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14. ABSTRACT The holistic, bottom-up strategy of the Byzantine theme system which earned the "buy-in" of the rural populace is capable of providing solutions for the crises that the Afghan government and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) are experiencing. Afghanistan needs a holistic, bottom-up counter-insurgency strategy which intertwines the mutual needs of the government and its people, therefore enfranchising all participants. Land reform which empowers the rural population, creates support for local security institutions, and establishes legitimacy for the local and central governments will disrupt the insurgent's ability to gain either explicit or implicit support and help resolve the unmediated interests which are at the core of the problem in Afghanistan today.					
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*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
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MASTERS OF MILITARY STUDIES

**From the Byzantine Empire to Afghanistan:
A "Theme" for Success**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTERS OF MILITARY STUDIES

MAJOR FRANK DIORIO
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Douglas Streusand

Approved: 

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Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Paul D. Gelpi

Approved: 

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: From the Byzantine Empire to Afghanistan: A “Theme” for Success

Author: Major Frank Diorio, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: The holistic governing strategy of the Byzantine Theme System which earned the “buy-in” of the rural populace, is capable of providing solutions for the crises that the Afghan government and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) experience today.

Conclusion: Afghanistan needs a holistic counter-insurgency strategy that intertwines the mutual needs of the government and its people, thereby enfranchising all participants. Agrarian reform that empowers the rural population, creates support for local security institutions, and establishes legitimacy for the local and central governments, will disrupt the insurgent’s ability to gain explicit or implicit support and resolve the unmediated interests that are at the core of Afghanistan’s problems.

INTRODUCTION

By the beginning of the seventh century the Byzantine Empire had entered into what historians have called its darkest hour, having recently lost large swaths of land to Islamic invaders, its boundaries were porous and vulnerable, and its military was bruised, humbled, and scattered throughout the empire.¹ The central government seated in Constantinople was weak, corrupt, and in upheaval. Its citizenry was neither homogenous nor loyal, comprised of numerous tribes and multi-ethnic compositions. Yet, from this desperate situation emerged an entirely new empire, one that would prove to be stronger, durable, and enduring for centuries to come. The catalyst for this change was a system of governance which sought to empower the powerless, streamline representation to the central government, reduce corruption and graft, enact land reform which linked security to subsistence, and create “buy-in” for all citizens of the empire. This system is the Byzantine *theme* system, and this paper will dissect its historical context and success, then argue that its tenets are capable of providing solutions for the crises the Afghan government and International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) experience today.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By 640, the Byzantine Empire was unraveling. Only decades earlier it had stretched its boundaries from what is today eastern Turkey all the way to North Africa. Having recently ceded Syria, Palestine, Armenia and parts of Mesopotamia to Muslim invaders, the empire had shrunk considerably.² Losing valuable territory was problematic, but the likelihood of a follow-on campaign by consolidating Muslim armies wanting to occupy all of Asia Minor, along with the Slav and Avar threats coming out of the Balkans, seriously threatened the empire’s existence.³

The Byzantine Empire's antiquated Roman institutions, political conceptions and traditions prevented it from responding to these threats effectively.⁴ The remnants of the tetrarchian and praetorian systems of defense and administration left over from the era of Emperor Diocletian in the third and fourth centuries had caused the empire to be unprepared for new and emergent threats.⁵ Stubbornness and arrogance in the face of these threats created a perfect storm for a society and government that "did not welcome change and wanted to perpetuate its late Roman institutions, mentality and the international status quo into the future."⁶

Perhaps no other remnant of the late Roman period was more responsible for the empire being overrun by the Muslim invaders than its strategy for defense known as the *limitanei* military system. Literally translated as "the soldiers on the frontlines," the *limitanei* were frontier garrisons made up of light infantry who served as a policing force to patrol the empire's "distant, far-flung border regions."⁷ Troops who comprised the *limitanei* were mercenaries hired from outside the areas they now patrolled and lived in. The *limitanei* had a "long heritage of military unrest" and serious problems related to their provisioning of necessary supplies from local sources that "seriously irritated" the local civilians."⁸ The troops of the *limitanei* often had to live in towns and villages that were isolated, impoverished, and with people whom they did not share a common background.⁹ This not only affected the discipline, morale, and cohesion of the frontline units, but created an environment which fostered "fluctuating and alternating loyalties" amongst the local populace towards the garrison's soldiers.¹⁰ Local citizens began collaborating with the Muslim invaders and many of the *limitanei* either deserted or changed sides.¹¹ The *limitanei's* overall condition limited their usefulness and caused military commanders to hesitate using them, even refusing to conduct otherwise necessary military operations that included them.¹²

Following their defeats, the Byzantine leadership learned two very important lessons. The first realization was retroactive in that the rulers concluded that their empire had been “psychologically...and militarily unstable prior to the collapse and defeats at the hands of their Muslim invaders.”¹³ The other realization belonged to Emperor Heraclius, whom after overseeing the beheading of his predecessor Emperor Phocas in 610 A.D., surveyed the empire and realized that it could “no longer afford to maintain the dense network of garrisons on which Rome had once depended.”¹⁴ Heraclius’ empire would need a new governing strategy which understood the context and true nature of the existing problem. The strategy that emerged would have immediate effects while continuing to evolve and transform over time into what is known today as the *theme* system.¹⁵

Heraclius “inherited” an empire that was in no shape to deal with the problems which confronted it. Its central administrative machinery was “worn-out” and operated at a “standstill” while its economic and military infrastructures were “exhausted” and dysfunctional.¹⁶ Before Heraclius could even address those problems he had to deal with his most pressing issue, which was to find a way to defend his empire’s reconstituted borders against impending invasions.

Muslim victories in the region created shifts in territorial borders which removed former buffer zones and significantly increased the importance of defending the mountain passes which controlled access into Asia Minor. The passes served as a friendly obstacle for Byzantine forces by limiting the ability of those who wanted to utilize the passes as a means to infiltrate enemy lines.¹⁷ Though time was of the essence in devising a new strategy, Heraclius recognized that the typical mercenary recruitment which fed the Byzantine military system would fail to solve this problem since it was the mercenaries who had collapsed in the face of Muslim aggression in the first place.¹⁸ Heraclius decided instead to deploy emergency military commands of professional

soldiers armed with political and administrative powers as part of “a desperate effort to check the Muslims” and increase the efficiency of the Empire’s defense, thus beginning the process of reorganization which “would bring fresh strength to the Byzantine Empire.”¹⁹

Heraclius’ ideas were carried forward from a civil-military cooperative practice that began in the 6th century with the introduction of the *exarchates* in Italy during the reign of Justinian I.²⁰ The *exarchates* were Justinian’s response “to weakening imperial authority in the provinces” that were most susceptible to enemy invasions.²¹ The Emperor endowed the *exarch* with full authority over civil and military matters, ideally unifying the two departments and laying the foundation for Heraclius’ reforms which would eventually evolve into the *theme* system. Despite the commonalities between the two institutions, the earliest manifestations of the *theme* system constituted a “fundamental change in the structure of the Byzantine army and administration” which would “characterize provincial administration of medieval Byzantine for centuries to come.”²²

Heraclius surveyed his empire’s new boundaries and broke it into large military districts, into which he deployed their own regiment of troops known as *themata*.²³ The *themata* would then be broken down into smaller units and be quartered amongst smaller military districts within these new zones.²⁴ The *strategus*, or general in charge of each zone, would exercise the highest military and civil power over the military units and inhabitants within his area.²⁵ These formally structured units of military-civil administration would prove themselves capable in responding to emergent threats in a fluid, cohesive manner while establishing stability amongst a population whose loyalty the empire needed if it were to avoid the same kind of defeats it suffered earlier.

The development of these districts into formal regions known as *themes* was gradual, whereby they began to be recognized by the names of the *themata* regiments which occupied

them, such as the Bucellarian or Anatolic, or Opsician. As the system was formalized, *themes* were named according to their geographic location such as the Macedonian or Thessalonican *theme*.²⁶ For a zone to officially become recognized as a theme demanded far more than simply being occupied by themata, but also required that citizens of the local tribes and villages support the new system, measured by the level of law and order within that particular zone. Areas of resistance where lawlessness prevailed were governed under martial law.²⁷ These districts, called *Clissurae*, would be elevated to *theme* status (and have access to the benefits of that status) once the Byzantine government regained control over these areas and order prevailed.²⁸

Attaining *theme* status did not eliminate provincial governance and organization, but continued it, though now within the *theme's* governing framework.²⁹ The *strategus* was in “supreme command” and paid a fixed salary from the central government.³⁰ The *proconsul* of the *theme* served as the head of the civil administration and was next in rank to the *strategus*, while various classes of officials served the *strategus* by overseeing the day-to-day governance.³¹ To limit the propensity for corruption, the central government appointed officers responsible for revenue collection and paying the salaries of provincial offices.³² Also, despite his “nearly unlimited local power” the *strategus* could still be fired by the emperor and citizens’ complaints could be filed against him directly to the central government.³³ With the establishment of the *themes* the previously inept central government receded back to the confines of Constantinople and the Empire’s stabilization process had begun.³⁴

As *themes* stabilized, military units would pull out their professional soldiers, the *tagmata*, and replace them with the *stratiotai*- soldier-farmers who were awarded small land-holdings in return for military service.³⁵ Noted Byzantine scholar and author George Ostrogorsky explains that the “internal revival experienced by the Byzantine Empire from the

seventh century onward was due in fact more than anything else to the rise of a large class of peasants and the formation of a new army *stratiotai*.³⁶ To enlist in the *stratiotai* was a family investment as the obligation of military service would eventually pass on to the eldest son in the family (as would the inheritance of the father's land) while "the rest of the offspring represented a surplus of free peasant labor which was naturally interested in cultivating the existing surplus of fallow land."³⁷ In addition to receiving grants of land the military landholders were exempt from all taxes (except land tax) and also received a fixed salary from the provincial government.³⁸ Alongside this new class of soldier-farmers was a class of free peasants which settled on plots of land made available from the division of large land-estates characteristic of the Byzantine period prior to the Muslim invasions. These estates were either abandoned in the wake of the invasions or broken up by the government in order to facilitate the empire's new system of governance.³⁹ In return for this land the free peasants had to fulfill two primary obligations towards the state- pay taxes and adhere to rules of the community. Together, the *stratiotai* and free peasants "formed a single class from which henceforth provided the force that sustained the Byzantine Empire" by strengthening the empire's economy and providing the majority of the *theme*'s defense forces.⁴⁰

The most profound element of the *theme* system was its creation of "buy-in" at the level where it counted most- with the populace. The soldier-farmer who had a fixed salary with tax-free status and a plot of land now had plenty of incentive to ensure the theme remained safe from external threats so as to protect the source of his and his family's well-being. Likewise, the peasant-proprietors had sufficient incentive to maintain and develop their holdings.

This new class of landholders collectively formed a "community of arable land and fields, vineyards, orchard and vegetable gardens which were the entire and personal possession

of the farmer or his family.”⁴¹ Where deserted countryside’s with fallow land had once prevailed, vibrant settlements were appearing and brought into cultivation.⁴² Common land-holdings which were used for pasturelands or grazing areas were collectively maintained and considered possessions of the village.⁴³ Each *theme* considered the village “a single administrative unit for its fiscal purposes” and held the village responsible for ensuring each landholder paid appropriate taxes; otherwise village members would be held accountable and levied fines.⁴⁴ From a once disloyal populace characterized by a lack of homogeneity came forth a people who were determined to defend the empire at all costs, or at least their portion of it, and became the “backbone” of the Byzantine Empire.⁴⁵

Controlling corruption within the *themes* was vital towards maintaining this local support for the government. As a *theme*’s military and regional influence grew larger and more powerful it would become partitioned to avoid potential usurpations of the throne. Such was the case in the middle of the 8th century when Leo III divided the Anatolikon *theme* and created the Thraceseion *theme* from the new partition.⁴⁶ The division of large *themes* “lent elasticity to the administrative machinery and perfected the entire system” whereby no large powers could undermine the central government or other *themes*.⁴⁷ This lesson proved valuable even within the *themes* themselves where particular legislation was directed towards preventing the accumulation of large land holdings for fear of tipping the carefully balanced *theme* system. Following a disastrous harvest in the tenth century powerful land magnates “rapidly bought up the property of the poor and made them their dependents” in return for food and provision.⁴⁸ Emperor Romanus Lecapenus lamented the situation, proclaiming that “the small holding is of great benefit by reason of the payment of state taxes and duty of military service...this advantage would be completely lost if the number of small holders was to diminish,” and he enacted several

measures to try and put a stop to this practice.⁴⁹ The Emperor re-instated the right of pre-emption, a law which had been repealed in the ninth century by Leo VI, whose aristocratic leanings had nearly destroyed the *theme* system, and the Empire.⁵⁰ The rights of pre-emption provided a fixed order of precedence by which land must be offered and refused before it could be sold or leased to an “outsider.”⁵¹ The land in question had to be offered first to relatives who were holding the land conjointly, then successively to “other conjoint holders, holders of property intermingled with the plot to be alienated, holders of adjoining land paying taxes in common, and other holders of adjoining land.”⁵² These laws served to protect the small landholders “from speculative buying” and coercion by the powerful.⁵³ If rights of preemption laws were ignored, violators had to restore the property and pay fines to the *theme*’s provincial government.⁵⁴

Other snares which threatened the proper workings of the *theme* system were addressed by the eighth century legal code known as the “farmer’s law” which dealt with matters concerning the peasantry and the villages in which they lived. The code protected the growing class of free peasant farmers and their property by establishing penalties for property damage to another’s possession, various kinds of theft, as well as extortion and oppressive taxation by authorities against the villagers.⁵⁵ The foundation of the *theme* system rested on the reliability of the governing authorities, both provincial and central, to protect the population from the powerful and the corrupt, and it is unsurprising for history to reveal that the Empire began to disintegrate in the eleventh century when this no longer happened.⁵⁶ The downfall can be traced to the evolution of the *pronoia* system of land grants, which favored the aristocracy and increased their land holdings.⁵⁷ Eventually, small landholders were bought out and became tenants (*paroikoi*) on these large estates which subsequently upset the tax system and the

Empire's ability to maintain the ranks of the *stratiotai*, both intrinsically tied to land tenure.⁵⁸ The village became increasingly splintered amongst the creation of new classes- the *dunatoi* and *penetes*, the wealthy and the poor.⁵⁹ Even worse, the reduction of the *stratiotai* brought mercenary hiring back into prominence, and thus the *theme* system, and ultimately the Byzantine Empire, had lost the local legitimization that it so desperately needed in order to survive.⁶⁰ The empire eroded from within its own borders due to its inability to control corruption, and subsequently made themselves vulnerable to outside invasions, this time for good in the fifteenth century.

The reorganization of the Byzantine civil-military structure in the seventh century was nothing short of remarkable, and can only explain "what otherwise appears to be an incredible change of fortune" for the Byzantine empire.⁶¹ In order for this transformation to occur, the central government of the Byzantine Empire had to let go of their political pre-conceptions and traditions, and allow changes to the system which clearly "marked a clear break" with what they had always known.⁶²

Emperor Heraclius understood better than his contemporaries that the security of the empire was rooted in the will of the people, and that for the empire to be secured it had to provide for their welfare. Heraclius understood his government had to earn the loyalty of the populace and he determined the "buy-in" for their participation in the governing process was land reform. By understanding the buy-in, he understood what could threaten it as well, and accordingly intertwined local security with land reform and wove the two within the local system of governance. In the end, invaders who had once triumphantly advanced toward the Empire's interior had no answer for the "new" Byzantine.⁶³ Where the enemy had formerly been able to curry the favor and loyalty of her citizens, they now became wholly dependent on finding

military solutions to defeat the empire, proven throughout history to be a woefully inadequate strategy when the problem to be solved is the will of a people. While the context is certainly different, problems experienced in Afghanistan today are similar to those the Byzantine Empire faced nearly fourteen hundred years ago. The disillusionment of both the Afghan and Byzantine populations allowed outside influences to deteriorate their security environments and erode the rule of law. The Byzantine renewal was the result of a redesigned governing strategy which earned the loyalty of the population and occurred in the “framework of sound military and administrative reorganization.”⁶⁴ That same framework can be utilized to find a solution in Afghanistan by developing a strategy in which competing interests are intertwined in mutual support of one another. The biblical book of Ecclesiastes tells us that “a cord of three strands is not easily broken,” and the careful weaving of agrarian reform, security, and governance into a three-fold cord holds the possibility for a successful outcome in Afghanistan today.⁶⁵

LESSONS LEARNED FOR AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan, very much like the Byzantine Empire, has a disparate population which possesses numerous tribal, ethnic, and linguistic affiliations and loyalties.⁶⁶ Throughout its history the country has struggled to truly form a nation-state, even during its period of autocratic rule where the central government was only able to extend its authority just several hundred kilometers outside of Kabul.⁶⁷ Despite their best efforts the international community has begun to realize that it is difficult to conduct nation-building when no nation ideally exists. They also realized that weak central governments are unable to replace the “delicate network of rights and obligations which make group survival possible” in countries like Afghanistan due to a lack of legitimacy.⁶⁸ This does not mean the dissolution of the central government or a federated states solution in Afghanistan is unavoidable or for that matter necessary. On the contrary, a state

which exists in a “non-literate” sense can establish good governance so long as authorities view their relationships with its sub-groups as more important than the unilateral power it wields over them.⁶⁹ The vital link which can facilitate those relationships in Afghanistan is the provincial governments, and like the Byzantine *themes*, the provincial structures are capable of harnessing bottom-up participation or “buy-in” at the local level.

Local Afghan participation and adherence to central governance will occur only when it is in their best interests to do so. The Byzantine Empire’s “problem” was the need for local security to beget overall security for the empire; land reform was the buy-in, and citizens of the empire would serve in its defense in return for landholdings. The Byzantine administrative and military departments were then restructured to support this new system of governance. The “problem” in Afghanistan is the disillusionment of the local populace which has threatened central authority rule throughout its statehood and in turn has fostered instability. Agrarian reform in Afghanistan has the capability to create buy-in for the Afghan people and move them towards becoming active participants in their governance, which in turn can facilitate security and impose legitimacy upon the government in Kabul.

In 1955 Afghanistan produced 2,090,000 metric tons of wheat; after nearly sixty years of technological advances and the phenomena of globalization, Afghanistan produced only 1.9 million metric tons in 2008- nearly two-hundred thousand tons less.⁷⁰ War & conflict, unfinished or ill-advised reclamation projects, lack of subsidies, drought, and the increasingly lucrative process of cultivating poppy seeds are but a few reasons for the decline. This translates into current production systems and yield levels not being able to meet the subsistence needs of the population or create marketable goods adequate to generate the minimum required income.⁷¹ The resulting lack of opportunity has created grievances amongst the rural peasant class and has

given cause for “grievance guerillas” to either usurp the central government, or be supportive or at least ambivalent toward those who do.

A progressive and thorough agrarian reform has the potential to create local level “buy-in” on which the foundation of a stable environment can be laid. Throughout history insurgent and counter-insurgent leaders alike have understood the importance of gaining the allegiance of the rural peasantry. Both Mao Tse-Tung in China and Ramon Magsaysay in the Philippines understood “that as long as the peasant felt no obligation to the central government, the guerillas could continue to prosper in their midst.”⁷²

Agrarian reform in Afghanistan is not a new idea however, in fact it has often done more harm than good. The Helmand Valley Authority’s Kajaki Dam project, the Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority projects, the Ghori hydroelectric plant, and the Nigrahar Valley Project were all attempts at reform.⁷³ These projects were mostly U.S or Russian led, and all pushed forward without sufficient local input concerning cultural or geological peculiarities and largely led to their failures, or in some cases simply unfinished.⁷⁴ With most if not all of these projects, hundreds if not thousands of indigenous farmers and herdsman were permanently displaced, even though the projects were “sold” to them on the grounds their displacement was only temporary.⁷⁵ These types of efforts further alienate the local populations and contribute to religious, ethnic, and tribal leader’s resistance towards government attempts at local development.⁷⁶

Despite present trends and past problems, Afghanistan has a rich agricultural and pastoral heritage. The “intensely cultivated” eastern valleys have traditionally yielded high value crops, the northern plains have vast grazing areas, the western valleys have been known to produce abundant wheat and barley crops, and the Helmand and Arghandab valleys are home to the ever

important Sistan basin.⁷⁷ In the late 1950's and into the 1960's Afghanistan possessed over twenty-million cultivated acres and eight million acres of pastureland.⁷⁸ A rich irrigation system of river water, natural springs, collection basins, and ancient underground tunnels, or *karez*, once produced pistachios, pine nuts, almonds, walnuts, berries, grapes, apricots, peaches, pears, apples, oranges, date palms, melons, cucumbers, wheat, barley, rice, corn, millet, clover, sesame, cotton, sugar-beets, sugar-cane, and tobacco.⁷⁹ Poppy production, interestingly enough, was deemed so unimportant just fifty years ago it was listed simply as "other farm products" compared to the more important crops.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, consistent conflict and conservative factions who want to maintain their local status quo have stalled the process of moving Afghanistan forward in areas of agricultural innovation and modernization, thus stunting farmer production capability.⁸¹

Agrarian reform in Afghanistan does not need to, nor should it attempt to mirror reform projects of other countries or conflicts, be it Magsaysay's EDCOR project in the Philippines or the aggressive parceling and titling of land that characterized the *theme* system. In some regions of Afghanistan, simple physical improvement of land and the restoration of water supplies will offer a more stable level of living for its population.⁸² In the Helmand and Arghandab valleys, vigorous water reclamation and rehabilitation projects in the Sistan depression and continued repairs on the Kajaki dam are paramount, as is the reconstruction of the *karez* system, once indispensable to Afghan farming but now severely damaged after decades of wars with the British, Soviet, American, and NATO forces over the last century.⁸³ Likewise, Afghan pastoralists who receive basic assistance with herd care, winter feeds, and help controlling animal diseases, along with the restoration of former grazing areas, will dramatically increase

their standard of living while decreasing conflict caused by nomadic herdsman crossing through and grazing on lands outside of their normal areas.⁸⁴

Agrarian reform which improves the agricultural landscape, introduces farmers to simple production techniques, redevelops once prosperous export markets for specialty crops, and restores traditional nomadic patterns will create buy in at the local level and most importantly instill ownership in the “system” which is facilitating these improvements.⁸⁵ Similar to the *theme* system, these reforms should be made at the provincial level and below with input from local level sources in order to meet the specific needs and peculiarities of each province. Though the central authority is mobilizing, authorizing, and conducting quality control over the reform process, the face on each project should be recognized by local populations as one of their own.

Absolutely vital to any agrarian reform program in Afghanistan is the eradication of the poppy harvests set aside for the opium markets. Discussions abound on whether removing a valuable crop does more harm than good. Any valuable harvest that is removed without equal compensation to the farmer does more harm than good-whether it's poppy or any other harvest. There is however no sufficient compromise in regards to the poppy/opium issue as it serves as an accelerant to many of the problems existing in Afghanistan today- from criminal activity amongst warlords to corruption inside the highest levels of the central government. The central government must subsidize alternate crops at the same level of profit the farmers would have made from their poppy harvests, and must do so for a period of several years until the crops produce, which in the case of fruit orchards, may take several years. It will be an expensive enterprise, difficult to enforce, and even harder to maintain. It will demand international support, money, and patience from United Nations and NATO countries for years to come, especially, learning from the experience of the Byzantine Empire, when events occur (either natural or man-

made) which result in a bad harvest season that can potentially disrupt the system. In the long run however it may cost significantly less than what it will to continue down the present path. It will also demand the simultaneous functioning of the other two cords of the three cord solution- effective governance and security.

The benefit of agrarian reform is that it is measurable- something the local population can see and believe in, which is why it must be done properly with local input and with an appreciation for long term effects. Once local populations “buy-in” that agrarian reform improves their lives, the government facilitating the reform and the local security forces in charge of protecting their improved holdings will gain legitimacy. In the *themes*, land reform served as the buy-in for locals to take up arms and defend the province whenever it was threatened. In Afghanistan, the fear of losing what they have recently gained will create buy-in at the local level to support those charged with protecting the new status quo- the often maligned local security forces.

Discussions regarding Afghan security forces often revolve around the debate between the capabilities of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). The ANA are often the better trained, better-paid, and better praised of the two, while the ANP constantly have to defend against the deserved stigma of high-levels of corruption due to their local connections to the areas they police. The top Afghan Army Officer in Zabul province, Major General Jamaluddin Sayed, commander of the 205th Corps’ 2nd Brigade claims that ANP recruits that come from and serve in Pashtun provinces probably have “some relationship with the Taliban,” since most of the people in Zabul province are Pashtu’s, and because of this, “they will support (some of) the Taliban.”⁸⁶ The question then always becomes whether a province should fill their ANP ranks with recruits from within their provinces or bring them in from

outside. The question that needs to be asked is which of the two is harder to do- gain legitimization, or prevent corruption? In a tribal environment, gaining legitimization as an outsider is already extremely difficult. Yet to be the authority which awards or punishes the behavior of a community, legitimization for outsiders is nearly impossible to maintain once grievances arise. This issue is no different for any police force around the world in which the majority of the force has familial roots from that area, whether in a small town or major metropolitan city.⁸⁷

The key to corralling corruption goes back to the issue of creating buy-in, which for the Afghan police force is presently very low. Many policemen are paid less than those who join the Taliban, the chance for retribution against themselves or their family is high, and the likelihood they will be fired regardless of their performance is very small. Their level of incentive must be elevated, starting with ensuring their salaries are higher than their counterparts fighting for the Taliban, and must be competitive with other national security forces. Secondly, the central government must be consistent in paying them, on time, and in full. The practice of filtering pay through the provincial authorities then through the individual chain of command must cease for the same reasons the Byzantine government avoided the practice, as the opportunity for forced patronage and outright stealing by the provincial authorities is too high. Byzantine authorities believed there were some things, such as the collection of taxes and the distribution of a soldier's pay, as too important to give local corruption practices even a chance to participate, and were two of the *theme*'s few direct administrative transactions between the central government and its local citizens.

While corruption is a problem that erodes ANP legitimacy, the benefits of a local police force are numerous. In a recent Marine Corps Gazette article Major General Robert Neller,

president of Marine Corps University, highlighted that local forces “know the town, the people, and the streets—who belongs and who does not...the local citizenry trusts them because many are related and provide them with intelligence” and added that “I cannot imagine conducting a successful COIN without the development of a local police force.”⁸⁸

The most persuasive argument in support of local police forces is in relation to agrarian reform, in that reform will benefit and increase the value of all landholdings, to include policemen, their families, and local affiliations. It is in the interests of the policemen and of those they protect to see the reforms become successful. This working relationship between the policemen and the citizenry bolsters ANP legitimacy but also provides incentives for the police to fulfill their responsibilities to the provincial governments, lest they and everyone around them lose everything. This of course demands a functioning, legitimate provincial government to be in place- the third “cord.”

Provincial governments are the primary administrative divisions in Afghanistan and were mostly autonomous until the late 19th century when Abdur Rahman incorporated the five existing provinces under the authority of Kabul.⁸⁹ In 1929 the country was divided into five major and four minor provinces under Nadir Shah, and remained that way until 1964 when the new constitution divided the land into twenty six provinces.⁹⁰ This move served the same purpose as when Leo III split up the Anatolian *theme* in the eighth century thereby preventing any one large province from usurping power from the central government.⁹¹ Today Afghanistan is broken up into thirty four provinces, each with its own “DNA.” Provincial governors work for the Ministry of the Interior in Kabul, while the governor has administrative officials at the provincial, sub-provincial, district, and sub-district levels (major population centers differ slightly in that they are broken into wards which report to a city administrator).⁹²

ISAF's mandate early in the reconstruction process was restricted to Kabul in assisting the Afghan Transitional Authority rebuild the central government.⁹³ Despite a 2003 mandate broadening their area of responsibility to cover all of Afghanistan, the top-down approach towards re-building the nation had already been cemented. This threatened the state's traditional structures and made it difficult for the new government to gain legitimacy in the eyes of most rural Afghans.⁹⁴ This in turn weakened the legitimacy of many of the provincial structures deemed to be in collusion with the new government.

The importance of the provincial system in Afghanistan cannot be understated, serving as the structural glue which holds the entire system together as it distributes administrative responsibilities and authority downwards while maintaining communication channels upward.⁹⁵ Most importantly, provincial governors have the flexibility to apply social and cultural norms in the development of new institutions which would otherwise be received skeptically.⁹⁶ In January 2010, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry announced a new program called the "Performance-Based Governors Fund," a \$21.3 million fund that according to Ambassador Eikenberry,

Will help provincial governors choose and pay for the programs and services most needed by their constituencies...increase self-sufficiency, responsiveness of governors to answer appropriate requests from the villages, districts, provincial councils and the civil society and help establish a culture of transparency and accountability...and by providing badly- needed funds at the provincial level, the program will help spur bottom-up planning, a major emphasis of the Afghan government's sub-national governance plans, and help to empower provincial level government.⁹⁷

While empowering provincial governors can facilitate state-building functions in a manner that is less threatening to local institutions, by no means should power be consolidated at any level without the infusion of proper checks and balances. It is dangerous to wholly adopt the common mantra for “bottom-up” consensus building and bypass all formal structures of governance, specifically in Afghanistan, where history shows no clear-cut power player. There is also a common trend to attribute the problem in Afghanistan as a “Pashtun” problem, which may be true when talking about the Taliban specifically, but which misrepresents the total spectrum of conflict in Afghanistan.⁹⁸ The Taliban are “hated by the Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazara and other non-Pashtun groups that together make up a numerical majority in Afghanistan,” and the memory of Taliban persecution “is fresh and motivational for all the non-Pashtun groups who have and will continue to fight for power.”⁹⁹ Likewise it is common to focus on the tribes as the solution in Afghanistan, even though tribalism “is not a feature of every ethnic group in Afghanistan” and is a “more flexible concept” than in places like Iraq, with fluctuating and in some regions even deteriorating importance as the war goes on.¹⁰⁰ It is imperative that the provincial government “build on and adapt traditional systems in appropriate ways” by empowering local authorities at the family, clan, village, tribe, sub-district or district level, and maintain those relationships in a manner which does not threaten local participation and/or their authority.¹⁰¹

CONCLUSION

The Byzantine Empire recognized the very threat to its existence rested in the disillusionment of its own citizens towards the welfare of the empire. The *theme* system addressed the root cause of the problem by decentralizing authority down to the provincial level and creating buy-in at the local level, thus rendering the original grievances obsolete. The present strategy in Afghanistan is focused on providing a secure environment in which stable governance can prevail, but fails to address the ever important question of “then what?” Even if a stable security environment is achieved in Afghanistan, the unmediated interests which allowed outside influences such as the Taliban to take root in the first place must be addressed, lest similar conditions re-appear and the cycle of instability continues. The insurgents recognize the local population as a critical requirement to their operations and have capitalized on their disillusionment. Any possible solution to this problem must likewise recognize and address these issues. Afghanistan needs a holistic counter-insurgency strategy which intertwines the mutual needs of the government and its people, therefore empowering all participants. Agrarian reform which empowers the rural population to improve their livelihoods, creates support for local security institutions, and establishes legitimacy for the local and central governments will disrupt the insurgent’s ability to operate and gain support in those areas. As only an internal solution could save an empire on the brink of destruction, only an internal solution can do the same for Afghanistan.

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- ² Ibid, 1
- ³ George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 92.
- ⁴ Ibid, 146.
- ⁵ Kaegi, 279.
- ⁶ Ibid, 46.
- ⁷ "Travel and Geography, North Africa," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/418538/North-Africa/46476/Later-Roman-Empire#ref=ref487496>
- ⁸ Kaegi, 62.
- ⁹ "Travel and Geography, North Africa," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/418538/North-Africa/46476/Later-Roman-Empire#ref=ref487496>
- ¹⁰ Kaegi, 62
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid, 46.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 51
- ¹⁵ Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 315.
- ¹⁶ Ostrogorsky, 92.
- ¹⁷ Kaegi, 242.
- ¹⁸ Ostrogorsky, 92.
- ¹⁹ Kaegi, 279; Ostrogorsky, 95.
- ²⁰ Mark Whittow, *The Making of Byzantium 600-1025* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 115; Ostrogorsky, 96.
- ²¹ Ostrogorsky, 96; Steven Runciman, *Byzantine Civilization* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 71.
- ²² Ostrogorsky, 95.
- ²³ Ibid, 97.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 96.
- ²⁶ Runciman, 76.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid; Ostrogorsky, 99.
- ²⁹ Ibid, 96.
- ³⁰ Ibid; Runciman, 72.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid, 73.
- ³⁴ Ostrogorsky, 99.
- ³⁵ Ibid, 98.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 133.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Runciman, 117; Ostrogorsky, 98.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 134.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid, 133.
- ⁴¹ Ibid, 134.
- ⁴² Ibid, 136.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 137.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 98.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid, 157.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid, 158.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid, 272.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid, 274.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid, 272.
- ⁵¹ Ibid, 273.

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- ⁵² Ibid
- ⁵³ Ibid, 274.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopedia Britannica Online. 19 Feb. 2010
<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/201972/Farmers-Law>>; Ostrogorsky, 275.
- ⁵⁶ Treadgold, 611.
- ⁵⁷ Ostrogorsky, 332.
- ⁵⁸ Runciman, 83.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid, 83.
- ⁶⁰ Ostrogorsky, 334.
- ⁶¹ Ibid, 100.
- ⁶² Ibid, 146.
- ⁶³ Kaegi, 243.
- ⁶⁴ Ostrogorsky, 98.
- ⁶⁵ Ecc. 4:12, New International Version.
- ⁶⁶ Volney F. Warner, "Afghanistan: Context and What's Next," *Joint Force Quarterly* 56 (2010), 19.
- ⁶⁷ Francis Fukuyama, *State Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 101; Volney F. Warner, "Afghanistan: Context and What's Next," 19.
- ⁶⁸ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 659.
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- ⁷⁰ Donald Wilber, ed., *Afghanistan: Country Survey Series* (New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1956), 214;
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- ⁷³ Dupree, 640.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, 635.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid, 623.
- ⁷⁷ Wilber, 216.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid, 214.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 213.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 214.
- ⁸¹ http://www.icarda.org/Afghanistan/NA/Full/Current_F.htm
- ⁸² Wilbur, 218.
- ⁸³ Ibid, 279.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid, 215, 218.
- ⁸⁵ http://www.icarda.org/Afghanistan/NA/Full/Current_F.htm
- ⁸⁶ <http://www.afji.com/2009/07/4231017/>
- ⁸⁷ <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/faq/faq.shtml>
- ⁸⁸ Robert B. Neller, "Some Thoughts on Coin," *Marine Corps Gazette*, February (2010), 12.
- ⁸⁹ Frank Clements, *Conflict in Afghanistan: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc.), 3.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid.
- ⁹¹ Ibid.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-history/>
- ⁹⁴ Christopher Kolenda, "Winning Afghanistan at the Community Level," *Joint Force Quarterly* 56 (2010), 28.
- ⁹⁵ Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, Pamela R. Aall, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington D.C.: Unites States Institute for Peace, 2007) 691.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 691.
- ⁹⁷ http://kabul.usembassy.gov/pre_2001.html
- ⁹⁸ Joseph J. Collins, "No Reason to Quit," *Armed Forces Journal*, <http://www.afji.com/2009/10/4266860/>
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- ¹⁰⁰ <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/54.htm>

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