated by the Shura and then trained, armed, and equipped under SOF oversight to serve as paid defenders of the village. As became the mantra of SOF supporting this mission, you could have VSO without ALP, but you could not have ALP without VSO.⁶⁰

Drawn from the village itself, ALP answered to their neighbors. A strong sense of commitment to one's own defense is common in Afghanistan, and at the village levels, these ALP were seen by the village, and saw themselves, as servants to the village and were held in high regard. Those who departed from this concept and showed abuse or corruption were brought before the Shura for discipline or firing. So successful was the VSO program that it grew nationwide to 16,474 by September of 2012.⁶¹

The desire to prosper, defend one's own village, and to share in the prosperity seen elsewhere were powerful drivers in unifying these villages with their district centers, and the district centers with the province. Villages where only subsistence had existed saw the rise of commerce, healthcare, and education. Banned activities under the Taliban became more common with simple events such as kite flying, music, and dancing at festivals.

What was most significant was the clear desire of the villages to see that these advances were not lost. The tired expression goes, “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day, but teach a man to fish and he will eat for life”. The corollary for perpetuation that grew under VSO was the addition of “Teach others to teach men how to fish, and you can stop a famine”. Applied from a security perspective, “Give a man a gun and he will fight for his family. Teach a man to use a gun and he will fight for his village. Teach a man to teach others how to use guns, and you can defend a nation.”⁶² On this premise, VSO sites followed the long-held concept by Special Operations trainers that they were there to work themselves out of a job. Through the creation of “Train the Trainer” programs, these gains became self-perpetuating advances.⁶³ Members of the Afghan National Army Special Forces and Commandos, Afghan Army, National Police and Border Police, and local governmental officials took on increasing responsibility under decreasing oversight of US SOF trainers for the development of VSO and ALP programs. SOF advisors went from roles as trainers, to supporters, then advisors. Further, Afghan midwives trained other midwives back in their villages. Teachers taught others to teach. Farmers taught neighbors better ways to farm. This spreading and collective effort at keeping forward progress moving is what was sought as the desired outcome of the VSO program, and that is irreversible momentum. Given something to fight for, and the means by which to fight for it is the best defense against the reemergence of the Taliban through the legitimization of the Afghan Government at all levels, as represented by the ALP locally answerable development programs secured by those most vested in them. Even in areas where there were gaps as a result of shortfalls of the Afghan Government to provide services or support to locals, the

governmental vacuum into which the Taliban projected influence was supplanted and their influence co-opted by a present and responsive government. This is the final stages of defeat of any insurgency through the re-establishment of legitimate governance that governs with the support of the people, whose needs the government meets, and secures a monopoly of the use of force.⁶⁴

Challenges to the Process

At the tactical level, areas that were relatively secure formed bases from which to expand influence. The effect was like placing clamps on a hose further back toward the source. Once security zones were established, they were expanded, denying more area to insurgents while expanding government influence.⁶⁵

What became a challenge was when the pressure backed up in the “hose”. With no place to go and losing geographic sanctuary and an intimidated population from which to extort support, desperation settled in with local Taliban remnants. Some of the harshest fighting resulted in the final pushes into remaining contested areas⁶⁶, in which a term deemed “forced entry VSO”⁶⁷ became a particularly challenging approach. These locations required the most dedicated application of the methodology of persistent engagement in high-risk, often enemy dominated areas.

Additionally, these contested areas called for the execution of high end combat operations just to create enough space in time and distance around the VSO sites that SOF Teams could get off their bases to engage the locals. Conventional partners and Afghan Commando units attached to Special Operations Task Forces were routinely used for this purpose to fight the Taliban back to allow VSO to take hold.⁶⁸ This capability to respond in high threat areas was vitally important to demonstrate to locals

that the VSO site, and by extension the villagers, would be protected. With the Quiet Professionals of SOF “talking softly” in the village, adjacent conventional forces or SOF-partnered Afghan Commandos were the “big stick”. Recent arguments about the unsuitability of conducting counterinsurgency while simultaneously engaging in high end combat operations (simultaneity)⁶⁹ do not bear out in experience where this protective response was necessary in support of VSO. Furthermore, in areas of varied progress, where some villages were receptive to governance and others were highly contested, these varied approaches were necessary, as described in US Marine Corps General Charles I. Krulak’s three block war theory.⁷⁰ What had to be guarded against though, in this simultaneous application of special warfare and strike capability was that strikes were conducted as a secondary effort to support the primary VSO effort, as well as avoiding perceptions that local security capability in the form of ALP was the desired endstate of VSO, rather than governance and development.

Additional challenges in these more contested environments came once the VSO forces imposed local security and development begun. Villagers would sometimes refuse to progress to taking responsibility for their own security. With the VSO site there, they felt there was no need. It took particular effort to overcome this “paradox of security”⁷¹ and make the locals understand that the VSO site was temporary and their security was ultimately their responsibility. One of the most difficult of these cases involving a near catastrophic setback in the volatile district of Panjwai was in Belambai village, Kandahar Province. In March of 2012 an infantry non-commissioned officer allegedly departed the VSO site and went on to kill 17 Afghans in two nearby villages. The very fact that the VSO site was there at all was a testament to the relationship

building conducted by the VSO team that entered the area, as Panjwai was one of the toughest Taliban strongholds in Kandahar. Despite the alleged actions of this individual, the VSO site remained. In December of 2012, Belambi graduated their first class of ALP and in March 2013 the village Shura agreed to prevent the Taliban returning in the coming fighting season.⁷² Sometimes cited as a case arguing against COIN as a result of the unpredictable impact of individual actions at a strategic level, Belambai actually illustrates the opposite. Again referring to General Krulak's "Three Block War", he introduced the concept of the strategic corporal.⁷³ When twisted in explanation, it is incorrectly referenced to show how a mission can fail based on the actions of a single individual's poor judgment or behavior. However, what General Krulak actually wrote on was how individuals, when properly trained and led, can have a positive cumulative strategic impact at the tactical level, by engaging on a daily basis across an entire theater. The continued existence and remarkable success of Belambi in the wake of the March 2012 tragedy is a testament to this theory and all of the other strategic corporals who built relationships and acted professionally before, during, and after the incident.

A third problem that developed in some of these newly opened areas came from a different challenge. Upon entering an area, sometimes teams were approached by a local who was very supportive, while the rest of the populace was stand-offish. Promises were made to the team and support followed from the team to this individual, but little progress was made. Usually after a period of weeks in trying to talk to difficult to engage villagers, it would be discovered that the individual the team was supporting was a local thug, illegitimate leader, or in some cases, Taliban himself. These "false

starts⁷⁴ proved to be particularly frustrating because not only did the team waste time working with the wrong local representative, they then had to undo damage to relationships that occurred by associating with him in the first place. However, once overcome, progress often followed rapidly when the locals saw that the VSO teams were truly interested in working with legitimate leaders.

The best way to avoid the pitfalls of forced entry VSO, false starts and the paradigm of security was with a thorough population assessment up front prior to moving into a village. Regardless, when progress fails, there must also be a willingness to change approaches or leave a village, as resources are too scarce to throw good after bad. When a VSO site was closed short of success, careful information management was required to shape the narrative. In the rare cases when a VSO site was announced for closing without progress made, locals would become supportive for fear of losing the resource, or once lost and they saw progress at a new location, they came back looking for another chance, ultimately achieving the same effect but on a different timeline. These are the hard-right decisions that have to be made in scarce resource environments when assessing progress and opportunities. Leaving a failing site in place with little hope of change is an easy-wrong decision that is made more out of habit than disciplined analysis.⁷⁵ This principle holds true at all echelons of engagement in COIN with organizations and individuals.

Broader Application of the VSO Methodology

As the US disengages from Afghanistan, there is much discussion about what the US will *not* do in the future, notably deploying large formations of US troops into major land combat for extended periods of time. However, there are also lessons about

what the US *will* do. As SOF redeploy alongside their conventional counterparts, some of whom served with them at VSO sites, the term “Light Footprint” continues to grow in use as to how the US plans to address threats in the future, with SOF commonly linked to this term.⁷⁶ Certainly, the strike capability of SOF as used in the raid that killed Osama Bin Laden is among the options of the light footprint, but there are more threats than just insurgent leadership and infrastructure. Much attention has been paid to the short term gains of surgical strikes, but also the negative long-term effects of potential further radicalization.⁷⁷ A further belief that short-duration surgical strikes are the answer to future land-based threats falls prey to thinking sometimes referred to as “The Bin Laden Effect,”⁷⁸ resulting in a global game of “whack a mole”⁷⁹ that tactically addresses the symptoms and operational structure of the problem of radical terrorists and insurgents, but not the broader strategic causes.⁸⁰ In a crisis mode or when immediate action is called for, answering why an attack or event has occurred does not matter when resolving it in the immediate context, but in the long strategic view, it is essential to find this out and address it. Understanding the causes of conflict is even more important in movements that value honor and vengeance, as seen in Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The importance of revenge and symbolism is embedded in the collective psyche of some of these groups as demonstrated in the timing of the Benghazi Consulate attack in Libya. There is no tactical surgical strike solution to the long-term aspect of the problem, and the US cannot kill its way to victory in these cultures⁸¹. If as Mao said, the revolutionary moves through the people as a fish through water⁸², then indeed taking the individual fish from the water is a means of fighting the radical extremists, but changing the environment of the pond is another.

Across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and South America, local governments struggle with disconnected rural areas that form sanctuaries for insurgent, terrorist, and criminal organizations. The 2001 war in Afghanistan toppled a government that rose to power when their brand of extremism went unchecked under an ineffective government and security apparatus, leading to it becoming an Al Qaeda sanctuary and training area for the 9/11 attacks. As the US Army pilots their Regionally Aligned Force (RAF) concept in Africa⁸³, SOF who were massed in Afghanistan and Iraq are again becoming available for employment elsewhere.⁸⁴ As the introduction of conventional forces to the SOF-led VSO effort proved vital to the expansion, the further development of regional alignment of Conventional Forces can do the same elsewhere. The model established by VSO of highly enabled SOF and Conventional Forces working with local partners and interagency assets can form the model for light footprint engagement in which emerging threats can be countered short of a Joint Task Force Deployment, or as some say, “left of bang.”⁸⁵ Projecting VSO-like capability from relatively secure urban population centers into contested rural areas has the potential to influence and shape conditions in struggling states at multiple echelons to achieve the kind of effects that can keep these states from failing or insurgents toppling them.

The unique challenge in Afghanistan and Iraq was not merely securing a government from an insurgency, but building a government in the wake of a major conflict that had resulted in regime change while fighting an insurgency. This was not the case in other more successful and less noted COIN efforts, such as in the Philippines and Columbia.⁸⁶ Similar techniques as described above were employed with greater success under an existing legitimate government, and with a lower profile.

However, it should be noted that the efforts in Columbia and the Philippines began long before 9/11. If surgical strikes are sprints, special warfare and traditional counterinsurgency operations are marathons. More eloquently stated by T. E. Lawrence, guerilla warfare is more intellectual than a bayonet charge.⁸⁷

When analyzing the massive cost of war, the alternative bargain price for peace through persistent engagement must be paid to achieve the aims necessary to resolve conflict “left of bang.” The entire US effort to support the Mujahedeen fight against the Soviets from 1980 to 1991 cost \$4 billion⁸⁸, while a single week of operations in Iraq cost approximately \$1.5 billion per week (in current dollars).⁸⁹ Put differently as articulated by Congressman Charlie Wilson in language not suitable for this format, in 1990s Afghanistan the United States failed to effectively complete the end game.⁹⁰ The qualified positive effects of the Military COIN strategy in Afghanistan, as with the successes in the Philippines and Columbia show that the full-spectrum, whole-of-government approach can effectively meet the requirements through persistent engagement that over time achieve the results necessary to sustain legitimate partner-nation governance, security, and development. VSO-modeled counterinsurgency micro-task forces using a capabilities-based approach in a combined/joint/interagency team formed of SOF Detachments, Conventional RAFs, Civil Affairs Teams, MISO Teams, DoS/USAID and other tailored interagency partners and contractors in conjunction with host-nation counterparts are the means to these ends.

Way Ahead for SOF/Conventional Interdependence in Persistent Engagement

When guided by a Combatant Commanders Theater Campaign Plan, using mutually supporting interdependent assets drawn from the Theater Service and SOC

Commands as task organized for accomplishment of specific missions⁹¹, operational level plans can form an interlocking strategic plan in which the United States can serve not by a position of exceptionalism, but “exampleism”. Ideas of making the world safe for democracy, the shining city on the hill, or winning of hearts and minds has of late all too often come in conflict with the hard realities of the current international system and the war on terror that makes pursuit of a grand strategy based on these concepts difficult. Even though the United States democracy forms the richest, most powerful nation on the planet, marking the reality of its exceptionalism, it does not mean that it holds a monopoly on good ideas, or for that matter good behavior. This does not mean it cannot still lead as a positive example. Some assert that it still must.⁹²

The US just must do so more as a partner than a parent, or at a minimum as a first among equals. The distinction here is that under this approach the United States doesn't come to its partners from a position of false superiority to force American solutions on them, but as a partner with unique capabilities to be applied and modeled within the context of their host culture and society from which both sides can learn.

From this frame of reference, a common way successful US SOF and conventional units would start planning in Afghanistan was to ask the Afghans what they wanted to do, whether it was a development project at the village level, or a large scale combined tactical operation, and then negotiate to consensus. A sure sign of problems ahead was when all too commonly a planning session was convened in Afghanistan and there were no Afghans present. If the question when asked “What do the Afghans think of this” would bring the session to an uncomfortable halt, it immediately became clear it was likely on track for serious problems, if not failure in execution, if it even got

that far.⁹³ Setting an example as a partner bore greater dividends than expecting to be given an exception for assumed correctness merely for being American. As one US Army Special Forces SOTF Commander was fond of pointing out, although our Afghan partner may not read or write in some cases, compared to what we knew about Afghanistan, he had a Ph. D.⁹⁴

With the already language and culturally oriented SOF Forces, to include CA and MISO Teams, the addition of Conventional Regionally Aligned Forces from Brigade to Corps level can prove as decisive around the globe as they did on the ground with VSO in Afghanistan. As with the changing nature of warfare in the Human Domain as discussed above, understanding of language and culture is becoming a more vital skill for relationship building than seen previously. This does not mean that among conventional forces these capabilities should supplant critical and essential core combat skills, but they should still be developed to enhance their capability⁹⁵. This is no different than in SOF units. With the Human Domain being the most decisive to shape and influence in the future, language and cultural understanding will aid in applying complex solutions required to the complex problems the Human Domain poses. Balanced against capability-based solutions for which forces can be tailored, the sustained interdependence of SOF and Conventional Forces can continue to yield positive orders of effect not seen previously in any peacetime theater.

Already discussed in a recent paper from the Center for New American Security by Major Fernando M. Lujan, the skills and missions applied through VSO to build governance, security, and development in post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan can also be applied in pre-conflict environments as preventative measures.⁹⁶ Weak

states that possess legitimate governments, or partner states with internal or adjacent ungoverned or contested spaces similar to those seen used by the Taliban insurgents for sanctuary in Afghanistan represent excellent potential for the continued application of the VSO methodology. As a low-cost solution for long-term persistent engagement, reestablishment of governance and security by denying insurgent safe haven, protecting the populace, and changing local conditions to make them unfavorable to insurgents and violent extremist organizations all serve to prevent future wars and violent extremist organizations sanctuary that can threaten US interests in the future.

Questions that emerge as to where to engage at the state level within Theater Combatant Commands are as complex, if not more so than determining where to establish a VSO sites, but the same criteria apply. Countries that have legitimate identifiable governments, a willingness to work with US partners to assume and expand their own security, and enough infrastructure to allow access and sustain basic operations can form initial anchor points for regional security. Just as with Afghanistan, medical evacuation, logistical resupply, and fire support in worst-case scenarios need to be close and responsive whether they are land based at regional hubs, or sea based as part of Air-Sea Battle support to Human Domain operations.

Additionally, there needs to be a “big stick” available in the event conditions rapidly deteriorate. This can be accomplished with a MEU-SOC or MSOT afloat offshore providing regional support,⁹⁷ or through theater apportioned assets with rapid deployment and Counter Terrorism or Non Combatant Evacuation capabilities and training. There also remains the Rapid Deployment Forces from the 82nd Airborne Division, and national level counter terrorism assets capable of responding worldwide

on short notice. These are all worth consideration when viewed particularly through the lens of the Benghazi, Libya attacks. However, it is also worth noting that the capabilities-based interdependent SOF/Conventional Force teams also have a remarkable ability of their own to sustain themselves. All SOF teams are trained in urban combat, and can themselves form a response force for a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations or in-theater terrorist event with capabilities far exceeding their host nation partners or in-country threat forces they would encounter. This would also be with the added benefit that the US SOF element would already be in theater, have language and cultural experience to better facilitate a response, and conventional forces already supporting them. This is further reinforced with the potential requirement to respond to humanitarian disasters and crises, as well as a pre-emptive/preventative force for the emerging doctrine of Military Atrocities Response Operations (MARO).⁹⁸ These vertically nested and horizontally integrated capabilities equate to greater tactical agility available for Combatant Commanders to employ as required to meet ongoing and emerging operational demands as part of an overall plan, or potentially for in extremis situations.

With teams working at the local level, Special Forces Company and Battalion Headquarters elements augmented with Conventional Company-Level elements and Interagency capability could serve to advise and assist provincial level governance and security headquarters as they did in Afghanistan. Finally, for true comprehensive Security Sector Reform to occur, national-level ministries will need assistance from embassies and MILGROUPS/OMCs/JUSMAGs⁹⁹ to vertically integrate in a manner that supports the overall effort in a way that further legitimizes the government in a multi-

echelon approach, removing the appeal of insurgents and Violent Extremist Organizations by co-opting their narrative, appeal, and use of force.

For this method to succeed, Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) within an overall Theater Peacetime Campaign Plan must direct responsibilities and authorities for Service and SOF Component Commands, employed in conjunction with Department of State efforts.¹⁰⁰ Under a clear theater-level task organization for major operations and exercises by domain, over which SOF augmented with conventional and interagency capabilities should have responsibility for Human Domain engagement, long-term operational and strategic goals can be achieved through persistent engagement. Mutual effects and support within Geographical Combatant Commands forming Operational Campaign Plans would then compliment other GCCs. US Special Operations Command as per their mandate would coordinate an integrated plan for purposes of combating global terror organizations.¹⁰¹ This is further facilitated by the SOF lead in Human Domain Operations as executed within this construct, overseen by Theater Special Operations Commands.¹⁰²

There remain challenges even if this premise is accepted as the way ahead for global engagement. In addition to the decisive support of Conventional Forces used to thicken SOF for VSO, so too were the contributions of interagency partners. Iraq and Afghanistan strained USAID and Department of State resources. Frequently pointed out is that there are more members of military bands than there are Foreign Service Officers.¹⁰³ Depending on the nature of the mission, these assets may be as vital as any military member on the ground, not to forget representatives for police training, agricultural development advisors, economic advisors, explosive ordnance disposal and

military working dogs for force protection, among others just to illustrate a few. The value of these efforts must constantly remain in sight when weighed against the price of engaging in peace versus not engaging and risking the cost of war. Although a counterfactual argument, on September 10, 2001 no one outside of Al Qaeda predicted what lay ahead for the US, but had Afghanistan not been neglected following US anti-Soviet support to the Mujahedeen, the entire set of circumstances could potentially have been different. Hard as it may be to identify the next Afghanistan, reducing the number of possibilities through persistent engagement can make it easier.

Asian Application of Persistent Engagement

Following the Vietnam War, the US abandoned many of its lessons in counter insurgency¹⁰⁴, instead choosing to focus on the wars it would prefer to fight using large forces in traditional maneuver warfare. Lack of joint interoperability and loss of Special Operations capability led to the Congress to finally legislate solutions in the Goldwater-Nichols Act and its Nunn-Cohen Amendment respectively. Some argue that this requirement for mandated integration through legislation now exists for the Interagency Arena as well, with an increasing number of supporters calling for a Interagency version of Goldwater-Nichols.

As we look to Asia today as possessing the greatest opportunities for future US prosperity, Air-Sea Battle Doctrine and the Pacific Rebalance are designed to assure access, but it is US land forces that will shape and influence the outcome of this access. Asia possesses the worlds three largest economies, the world's four most populous countries, six of the world's 10 largest armies, five of the seven US mutual defense

agreements, and of 27 Defense Chiefs, 21 are drawn from the Army.¹⁰⁵ All of these impact the Human Domain and are facilitated through relationships.

It is for these reasons that persistent engagement in areas of latent conflict and struggling populations that US Land Forces must continue to operate and expand their efforts. Successes in the Philippines against Abu Sayef and the Philippine Government's peace accord with the Morro Islamic Liberation Front, Indonesia's continue work against Islamic Extremists, and peace negotiations between the Thai Government and Southern Muslim Separatists facilitated by Malaysia all provide encouraging examples of progress. Still, from these anchor states, along with Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, much remains to be done. The transition of Burma/Myanmar from a military Junta, and integration of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia into equal partners in ASEAN as stated by their 2015 plan, North Korean unpredictability, Chinese expansionism, and nuclear-armed Indian and Pakistani conventional and asymmetric conflicts all call for a strong and influential US presence in the region. With the exception of China and North Korea, the persistent engagement model of SOF-led VSO-like engagement, with the US Army leading in major training exercises on land, US policy can effectively serve our allies' needs and continue to insure opportunity for the US. This will also allow for the further indirect influence on North Korea and China as regional competitors (but not necessarily enemies) particularly given the best partner for defusing North Korean belligerence may end up being China.

Beyond Asia

In *The Pentagon's New Map*, Thomas Barnett identified anticipated sources of conflict in the 21st century.¹⁰⁶ From Latin America across Africa and through the nuclear armed and unstable Pakistan and India, on into Indonesia, the most likely threat to the US will come from here. Identification of anchor states to reinforce regional legitimate governance, and then mitigation of failed states and ungoverned territory through long-term persistent engagement is essential to prevent the emergence of future threats from unaddressed areas of extremist sanctuary. Al Qaeda elements continue to grow in Africa, as do drug cartels in South America and Mexico, while warlords continue mounting atrocities in sub-Saharan Africa, and emerging governments in North Africa following the Arab spring struggle for democracy while grappling with extremist factions. Physical presence and personal and organizational relationships can shape these outcomes in a positive way. Doing nothing or failing to recognize the gravity of threats will only open these regions up for further bloodshed as seen in Syria, or further attacks on US government and private allied interests as in Benghazi and the Algerian oil refinery attack, or the mass atrocities of Sudan and sub-Saharan Africa.

Counterarguments to US Lead in Persistent Engagement

Others assert that the last decade-plus of US involvement has been an abject failure of wars of choice. They further argue that the US should break off overseas engagement, and bring troops home, deploying large forces only in the case of clear vital national interest, arguing that determining where to engage is too difficult to be effective. Some go so far as to call for strategists to “fess up to your failures. Acknowledge the limits of your predictive abilities. Quit simplifying. Shut up.”¹⁰⁷ This

stance is less than helpful in the context of international security and the US role in it, particularly when no effective alternative is offered, and when predicting the next major war can be as difficult as determining where best to engage now short of war to prevent it.

Others have made great efforts to illustrate through limited examples, which are broadly applied or contextually questionable, that the problem with US military strategy lies with poor political and military leadership and a lack of accountability as reflected in not enough firings among generals.¹⁰⁸ The US has been at war longer than any other time in history, with its military answerable to elected civilian politicians and the policy-makers they appoint. Yet this criticism of military leaders' performance comes absent recommended tangible solutions or alternatives, making it ring hollow. There have been many successes across the DIME spectrum, as have there been failures.

In either of the above criticisms, poor strategic decision-making and leadership, or withdrawal into the homeland to only fight wars of absolute existential necessity, they deny the realities of the conflicts fought over the last 12 years, and those fought going back the 25 years illustrated earlier. Afghanistan was not a war of choice. An attack on the homeland was launched from there, and even under the Army Operational Concept that states this type of conflict and enemy does not pose a threat to vital US interests ignores the impact of September 11, 2001 on the US populace, military, and economy. Conversely, the outcome with the advances made in Afghanistan in infrastructure, governance, healthcare, women's rights, and education, all of which run counter to the ability of the Taliban to return to power, demonstrate how the methods employed have been successful.

Iraq, even when accepting it as a war of choice, still removed Saddam Hussein. Were he still in power he would remain a continued destabilizing actor in the region, and in light of Iranian nuclear expansion, would have almost certainly himself restarted an Iraq nuclear program. This would necessitate US intervention or another Israeli counter-strike prompting a Middle East crisis. Although weapons of mass destruction were not found after the 2003 invasion, and the war cost far more in blood and treasure than anticipated, arguing the alternative of Saddam Hussein remaining in power is a counterfactual that is only valid when recognizing other possible likely negative outcomes would have resulted at a later time.

US support to Philippine and Columbian counterinsurgency worked. Thailand as a US ally is independently following suit. The Arab spring continues to unfold with varying degrees of US support, but failure to engage will prevent any ability to shape or influence its outcome. US intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo halted humanitarian disasters as they unfolded, while withdrawal from Somalia, failure to act in Rwanda, and inaction in Syria allowed them to continue.

Withdrawing to an isolationist Fortress America from which US forces only deploy to fight major wars with peer competitors, few if any of whom have any motivation to go to war with the US, ignores a fundamental premise of security, which is readiness. The US can decide which war it wants to fight, but as mentioned earlier, the enemy gets a vote, and the US may end up fighting a war that the enemy decides, possibly on the home front. Given there is no true peer competitor of the US, likely future wars will be fought in the Human Domain against an asymmetric enemy. No amount of firings will

change this, any more than withdrawing from all engagement will affect anything other than to embolden nascent enemies and ignore other rising security threats.

Conclusion

Wars among the people forming the Human Domain remain the most probable threat that the United States will confront in the coming years. The ability to shape and influence the Human Domain through interdependent and enabled SOF and Conventional Force interdependent engagement and interagency enabling at all echelons and across the full spectrum of conflict is a capability that must be retained and employed if future threats are to be effectively addressed. Using the lessons from Afghanistan and Village Stability Operations, emerging conflicts in Asia and beyond can be mitigated short of war and for reduced cost in blood and treasure. Doctrine, training, and resources must be applied to insure this remains a viable option for U.S. military employment. Choosing to do less will in effect force the United States to engage in conflicts in the future on the enemy's terms, rather than addressing them now on US terms.

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special operations — Operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise, and/or a high degree of risk.

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