

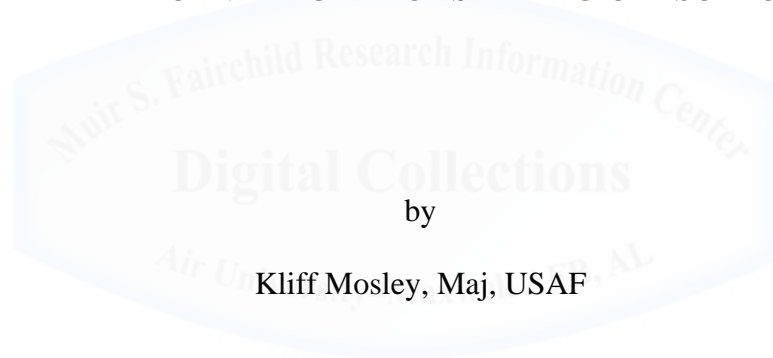
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AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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AFGHANISTAN:

ANOTHER AMERICAN TRAGEDY OF STRATEGIC MISCALCULATIONS



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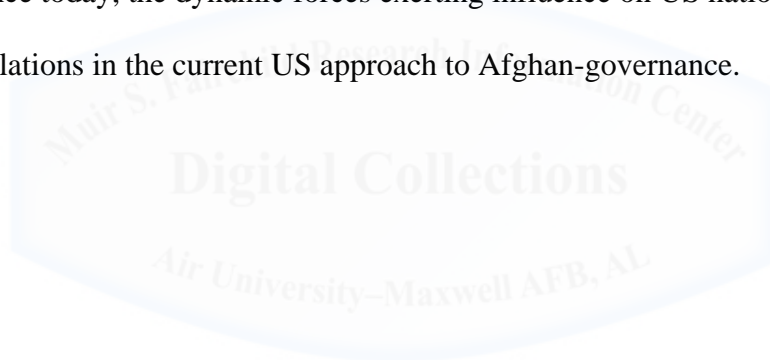


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Abstract

The United States political and military efforts in Afghanistan follow the post-World-War-II pattern of failed policies, tactical military victories with strategic losses, and Western-imposed democratic governance. The dynamic and complex conditions of Afghanistan contain valuable political and strategic lessons for military practitioners desiring to study and potentially prevent another limited armed conflict ultimately destined for failure. To develop successful political and strategic objectives, US civilian and military leadership should assess the influence of the target state's political and strategic culture to inform US political decision-making and rules of war. Focusing on Afghanistan, this paper explores the history that produced the political and strategic culture in existence today, the dynamic forces exerting influence on US nation-building efforts, and the miscalculations in the current US approach to Afghan-governance.



Despite the lessons available from the protracted conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and post-2001 Iraq, the American rules of war following World War II favor limited, state-on-state, conventional conflict and Western ideals of state-societal relations. Both political and military institutions of the US government stubbornly adhere to notions of limited conventional warfare under excessively restrictive rules of engagement for combat operations, political interference into routine military matters, and Western biases of democratic governance.

According to Magyar and Danopoulos, leading up to Vietnam, the United States possessed “neither a doctrine of protracted conflict...nor a desire to produce one. To provide one would be to resort to the tactic of our enemy.”¹ Warren Trest argues that the US multifaceted effort in Vietnam sought “to wrest the initiative from the enemy by changing the nature of the conflict, from [counterinsurgency (COIN)] to limited war.”² Continuing with the Vietnam example, Samuel Abrams claims that the United States tried to force an illegitimate and unnatural Western-style democracy on a nation with a weak national identity and fragmented society.³ An examination of US strategy in Afghanistan reveals a similar pattern of failed political objectives and military strategies. This trend leads to the expectation that regardless of a conflict’s nature and the target state’s traditional governmental structure, the United States will continue to win tactical military victories at the expense of strategic success and impose unnatural democratic governance.

Examining the United States’ effort in Afghanistan, one can draw valuable political and strategic lessons to potentially prevent another Vietnam-type quagmire. To develop successful political and strategic objectives, US civilian and military leadership should assess the influence of a target state’s political and strategic culture to understand how the population will react to US activities. Political decision-making and rules of warfighting without consideration of the popular reaction offer little prospect of success. Focusing on Afghanistan, this paper will explore the

history that produced the political and strategic culture in existence today, the dynamic forces influencing US nation-building efforts, and the miscalculations in the current US approach to Afghan-governance.

Synopsis of Afghanistan's History

Afghanistan's historical pattern of conflict and ineffective governance remains relevant to the present-day situation. For centuries, foreign invaders used Afghanistan's location as a stronghold to block rival powers. Afghanistan has served as a source of instability to its neighbors and as a barrier between Western and Central-Asian invaders seeking the wealth of the rich agricultural regions of India. While small portions within the Afghan population have served as puppets of a great invading power, most people suffered grievously during the conquests and periods of occupation, and remain bitter, poverty-stricken, and illiterate to this day. Fears of foreign-power manipulation and single tribe or clan rule fuel Afghanistan's present-day societal tensions, strife, and division. As common themes, ineffective central governments over the centuries failed to permanently unite the numerous and diverse peoples, while only the task of expelling a foreign invader could briefly unite the extremely dissimilar population.⁴ After expelling an invader or at the mercy of a conqueror, the population lived with internal turmoil under impotent monarchs, internal power struggles, and social strife. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw conflict fomented by competition between Britain and Russia for influence over the strategic region in a struggle known as "The Great Game." Each great power sought 1) to exclude the other; 2) install a pliable puppet government that would control lawless elements; and, 3) gain exclusive trade privileges. The British and Soviet political and economic policies served to control and further divide the diverse cultures of the already deeply divided area. To prevent a united Afghanistan, the British and Soviets each created their own tribal alliances; displaced entire ethnic

groups; and, redrew border lines to purposely aggravate tensions and provoke armed conflict by forcefully inter-mixing the population. Britain sponsored the murderous *Iron Amir* from 1880-1901, the Communists influenced coups and assassinations from the 1930s until the 1979 Soviet invasion, and America abandoned the country to feuding warlords, mujahedin factions, and civil war following the 1989 Soviet withdrawal. The great-power manipulators created a political vacuum that led to the rise of Al Qaeda and the Taliban and still evoke feelings of resentment within the Afghan population.⁵

US Military's Post-Cold-War Focus on Culture

Culture, the often neglected or superficial planning consideration, is the set of fundamental beliefs and values that unconsciously and collectively drive behavior, influence national memory, and invoke universal feelings.⁶ While superior technology and firepower may produce tactical victories, for strategic success and conflict resolution, the entire combat force requires cultural competence in the target state's political and strategic culture before commencing operations. As seen in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, understanding the cultural and human terrain holds as much importance as understanding the geographical terrain. Military operations with Western-biased assessments and superficial understanding of a foreign states' political and strategic culture served to aggravate existing tensions and even managed to create new conflict.

Following the Cold War, US conventional military forces saw operations in increasingly complex environments. Since 1992, the military has made slow strides updating military doctrine, education, and training to improve general-force awareness of the importance and relevance of human terrain: culture, religion, history, historical rivalries, language, political structure, local/customary laws, relationships between ethnic groups, economics, nonstate actors, and military/militia forces.⁷ Low-intensity, limited operations quickly turned hostile due to US forces

using unnecessary and often excessive force, demonstrating culturally offensive behavior, and misplacing trust in unsavory regimes. Otherwise routine operations turned into deadly armed conflict. At the onset of most operations, the primary military focus emphasized routine planning considerations such as calculated use of force, command and control, and logistics requirements. Planning for cultural dynamics and likely behavior of non-Western state or nonstate actors received little attention or suffered from Western biases in interpretation.⁸

The US military's internal culture distinctly shapes a view of warfare where technological integration and tactical maneuvering overshadow strategic effectiveness. This distinct and encompassing internal culture controls how the force thinks and acts, shapes identities, influences relationships, defines security objectives, processes information, organizes force structures, develops new theories, and creates doctrine.⁹ Recognizing the characteristics of this distinct culture can enable military leaders to think beyond the predispositions and limitations of institutional and personal biases that lead to the most common errors in US strategic judgment: underestimating the enemy and looking at other cultures as inferior. Thus, culture matters because it "helps explain the worldview and motivations of one's potential adversaries," allies, and third parties.¹⁰

Political Culture

Political culture consists of beliefs, attitudes, and values, regarding governance, authority, and legitimacy.¹¹ For political and military decision-makers, correctly assessing the political culture of a foreign nation-state can lead to strategies that produce government structures deemed as legitimate in the eyes of the population. The most successful model of governance in Afghanistan employed what one anthropologist described as *Swiss cheese*.¹² Successful regimes governed urban areas, typically containing the more populous economic centers, entirely different

than rural areas where the people opted for self-rule, local law, and more traditional ways of life. Rural peoples accepted central governance as long as the regime avoided interference with local leaders, allowed rural autonomy, and granted access to and participation in urban markets. Chaos and often revolt ensued when overambitious leaders disrupted this model. Against this example and backdrop, one should assess US political decisions and the rules of warfighting against Afghan political culture.

The US coalition made three strategic errors regarding Afghan political culture with the Bonn Accord, abolishing the monarchy, and holding elections for central and provincial governments. These decisions 1) implemented legislative, executive, and judicial governance unfamiliar to the populace; 2) eliminated a recognized form of leadership; and, 3) instituted an unfamiliar electoral process which produced a Western-style democratic government led by President Hamid Karzai. The Karzai-led government, often described by the Afghan people as corrupt and incompetent, lacked legitimacy with the larger population for several reasons: tribal mistrust and favoritism; perception of foreign-power control and manipulation; failure to provide security from insurgents; and, inability to extend modern services into the rural areas.¹³ The coalition avoided revolt from the population by eventually recognizing the importance of local elders and shifting focus to rebuild their involvement in local governance. It remains unseen how the coalition will handle the corrupt and “illegitimate” central government, but the population prepares for the potential coalition withdrawal by hoarding weapons and money for what they see as an inevitable civil war and Taliban resurgence.

Strategic Culture

Strategic culture consists of the worldview, beliefs, values, and attitudes toward war, fighting, violence, and use of force.¹⁴ For political and military decision-makers, correctly

assessing the strategic culture of a foreign nation-state can lead to strategies that produce government structures, reforms, and modernization without provoking rebellion or increasing support for an insurgency. The Swiss cheese model explains why unsuccessful regimes fail in Afghanistan: 1) the regimes tried modernizing too quickly; 2) the regimes infringed on local/tribal autonomy; or, 3) the regimes violated customary law.¹⁵ During the period of 1901 to 1978, the people demanded economic improvement, constitutional reforms, and rejection of foreign-power control, but in the end, disgruntled Afghans assassinated leaders or forced rulers into exile for exceeding socially accepted limits on economic, social, military, and political reforms and modernization.¹⁶ Against this example and backdrop, one should assess US political decisions and the rules of warfighting on the strategic culture of Afghanistan.

For Afghanistan, the coalition should guard against modernizing too quickly, disrupting traditional life, negating customary law, and applying heavy-handed tactics to force acceptance of exclusive coalition goals. Violation of culturally acceptable norms, as seen historically, only provokes armed rebellion and drives support for the insurgency.

A Cultural Exchange

Intercultural exchanges during military operations can create conflict, but handled properly, multinational operations represent opportunities for sharing expertise and solving complex problems. Understanding culture offers insight into behavior, decisions, social roles, expressions, and communication.¹⁷ As a means to see the world through the eyes of another, Table 1 offers a taxonomy useful for framing cultural context. By highlighting areas in which beliefs and values may fundamentally differ, one can gain greater self-understanding and appreciation why people of another culture think and act the way they do. Understanding can lead to respect and offer ways to accommodate fundamental differences. Table 1 displays a common set of factors

covering work settings and social encounters, and generalizes a comparison between Afghan and American cultures. Common anecdotal comments by military members and Afghan civilians show that even with the best intentions, people can make culturally offensive actions, and hold attitudes ranging from indifference to outright aggression.

Table 1. Factors of cultural difference, Afghanistan and the US, at a glance.¹⁸

| Framing Cultural Factor | Afghanistan | United States |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Risk Averse versus Risk Acceptance | Risk Averse | Risk Acceptance |
| Indirect versus Direct | Indirect | Direct |
| Egalitarian versus Hierarchical | Egalitarian | Hierarchical |
| Individual versus Community | Community | Individual |
| Task versus Relationship | Relationship | Task |
| Cultural Concept of Time | Time is eternal | Clock-focused, time-driven society |

The study of foreign culture provides an understanding of how to adjust expectations and modify behavior to fit socially acceptable standards when working outside of a native culture. Additionally, study of foreign culture's poetry and proverbs provide a window into the history and culture of a nation. Similarly, *Pashtunwali*, the honor code of the Pashuns (Appendix A), offers cultural insight into the Afghan culture and as a code of conduct, Pashtunwali provides insight into Afghan-cultural values supporting both conflict and methods for conflict resolution. The Afghan culture strictly adheres to Pashtunwali alongside the observance of Islam and teachings of the Koran.¹⁹ As a rule, and despite the many subdivisions of Islam within Afghanistan, Islam governs all aspects of society: religion, politics, law, economics, and social relationships.²⁰ Understanding these dynamic elements of culture, notably the foundational influences of Afghan political and strategic culture, US civilian and military leaders can make improved strategic decisions on Afghan governance and better assess the effectiveness of US operations.

Other Influences

Since the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan has endured political interference from state and nonstate actors. Each party sought to contain the influence of the other

and thereby fueled the Afghan civil war. Meanwhile, with the Soviet menace no longer a threat, the rest of the international community largely ignored the ailing state. United by religious ideology, funded internationally, emboldened by weak central governance, and unchecked due to wavering US political will, Pakistan, the Taliban, and Al Qaeda continue to exert influence on the government and population of Afghanistan.

Pakistan

Pakistan holds a tenuous, but important political and economic position with Afghanistan as it balances relationships with the US, the Taliban, and anti-US segments within its own population. Economically, Pakistan influences southern Afghanistan with trade and use of the Pakistani Rupee.²¹ Additionally, Pakistan receives billions in aid from the US and endures considerable political pressure from both the US and Afghan governments for offering sanctuary to the Taliban and essentially ignoring cross-border activities. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas offer safe haven to insurgents with Pakistan's military and intelligence establishments providing the Taliban with combat training, advice, intelligence, and weapons. Pakistan avoids overt acquiescence to the US on a total Taliban crackdown for fear of fueling anti-government sentiment from the population. By allowing sanctuary to the mostly unpopular Taliban, Pakistan enables the insurgency in Afghanistan to survive. Overall, Pakistan will continue to publicly support the NATO effort against the Taliban, but with the pending withdrawal of US forces, Pakistan will privately enable the Taliban militants as an insurgent proxy force to help maintain a military balance against rival India.²²

The Taliban

The civil war--spurred by mujahedin factions following the Soviet withdrawal--gave rise to the Taliban in 1996. Initially, the Taliban brought welcomed stability, but after gaining a foothold

in Kabul, the largely Pashtun dominated Islamic group oppressed other ethnic groups as enemies.²³ The Taliban interpretation of Islamic law resulted in harsh conditions for the population. As the Taliban moved to control the rest of Afghanistan, they subsequently assassinated those within the population who refused to cooperate and repeatedly used this tactic to coerce others into submission.²⁴ From the Taliban-Al Qaeda alliance, both sides gained what they desired: the Taliban received money and Al Qaeda maintained an uncontested base of operations within Afghanistan. Following the September 2001 attacks, the Bush Administration issued an ultimatum to the Taliban to turnover Osama Bin Laden, but the Taliban refused. Operation Enduring Freedom commenced with US Special Operations Forces, operating with the Northern Alliance, using close air support to quickly and decisively defeat the Taliban. The Taliban fled to Pakistan for sanctuary and support. The 2004 Taliban resurgence surprised coalition forces and the Karzai Administration, but even after a 2006 defeat, the Taliban again returned and resorted to classic insurgency methods.²⁵ The Taliban competed with the weak Karzai Administration for legitimacy among the population, took over various government administrative functions, and continued pointed assassinations of leaders and teachers successfully providing government or coalition-sponsored human services. The Taliban influence on the Karzai government and population remains a threat since the coalition falls woefully short of protecting the rural population and the Afghan National Army proves unable to secure their small areas of responsibilities.

Al Qaeda

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought Muslim youths from around the Arab world to Afghanistan for jihad.²⁶ The eventual Soviet defeat emboldened Islamic militants around the world as religious leaders sought to create many groups of Islamic radicals. The official birth

of what we know today as Al Qaeda began in 1988. By this time, the organization contained charismatic leaders, skilled organizers, brave fighters, and substantial funding from Islamic governments and private donors.²⁷ Following the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan, the Al Qaeda objective changed to “replace moderate, modern, Western regimes in Muslim countries with theocracies modeled along the lines of the Taliban.”²⁸ Under the Taliban government in 1996, Osama bin Laden moved to Jalalabad where he enjoyed freedom to plan, train, and operate his international organization. He united with Aymen al-Zawahiri in seeking to overthrow secular Western-backed governments within the Muslim world.²⁹ Other Islamic states viewed Al Qaeda as a threat and by 2001 Al Qaeda demonstrated competence as an organization capable of bold and sophisticated attacks. While operating from sanctuary in Pakistan and small cells in locations around the Muslim world, Al Qaeda continues supporting the Taliban to overthrow or discredit the Karzai government. For Afghanistan, Al Qaeda remains committed to re-establishing a fundamentalist Islamic government and re-installing the Taliban. With its influence over an international network, Al Qaeda remains a deadly threat to the Afghan people and to international security.³⁰

US Approach to Afghan-Governance Building

Assessing the influence of Afghanistan’s political and strategic culture, the United States will need to profoundly change the American view of time, combat, success, and victory as these notions pertain to US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. Examining Afghanistan and Operation Enduring Freedom, one must first understand the general context of leadership and decisions resulting in the initial eight years of failed policies and strategies. The problems originate with the Bush Administration, but the situation did not improve under the current administration.

Context Following 11 September 2011

According to Gordon and Trainor, civilian and military advisors explained the complexity of Afghanistan to the politically elected leaders before combat operations in 2001, but in the aftermath of 9-11, the emotional need for retaliation overrode rational thoughts of long-term consequences.³¹ Advisors made anecdotal comments like America would bomb Afghanistan *to* the Stone Age and building a central government capable of uniting and successfully governing the country could take, literally, *generations*, not years. These warnings went unheeded by Bush Administration officials, specifically Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, who viewed operations in Afghanistan as an inconvenient distraction from a more desirable war against Iraq.³² Efforts for Afghanistan began with mid-level military planners crafting a campaign plan of conventional combat operations, stability operations, and nation building. However, Rumsfeld personally undermined strategic planning efforts and purposely under-resourced forces for missions beyond limited, conventional combat operations. Additionally, General officers at the highest levels of the military failed to convince Rumsfeld of the danger in a minimal-force approach and the importance of following the most comprehensive contingency plan covering Afghanistan, *OPLAN 1003-98*.³³ Originally designed for combat against Iraq, OPLAN 1003-98 called for 500,000 troops and detailed the necessary actions required for major combat, regime change, and stability operations, and concluded with a plan to enable civil authority.

Rumsfeld outright rejected OPLAN 1003-98 mainly due to the large force requirements as the plan competed with his unrealistic, parochial inclinations for a light, lethal force in his military transformation concept. Rumsfeld's military transformation concept envisioned a light, lethal military to handle any national crisis requiring a military response. To compare, the US fought to a stalemate in Vietnam, a country almost five times smaller than Afghanistan, with 535,000

troops.³⁴ As operations commenced in Afghanistan in 2001, an initial US combat force of 8,000 troops entered Afghanistan with the following limited objectives: “overthrow the Taliban regime”; “destroy al Qaeda’s (sic) organizational infrastructure”; “build the Afghan National Army (ANA)”; and, unofficially, avoid the business of nation-building.³⁵ By 2004, the Taliban re-emerged as a formidable, resurgent force, but Rumsfeld perpetuated strategic ignorance by refusing to acknowledge the insurgency, and forbade commanders and ground forces from planning and conducting COIN operations.³⁶ Without accountability from Congress or the national news media, subsequent defense secretaries and the Obama Administration undermined COIN efforts with rash, politically motivated policies and under-resourced forces.³⁷

While the political culture, climate, and personalities surrounding Operation Enduring Freedom serve to explain failures at the senior political level, the military’s analysis of the situation also contained fundamental flaws. The American view of time, combat, success, and victory show a bias of Western political and strategic culture within military thinking, planning, and decision making. One could argue that without Rumsfeld’s transformation convictions hampering operations, the military could have avoided stumbling from failure to failure, but even without Rumsfeld’s interference, the military would learn many hard lessons from misunderstanding its enemy, allies, and own cultural biases.

View of Time

Assessing the influence of Afghanistan’s political and strategic culture, the United States will need to profoundly change the American view of time, as time pertains to US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. To every culture, time represents a different concept and approach to all life.³⁸ Americans equate time to money, a quantitative measure of progress and success, and an absolute determinant force where *quick* equals *efficient*.³⁹ To an Afghan, “time is

not measured in hours and minutes, but has a feeling of unlimited continuity, an unraveling.”⁴⁰

Waging war requires potentially extended periods of time, as noted by the labels of European wars: “The Seven Years War,” “The Thirty-Year War,” and “The Hundred-Year War.” War also imposes immense destruction on people and their means of livelihood, as Sun Tzu says, “For there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.”⁴¹ The fundamental American understanding of time, the concept of time in other cultures, and the nature of time in conflict poses a unique dilemma, but to achieve success, the US must understand, accept, and adjust to the cultural differences of time.

In the concept of time, building a government in Afghanistan, with a professional security and police apparatus, can conceivably take more than a generation (30+ years). The reasons for such an extended period of time are threefold: 1) the lack of literacy and education will require a generation to produce a literate population with a professional-level of education and practical experience in such subjects as government, political science, human resources management, public administration, economics, etc.; 2) cultural understanding, acceptance, and implementation of societal and governmental institutions will require decades; and, 3) training public servants with the proper values to function according to a code of ethics and the rule of law (reframing from family, tribe, or clan favoritism) will require decades of stability and enforcement. At present, the Afghan population will resist central-government intrusion on their local traditional customs and values.

Since 1747, Afghans have tolerated a king in Kabul as long as his administration allowed rural governmental autonomy as determined by their local culture and morals. The well-established custom of loya jirga substantiates popular willingness to abide by national-level decisions. Some warlords have built military and political structures larger than just tribal elders,

while for Uzbeks and Tajiks, loyalty follows region of birth, not tribe. Just as refugees lost their subjugation to village elders and Pasthunwali, they have gained a sense of territorial nationalism. Building an Afghan national identity with acceptance of a national, central government will take generations.

Another example resides in the security forces and police units. Coalition forces responsible for training security forces and police units boast large numbers of Afghans trained and how most have obtained a first-grade reading level, but this feat fails to explain the bigger picture. At a first-grade reading level (*See Spot run. See Spot play with Dick and Jane.*), Afghan military forces as a whole are years away from a cohesive national identity and the ability required to operate and manage sophisticated accounting, administration, and logistics systems. Gordon and Trainor report that before commencing Operation Enduring Freedom, advisors explained to Bush Administration officials that nation building, to include a functioning national army, in Afghanistan would require 500,000 US troops and optimistically 9 to 13 years; officials summarily dismissed both factors.⁴²

To continue on the topic of time and the cultural impact of time on military operations, a common tendency for military personnel involves working until exhaustion under unrealistic, artificial, and often self-imposed deadlines.⁴³ Flawed notions of dedication and invincibility may also explain why exhausted military personnel conduct cursory research to achieve an elementary and superficial understanding of extremely complex problems and situations. When political leaders need the bold truth in the face of a misguided decision, exhausted military advisors, with a shallow understanding of a complex problem, fail to make a convincing argument for a more realistic strategic assessment.

View of Combat

Assessing the influence of Afghanistan's political and strategic culture, the United States will need to profoundly change the American view of combat as far as combat pertains to US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. United States' military policies, doctrine, education, and training favor the conventional warfare paradigm while adaptation "to operations other than major combat," like insurgency, comes at considerable costs of military and civilian casualties and monetary expense.⁴⁴ An insurgency "is a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order."⁴⁵ As experienced by the Soviet Union from 1979 to 1989, modifying conventional organizations to satisfy the demands of COIN comes at considerable expense, often proves insufficient, and makes an awkward solution to a complex problem.⁴⁶ Asymmetric capabilities and methods, like those used in COIN, run counter to the US understanding of war and preference for conflict since the US predisposition favors conventional warfare.⁴⁷

Field Manual (FM) 3-24, the Army COIN manual, states COIN is as complex as an insurgency: "In many ways, the conduct of COIN is counterintuitive to the traditional US view of war."⁴⁸ The paradoxes of COIN require a force, down to the lowest-ranking combat soldier, to deviate from the comfortable norms of superior conventional combat power. For example, consider some of the following axioms from FM 3-24: "Sometimes, the more you protect your force, the less secure you may be"; "Sometimes, the more force is used, the less effective it is"; "The more successful the (COIN) is, the less force can be used and the more risk must be accepted"; "Sometimes doing nothing is the best reaction"; "Some of the best weapons for counter-insurgents do not shoot"; "The host nation doing something tolerably is normally better

than us doing it (perfectly)”; “If a tactic works this week, it might not work next week”; “If it works in this province, it might not work in the next”; “Tactical success guarantees nothing”; and, “Many important decisions are not made by generals.”⁴⁹ Successful COIN operations require patience, avoid rigid timetables with one-size-fits-all solutions, and adapt soft-power techniques, facilitated through inter-agencies and/or nongovernmental agencies, to achieve strategic successes.

However, continued signs of failure in US military leadership, education, training, and strategy show disillusioned combat troops expressing their concerns to the media. Vaughn and Vaughn report the fears of military personnel dealing with very restrictive rules of engagement: “While concern over being killed due to (restrictive engagement) policies weighs heavily on the minds of those we’ve spoken with, the deepest pit in the stomach comes from fear of prosecution should they violate these absurd and ever-changing (rules of engagement).”⁵⁰ Forces fail to realize excessive combat power, especially air strikes resulting in casualties of innocent civilians, acts as the perfect insurgent recruiting tool. However, political and military leadership complicate an already tenuous situation by alienating and criminally prosecuting combat troops as a politically expedient means to appease an unsympathetic media, overly sensitive host-nation government, or frustrated indigenous population. As Cloud and Jaffe note, “occupation duty is hard even for the best-trained military, and the longer you stay the harder it gets.”⁵¹

United States’ policy, doctrine, education, and training teach that a population-centric or an insurgent-centric COIN strategy alone will defeat an insurgency.⁵² Friedman argues that strategies focused only on the population or only the insurgent ignore Clausewitz’s “wondrous trinity” and “assume a predictable, static relationship between the enemy, the civilian population, and the insurgency itself.”⁵³ Friedman asserts that insurgencies fail when “they slowly drown in a rising tide of defeat across multiple dimensions, amongst the population, on the battlefield, and in their

policy goals.”⁵⁴ The multiple dimensions in Afghanistan will require the US-led coalition to: 1) protect both the urban and rural population; 2) facilitate a structure of governance acceptable to the population; 3) deny sanctuary to the insurgents; 4) strike the insurgents when possible, but with controlled force; and, 5) pivot the weight of effort among all three, as needed, without ignoring any one.⁵⁵ The coalition will need to use a multidimensional COIN strategy while understanding the unique political and strategic culture of the Afghan people. Therefore, this multidimensional effort requires a specific configuration and size of force with the mental and professional capacity to understand and execute complex COIN operations.

View of Success and Victory

Assessing the influence of Afghanistan’s political and strategic culture, the United States will need to profoundly change the American view of success and victory as these notions pertain to US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. Strongly held Western biases, misguided definitions for success, and ill-defined notions of victory in doctrine require re-examination. First, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, advocates Western ideals of an internationally recognized democratic state and a population-centric COIN strategy.⁵⁶ Field Manual 3-24 describes host-nation self-sufficiency as, “The government secures its citizens continuously, sustains and builds legitimacy through effective governance, has effectively isolated the insurgency, and can manage and meet the expectations of the nation’s entire population.”⁵⁷ For Afghanistan, a government meeting these conditions is optimistically generations in the future and may never reach an *ideal Western democracy*. Abrams criticizes FM 3-24 arguing that it fails to “recognize local interests as sources of conflict, [and failing to] permit nonstate actors to manage social relations and resources.”⁵⁸ By this description, the basis for stable governance in Afghanistan--the tribal elders, religious leaders, and nonstate institutions--fall short of doctrinal recognition as legitimate

authority. In this manner, US doctrinal elements, qualifications for success, and notions of victory directly conflict with the Afghan political and strategic culture.

To avoid misguided qualifications of success, the military must constantly re-evaluate and re-examine the significance and relevance of the metrics used to measure success, failure, and progress. As Jones notes, “We have created a government that looks good on paper but is very weak in reality.”⁵⁹ Overreliance on misleading and irrelevant metrics reinforces strategically flawed policies, objectives, and decisions. Two misleading metrics commonly used to taut success and progress involve infrastructure projects and trained and equipped ANA soldiers. First, commanders track infrastructure construction projects in a variety of ways, but the money spent and projects completed misrepresent project value or usefulness to the local population. Additionally, some new construction projects never survived insurgent attacks. Second, metrics tracking ANA soldiers trained and equipped fail to account for deserters, troop quality (illiterate, drug users, criminals, infiltrators, etc), and population support for those remaining in uniform. From May 2002 to December 2009, the Pentagon posted figures of 90,000 trained and equipped ANA soldiers while omitting metrics showing more than 68,000 soldiers either deserted or quit after the first enlistment.⁶⁰ Ultimately, leaders using such metrics as qualifications of success misrepresent the true conditions and eventually produce more flawed policies, objectives, and decisions.

Doctrine needs a platform of thorough analysis for assessing the political and strategic culture of a foreign nation-state.⁶¹ Abrams states that you have to undermine, alleviate, eliminate, or fulfill the insurgent’s political goal, but ultimately, you have to understand what the people want. What effort will produce positive, acceptable, and effective results? Sometimes democracy is too complicated.⁶² Forcing a central-government structure at the expense of historically

accepted local or religious leadership, or ignoring customary, traditional, or religious law will produce a short-lived arrangement and may even provoke civil war against the newly installed government. The coalition will need to withstand a substantial amount of uncertainty in political structures short of national governance, but in some cases, a subnational political order will prove sufficient, in contrast to a forced, ill-conceived, illegitimate, and doomed national state-centric model.⁶³ While a Taliban political party and/or a Sharia-law based constitution seem bitterly unpalatable to Western ideals of governance and law, some version of similar conditions may prove the only acceptable solutions to an indigenous population, and may require we change our view of success and victory.

While we do not have sufficient information to confirm that the Afghan people, in general, either want or would tolerate any democratic formulation or model, the educated urban elements now in power will certainly oppose any changes and if altered, may fight or otherwise undermine any other model. Given the absence of resources, such models would remain dependent on Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Pakistani support. The United States does have good diplomatic relations with other countries of similar governance so we may conclude that the US bottom line is resistance to the export of terrorism. If Afghanistan does not threaten international security, the United States may ignore it.

Practical Conclusions for US Approach to Afghan-Governance Building

Assessing the influence of Afghanistan's political and strategic culture, we can draw practical conclusions to inform US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. As Johnson and Mason note, "Strong and stable governments and societies are necessary to support the creation of strong armies."⁶⁴ A strong and stable Afghan government with strong national army, by FM 3-24 definition, is generations in the future. However, extending a mistrusted central

government and security force at this point will push the population toward the insurgency or back into civil war.

For our view of combat, state's must realize you cannot do COIN on the cheap; you do not hold elections until you defeat the enemy; and, you have to organize for the insurgency you are fighting.⁶⁵ Defeating insurgencies requires a restrained, persistent, legitimate, and educated force.⁶⁶ For example, during World War II, the United States prepared civilian and military leaders for post-war stability operations in Germany and Japan 3 years prior to the end of the war.⁶⁷ Using a *whole-of-government* approach, the United States needs educated leaders prepared for the complexity of stability, security, transition, and reconstruction operations. Writing in 2009, Johnson and Mason observe that eight years into Operation Enduring Freedom, "...only 13 Foreign Service officers have been trained to speak Pashto, and only two of them are apparently in Afghanistan today, a pathetic (COIN) effort by the State Department by any reasonable standard."⁶⁸ Ken Dilanian found, "The State Department has long failed to meet its language needs. In 2006, the Government Accountability Office found that nearly 30% of State Department employees based overseas in 'language-designated positions' could not speak and write the local language well enough to meet basic requirements."⁶⁹ Failure to dedicate the necessary resources to a war effort invites mission failure as the only inevitable conclusion.

For our view of success and victory in COIN, the military must break the patterns of misinterpreting and misapplying historical examples and remaining culturally obtuse to the population, enemy, third parties, and allies. Even with superior technology and firepower, the enemy has a vote, but ultimately the people decide the outcome. Despite the time and treasure invested, we must extract the lessons of this experience called Afghanistan and eventually conclude, as Johnson and Mason observe, "History...shows decisively that governments sustained

on the points of foreign bayonets in Kabul do not long outlive their departures...It is beyond our power to change to an entire society.”⁷⁰

Conclusion

The US political and military effort in Afghanistan follows the post-World-War II pattern of failed strategies, tactical victories, strategic losses, and Western-imposed democratic governance. The dynamic and complex conditions of Afghanistan contain valuable political and strategic lessons for those that desire to study and potentially prevent another limited conflict ultimately destined for failure. The lessons from the protracted conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and post-2001 Iraq vividly portray the favored American rules of war and Western-ethnocentric ideas for state-societal relations. Unfortunately, optimism and parochial best intentions fall short on foreign recipients of a forced, illegitimate, and unnatural Western-style democracy, especially on a state lacking a strong national identity.⁷¹ To develop successful political and strategic objectives, US civilian and military leadership should assess the influence of a target state's political and strategic culture to better inform US political decision-making and rules of warfighting. For Afghanistan, examining the history that produced the political and strategic culture in existence today, the dynamic forces exerting influence on nation-building efforts, and the strategic miscalculations of great empires reveals this unique, strategic region will continue to remain largely untamed.

Appendix A. The main tenets of Pashtunwali.⁷²

| Tenet | Meaning |
|---------------------|--|
| Melmastia | Hospitality and asylum to all guests seeking help. |
| Nanawati | Humble admission of guilt for a wrong committed, gaining automatic forgiveness from the wronged party. |
| Badal | Justice and revenge (Eye for an Eye). |
| Nang | Honor--courage, grace and generosity and other good qualities of Pashtunwali. |
| Pakhto | Truth, reality, manliness, protecting the right of sisters, brothers, or other close relatives, a high sense of ego, honor and pride, hospitality, and a sense of a firm belief on his faith. |
| Ghairat | Zeal. To protect one's own and his tribe's prestige one has to be zealous, courageous and somewhat reckless. |
| MeRana | Zeal in action with courage, bravery and militancy sacrifice to overcome his antagonist, to protect his family rights. |
| Zan, Zar and Zameen | Defense of women and family, treasure, property and land. |
| Teega or Kanray | Cessation of bloodshed between contending parties. Teega (putting down of a stone) in other words means a temporary truce declared by a Jirga. The word stone is used figuratively as actually no stone is put at the time of the cessation of hostilities. Once the truce is enforced, no party dares violate it for fear of punitive measures. |
| Tor | Honor of women and slight touching of the women is at times considered a serious and an intolerable offence. The cases of adultery and illicit relations are put down with iron hand in and no quarter is given to culprits either male or female. Casting of an evil eye on woman is tantamount to imperil one's life. Both sexes, therefore, scrupulously avoid indulgence in immoral practices. |
| Ghundi | A classic case of balance of power in tribal areas. It is derived from Pashto word Ghund, meaning a political party but it is used for an alliance. As modern states enter into bilateral agreements for promotion of trade, cultivation of friendly relations and mutual defense, similarly various sections of a tribe align themselves in blocs or Ghunds to safeguard their common interests. Ghundi is entered into defeat the aggressive and nefarious designs of a hostile neighbor. In tribal fighting the Ghundi members espouse their mutual interests against their common enemy and act as a corporate body with all the resources at their command. |
| Lokhay Warkawal | Literally, 'Giving of a pot,' but this implies the protection of an individual or a tribe. A weaker tribe may ally with a stronger one if the object of ensuring its safety and security generally gives Lokhay. It is accepted in the form of a sacrificial animal such as a goat or a sheep. When a tribe accepts a Lokhay from another tribe, it undertakes the responsibility of safeguarding the latter's interests against its enemies and protects it at all costs. |
| Lashkar | An armed party, which goes out from a village or tribe for warlike purposes. The Lashkar may consist of a hundred to several thousand men. The Lashkar assembled for Jihad (Holy Struggle) is usually very large. The decisions of a Jirga, if violated by a party, are enforced through a tribal Lashkar. The Lashkar thus performs the functions of police in the event of a breach of tribal law. |
| Chigha | A pursuit party composed of armed persons to pursue raiders or recover stolen property. |
| Tarr | A mutual accord between two tribes or villagers themselves with regard to a certain matter. For instance, after sowing wheat or any other crop, the people of the village agree not to let loose their cattle to graze in the fields and thus damage the crop. The man whose cattle are found grazing in the fields in violation of this agreement has no right to claim compensation for an injury caused to his cattle by the owner of the field. |
| MLA Tarr | 'Girding up of loins' denoting two things. First, it is used for all such members of a family who are capable of carrying and using firearms. Second, it means espousing the cause of a man against his enemies and providing him with an armed party. The tribesmen resort to Mla Tarr when a person belonging to their village or tribe is attacked, mistreated or disgraced by their enemies. |
| Badragha | An armed party escorting a fugitive or a visitor to his destination is called Badragha. Badragha is a guarantee for the safety of a man who is either hotly pursued by his |

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| | <p>enemies or there is an apprehension of his being killed on his way home. An armed party accompanies such a man as Badragha or 'escort' to ensure his safe return to the place of his abode. Badragha is never attacked by the second party because of fear of reprisals and the blood feud that is sure to follow if an attack is made on it. The Badragha convoy can be depended upon only within its own geographical limits; beyond it, the people of other tribes take the charge to convoy the traveler.</p> |
| Bilga | <p>The word Bilga is used for stolen property. A man is held responsible for theft or burglary if any of the stolen articles are recovered from his house. In such a case he is obliged to make good the loss sustained by the afflicted person. He, however, stands absolved of Bilga if he discloses the source or the persons from whom he had purchased the stolen articles.</p> |
| Bota | <p>To carry away. A retaliatory action against an aggressor. For instance, if a creditor fails to recover his debt from the debtor, he resorts to Bota by seizing his cattle or one of his relatives. The creditor keeps them as hostages till his dues are fully realized or the debtor has furnished a security to make payment within a specified period to the creditor.</p> |
| Baramta | <p>The word Baramta is derived from Persian word Baramad, which means recovery or restitution of property etc. Under Baramta hostages are held to ransom till the accused returns the claimed property. The Pashtuns consider it an act against their sense of honor and contrary to the principles of Pashtunwali to lay their hands on dependent classes such as blacksmiths, tailors, barbers, butchers, etc., belonging to the debtor's village.</p> |
| Balandra or Ashar | <p>Balandra or Ashar can be best described as a village aid program under which a particular task is accomplished on the basis of mutual cooperation and assistance. At the time of sowing or harvesting, the villagers lend a helping hand to the man who seeks their help. They take out their pair of bullocks to plough his fields at sowing time and assist him in reaping his crops at the time of harvest. The man, thus obliged, by the fellow villagers holds a feast in their honor in the evening.</p> |
| Meerata | <p>Meerata means complete annihilation of the male members of a family by brutal assassination. This is not a custom, but a criminal act. Under Meerata, the stronger member of family used to assassinate their weak but near relatives with the sole object of removing them from the line of inheritance and gaining forcible possession of their lands, houses and other property. The tribal law seriously views this kind of cold-blooded murder and persons responsible for such an inhumane and ghastly act cannot escape the wrath of Pashtuns. The Jirga immediately assembles to take suitable action against the culprits. The penalty is usually in the form of setting on fire their houses and other property and expulsion of the culprits from their area.</p> |
| Saz | <p>Blood money or compensation in lieu of killing. Under the custom of Saz a person who feels penitent after committing a deliberate murder, approaches the deceased's family through a Jirga and offers to make payment of blood money to end the enmity. All hostilities end between the parties after acceptance of Saz. The payment of compensation may take the form of giving a girl in marriage to the aggrieved (called Swarah), binding the two parties in blood relations and eradicating ill will and feelings of enmity.</p> |
| Itbar | <p>Trust, or guaranteed assurance, follows un-written laws or conventions. All business--including contracts relating to sale and mortgage or disposal of property, is transacted on the basis of trust or Itbar. Verbal transactions entered into in the presence of the village elders or a few witnesses become subject to itbar. The violation of Itbar is considered to be dishonorable act, un-becoming of gentleman and contrary to the norms of Pashtunwali.</p> |
| Hamsaya | <p>Applies to a man who abandons his home either due to poverty or blood feud and seeks protection of an elder of another village. In this way, the latter becomes his client or vassal. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the protector to save his Hamsaya from insult or injury from any source.</p> |

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- ¹ Magyar and Danopoulos, *Prolonged War*, 11.
 - ² Trest, *Air Commando One*, 10; Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 5.
 - ³ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 37-38.
 - ⁴ "Introduction and Historical Setting," 1.
 - ⁵ Jenkins, "Afghanistan," 1-10.
 - ⁶ Mansoor, "The Softer Side of War," 1-2.
 - ⁷ Mansoor, "The Softer Side of War," 1.
 - ⁸ Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Culture in Conflict," 33.
 - ⁹ Mansoor, "The Softer Side of War," 2.
 - ¹⁰ Mansoor, "The Softer Side of War," 6.
 - ¹¹ ACSC Elective Seminar, 2014.
 - ¹² Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 337.
 - ¹³ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 242.
 - ¹⁴ ACSC Elective Seminar, 2014.
 - ¹⁵ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 339.
 - ¹⁶ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 12.
 - ¹⁷ Klein, "Cognition in Natural Settings," 253.
 - ¹⁸ Synthesized and adapted from Klein, "Cognition in Natural Settings," and ACSC Elective Seminar notes.
 - ¹⁹ Schofield, *Afghan Frontier*, 116.
 - ²⁰ Mendoza, "Islam and Islamism in Afghanistan," 9.
 - ²¹ Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop*, 27.
 - ²² Kaiser, "The Pakistan-Afghanistan entente cordiale," 1.
 - ²³ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 7.
 - ²⁴ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 59.
 - ²⁵ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, 328-329.
 - ²⁶ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 69.
 - ²⁷ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 70-73.
 - ²⁸ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 85.
 - ²⁹ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 85.
 - ³⁰ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 290.
 - ³¹ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 4-7.
 - ³² Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 4-7.
 - ³³ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 4.
 - ³⁴ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 5.
 - ³⁵ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 5; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 100, 142.
 - ³⁶ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 17, 23; Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 209.
 - ³⁷ ACSC, Lecture 2014.
 - ³⁸ Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Culture in Conflict," 37.
 - ³⁹ Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Culture in Conflict," 37.
 - ⁴⁰ Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Culture in Conflict," 37.
 - ⁴¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 73.
 - ⁴² Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 4.
 - ⁴³ Gordon and Trainor, *Cobra II*, 19-23.
 - ⁴⁴ Szafranski, "Decade of War" 130.

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- ⁴⁵ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, 2.
- ⁴⁶ Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare*, x [Foreward by John A. Nagl, PhD, LTC (ret.), USA].
- ⁴⁷ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 129.
- ⁴⁸ HQ, Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-26.
- ⁴⁹ HQ, Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 1-26 - 1-29.
- ⁵⁰ Vaughn and Vaughn, "I Didn't Join to Be Sacrificed," 2.
- ⁵¹ Cloud and Jaffe, *The Fourth Star*, 112.
- ⁵² Friedman, "Creeping Death," 82.
- ⁵³ Friedman, "Creeping Death," 83.
- ⁵⁴ Friedman, "Creeping Death," 84.
- ⁵⁵ Friedman, "Creeping Death," 85-89.
- ⁵⁶ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 34-35.
- ⁵⁷ HQ, Department of the Army, FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 5-2.
- ⁵⁸ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 35.
- ⁵⁹ Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires*, 207.
- ⁶⁰ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 6.
- ⁶¹ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 40.
- ⁶² Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 41.
- ⁶³ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 41.
- ⁶⁴ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 6.
- ⁶⁵ Abrams, "States, Societies, Resistance, and COIN," 35; Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 13.
- ⁶⁶ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 13.
- ⁶⁷ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 12-13.
- ⁶⁸ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 5-6.
- ⁶⁹ Dilanian, "State Dept," 1.
- ⁷⁰ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 6.
- ⁷¹ Johnson and Mason, "Refighting the Last War," 5.
- ⁷² Condensed and adapted from <http://afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html> and ACSC Elective Seminar notes.

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