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## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL: A CRITIQUE OF COMPREHENSIVE COIN DOCTRINE

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**JCSP 36**

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE – COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES  
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MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES – MAÎTRISE EN ÉTUDES DE LA DÉFENSE

**ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL: A CRITIQUE OF COMPREHENSIVE COIN  
DOCTRINE**

By Lieutenant-Colonel Cody Sherman

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## ABSTRACT

The nature and evolution of Coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan set the conditions for a grand experiment in the branch of warfare known as counterinsurgency (COIN). There, in the midst of a co-dependency between state failure and insurgency, commanders and COIN theorists quickly wove lessons from the disparate success of 20<sup>th</sup> Century COIN operations into an all inclusive formula for state building. This campaign design process is known as comprehensive-COIN. Also referred to as state stability operations, it is underpinned by the population-centric approach to COIN operations and is exclusively adopted as U.S., UK and Canadian doctrine. As such, it will frame the mindset of future planners at all levels.

This paper contends that comprehensive-COIN doctrine - a product of these two campaigns - is inherently flawed as it assumes certain key COIN principles as valid to all situations. In other words, it ignores or misuses many COIN principles upon which it purports to be based. These 'three principles' include the ability to win the 'hearts and minds' of the population, the need for state support, and an ability to affect the insurgents – also stated pre-requisites of the population-centric approach.

The conclusion reached is that the doctrine was created as a panacea to challenges that would not have been undertaken had proper pre-campaign analysis been done. It will argue this point along two parallel themes. First, that failing to assess a reasonable likelihood of securing popular support, developing effective indigenous institutions, and inflicting a lasting disruption on the insurgency entails the conduct of COIN contrary to its historic and intrinsic principles. It is therefore flawed doctrine. Argued in parallel is that the current comprehensive COIN doctrine and the population-centric COIN approach cannot succeed when the practical aspects of the principles are unachievable. Comprehensive COIN is based on mutually supporting lines of operation that will fail as such without reliable support from the other lines of operation. It is therefore a flawed approach and distracts strategists and policy makers from other options to the accomplishment of national security objectives.

## INTRODUCTION: WHITHER COIN

### Strategic Choices: The Road to Counterinsurgency and State Reconstruction.

*The international community is faced with a dilemma. The recent collapse of the state-control regime in Country-X has quickly led to a dangerous power vacuum and a crisis of regional if not international importance.*

*The borders of Country-X are post colonial and have no real historic linkages to the religious or ethnic composition of the country. Families have transited the shared borders of neighbouring Country-Y for generations in order to maintain tribal linkages. Country X is not a stranger to insurgencies. Decades ago, Country-X was invaded by a militarily superior Country-Z, triggering a brutal civil war along political and sectarian lines. As a result, weapons litter the country. Insurgent success against a puppet regime is heralded across the country but particularly in the rural half that is fiercely tribal and independently minded. The saying amongst elders is ‘live in your clan’s village – defend your tribes’ valley’. Sayings like this are reflective of a proud, centuries old warrior tradition always resentful of foreign invaders. A single religion plays a strong and underpinning role in the entire society but secular divides have been used as an instrument of power and prejudice in past power struggles. Officers and men of the former regime’s military are desperate to retain their power and prestige or find a new position among the warring factions and extremist elements.*

*The current insurgency is composed of factions too numerous to count, each demanding their role in a new power structure. Several are undoubtedly receiving advice evidenced by their successful use of urban tactics. These tactics are straight from the playbook of the “Swords of Revenge”, a religiously motivated terrorist movement responsible for numerous devastating attacks in Europe and North America thought staged from camps and C2 nodes in Country-X. Their possible access to the former regime’s chemical weapons represents a clear and present danger to regional and international security.*

*There is an air of revenge and indignation in western capitals. Conventional arms including modern SAMs and anti-armour weapons are now proliferating through other resistance movements in the region and in some cases their terrorist sponsors. SAMs fired in terrorist strikes oceans away have been traced to former government arsenals. Reluctant to enter into another protracted and costly conflict, this situation presents the international community with an entrenched terrorist threat and broader national security concerns. The humanitarian and refugee situation from this conflict has international attention and UN and NGO pressure mounts to establish security for their operations. This equates to a comprehensive, expeditionary COIN campaign to re-establish the integrity of Country-X and achieve regional stability. To do so will require engagement across the “PMESII” spectrum. Tens of thousands of soldiers – SOF and conventional – could be made available for this campaign.*

*Striking the terrorists and/or seizing the chemical-weapons seem feasible and present an alternative strategy to state reconstruction. The question facing policy makers and military commanders is the plausibility of changing this mosaic of interests into a manageable entity – a new state? Is this achievable by a military force while engaging numerous competing insurgencies? The military commander asked to consider the problem demands three key fundamental intelligence requirements (CCIRs) of the planning staff before being confronted with a policy driven end state:*

- *Who are the people in the region according to the people in the region; what is the likelihood of earning and keeping their loyalty and trust?*
- *Is Country-X actually a viable state construct and what is the Coalition actually trying to restore: Can a new government maintain what the intervention force begins?*
- *To conduct this state building effort Coalition forces must be with the people to influence the people. We must protect the populace, the state institutions that we support, the humanitarian effort and protect ourselves both in transit and in our bases. These shaping operations must be reinforced by decisive, offensive operations to disrupt if not defeat those who persist in their threat to security. We have adaptive troops but adaptation is a two-way street. Who are the insurgents as a fighting force? Can the intervention force find them and reduce them as a threat or spend more time and resources defending ourselves?*

<sup>1</sup> Figure i. Scenario created by the Author.

The scenario in the preceding figure describes a complex battle space in a failed state environment like those experienced by U.S. and Coalition forces in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom – OEF-A) from 2001 to the present and in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom – OIF) from 2003 to 2011. Distilled, the scenario presents policy and strategy alternatives to the resolution of a national security dilemma. While less popular in the court of public opinion, one option is a precise and short lived action against the specific international aspect of the security threat. Another is a comprehensive overhaul of the failing state with a view to progressively exorcising the insurgency. To do the latter – the decision adopted in Iraq and Afghanistan – entails direct involvement in counterinsurgency warfare (COIN), such that insurgents and the population are persuaded to support a new government, enabled by the intervention force.<sup>2</sup>

After interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan occurred and much trial and error ensued, the method of COIN adopted to achieve success was ‘population-centric COIN’. This theory holds that the way to defeat an insurgency is to focus the efforts of the intervention force on protecting the population, fostering economic development and spreading the influence of nascent government institutions. The military component of this approach – security – requires mutually supportive state reconstruction efforts. This state stability apparatus is now doctrinally referred to by U.S., Canadian and U.K. forces as comprehensive-COIN.

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘COIN force’ and ‘intervention force’ are used interchangeably throughout this paper and refer to a foreign nation’s or coalition’s military intervention for the purpose of conducting counterinsurgency in support of the indigenous government. In the literature, the term ‘COIN force’ is sometimes used to generically describe the indigenous government forces and/or the foreign force. As this paper critiques the feasibility of creating viable indigenous forces, the two will remain distinct. Indigenous forces will be referred to as indigenous forces.

In many respects, the depicted scenario also presumes to capture competing options put before western political and military leaders during the 2011 fall of the Qadaffi regime in Libya and currently, as contingencies to a political vacuum in a ‘post-Assad’ Syria are examined. Increasingly, and in no small measure to the blood, treasure and reputation expended in OEF-A and OIF, the trend is toward a broader look at strategic options rather than a re-play of these costly state reconstruction efforts. Options at the political-strategic level include sanctions, air interdiction (and/or the imposition of no fly zones), funding and/or arming of opposition groups and/or surgical, counter-terrorist operations.<sup>3</sup>

The trip wire for intervention in Syria – even just to establish cease-fire conditions - might only be a headline away in the face of growing atrocities and the possible use of chemical weapons. However unintended, standing COIN doctrine would look to support a transitional administration.<sup>4</sup> In the likely event that one or more rival factions take arms against that transitional government or the intervention force, an insurgency situation is in play. It is reasonable therefore to forecast that such a situation could consequently be

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<sup>3</sup> Baucum Fulk, “An Evaluation of Counterinsurgency as a Strategy for Fighting the Long War” (master’s thesis, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 13-14. Accessed March 15, 2013. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1052>. In his thesis, Fulk challenges the value-to-risk-return of Comprehensive-COIN in the pursuit of defeating terrorism. COIN, he concludes is inefficient and counter-productive, and exposes the U.S. to greater risk to resources and reputation. In addition to counter-terrorism, he explores anti-terrorism, and supporting friendly insurgencies as less costly alternatives.

<sup>4</sup> Al Jazeera, "Top US General Details Five Options for Syria," July 23, 2013, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/2013723101314130114.html>. In his open letter to Senator Carl Levin of the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Dempsey outlines the following options: Train, advise and assist the opposition; Conduct limited stand-off strikes; Establish a No-Fly Zone; Establish buffer zones; and Control Chemical weapons. He does not mention counter-terrorist options as these would no doubt be classified.



rationalized into a comprehensive-COIN approach to state stability operations.<sup>5</sup>

Conditions in Syria have without a doubt evolved into ‘Iraq through the looking glass’.<sup>6</sup>

Such an intervention would once again place western armies in culturally polarized surroundings, facing multiple sectarian and ‘terrorist’ factions on competing agendas.

The cost and outcome of COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan (thus far) under this new doctrine, reinforces the need for a ruthless understanding of the feasibility of the approach in volatile failed state environments. COIN literature and field manuals are replete with intelligence and information requirements checklists, notionally useful to tactical elements once committed to the operation. However, undetected are pre-campaign “go-no go” criteria that challenge the very feasibility of conducting this new brand of counterinsurgency warfare.

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The nature and evolution of Coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan set the conditions for a grand experiment in the branch of warfare known as counterinsurgency (COIN). There, in the midst of a co-dependency between state failure and insurgency,

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<sup>5</sup> United States, Department of Defense, USCENTCOM CCJ5-Combined Strategic Analysis Group, *Building a Coalition around and Eventually within Syria*, 12th ed., vol. 2013 (Tampa: USCENTCOM, 2013), 3. President Obama has thus far avoided ‘boots on the ground’ options for Syria. USCENTCOM states: “Our experiences in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya, however, make us wary of the costs and effects of an outside intervention and even its ability to deliver. So we should be more pragmatic and concentrate on delivering limited military strategic options.” This statement notwithstanding, the paper explores (amongst other objectives) the development of coalitions to secure chemical weapons that...” would from the start have to conduct (humanitarian) and peacemaking missions.”

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 2. “The Syrian crisis slowly morphed from an internal dispute two years ago into a war of proxies with regional and even global impact. Geographically it takes place in the heart of the Levant and can impact countries where the U.S. and the West have formidable interests such as Israel and Jordan... From a religious point of view it becomes a sectarian war and will have a far reaching impact on the relationship between Sunni and Shia, throughout the *Ummah*. It is also becoming the breeding ground for terrorists, including domestic terrorists and nationals of many countries outside of the region...”

commanders and COIN theorists quickly wove lessons from the disparate success of 20<sup>th</sup> Century COIN operations into an all inclusive formula for state building. This campaign design process is known as comprehensive-COIN. Also referred to as state stability operations, it is underpinned by the population-centric approach to COIN operations and is exclusively adopted as U.S., UK and Canadian doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Now set as official doctrine, it will frame the mindset of future planners at all levels.

This paper contends that comprehensive-COIN doctrine - a product of these two campaigns - is inherently flawed as it assumes certain key COIN principles as valid to all situations. In other words, it ignores or misuses many COIN principles upon which it purports to be based. These ‘three principles’ include the ability to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the population, the need for state support, and an ability to affect the insurgents – also stated prerequisites of the population-centric approach.

It will argue this point along two parallel themes. First, that failing to assess a reasonable likelihood of securing popular support, developing effective indigenous institutions, and inflicting a lasting disruption on the insurgency entails the conduct of COIN contrary to its historic and intrinsic principles. It is therefore flawed doctrine. Argued in parallel is that the current comprehensive-COIN doctrine and the population-centric COIN approach cannot succeed when the practical aspects of the principles are assessed as unachievable. Comprehensive COIN is based on mutually supporting lines of

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<sup>7</sup> References to U.S., U.K. and Canadian COIN doctrine refer to (respectively): U.S. Army Field Manual 3-24/Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5 (2007) *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* (hereafter referred to a FM 3-24); British Army Field Manual Vol 1, Part 10 (2009) *Countering Insurgency*; and Canadian Army Publication B-GL-323-004/FP-003 (2008) *Counter-Insurgency Operations*. All are formerly cited later in the paper.

operation that will fail as such without reliable support from the other lines of operation. Without these conditions, it is a flawed approach. The conclusion reached is that the doctrine was created to justify the continuity of state-stability operations and not the result of a practical examination of its feasibility.

The paper will be argued in four chapters. Chapter One will make clear the prerequisite role that popular support (hearts and minds), state support and the ability to affect the insurgent play as principles of classical COIN theory. It will also describe and analyze the co-dependency between comprehensive-COIN and state stability campaigns. In a retrospective look at ‘what should have been clear in sufficient time’ to military planners and senior policy makers, Chapters Two through Four will assess the validity and feasibility of the comprehensive, population-centric approach against the three ‘prerequisite’ principles, in the context of the OIF/OEF-A campaigns. The conclusion will summarize the overall argument and briefly speak to alternatives other than state stability operations to resolve national security challenges.

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This paper does not question why the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan and Iraq. Of import here is that these interventions caused rapid regime change without a fulsome analysis of the possible outcome. The road to COIN was, therefore, paved with poor policy, intelligence and planning. There is no intent here to suggest that abandoning these states post-intervention could have passed any test of morality or national security cost-benefit analysis. However, other transitional exit strategies were apparent. This critique merely questions the presumption that comprehensive state-building, based on

population-centric COIN was viable, given readily available history and the state of the situation at hand. An Allied colleague states that...

...(t)here is a potential decision point in the planning or conduct of every...campaign in which the astute leader may conclude that the costs of success or risks of failure far outweighs the benefits of any success. If the state being supported is on the verge of collapse...enjoys little popular support (or is truly divided).. no amount of military action ...will win the people over. It may be the situation must be left to resolve itself. Determining this decision point in the actual conduct of war is extremely difficult. Recognizing its inevitability while still in the strategy formulation or campaign planning stage is genius; acting on it is the essence of moral courage.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> I. A. Rigden, Col, "The British Approach to Counterinsurgency: Myths, Realities and Strategic Challenges" (Thesis., U.S. Army War College, 2008), 21. Accessed April 28, 2013 <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA479660>

## **CHAPTER ONE: FROM COUNTERING INSURGENTS TO COUNTRY BUILDING – GAPS IN THE REASONING.**

*Soldiers and Marines are expected to be nation-builders as well as warriors.*

- U.S. FM 3-24.

*Again, if the campaign is protracted, the resources of the state will not be equal to the strain.*

- Sun Tzu

This chapter will make clear the pre-requisite role that popular support (hearts and minds), state support and an ability to affect the insurgent, play in the execution of COIN. It will also describe and analyze how comprehensive-COIN inspired the state building approach. This chapter will not précis a history of COIN theory. However, mindful of that history, it will make clear for the reader the definition, meaning and most importantly the implications of the ‘comprehensive-COIN approach’ now entrenched in U.S., UK and Canadian doctrine. In doing so it will observe that ‘comprehensive’ implies and demands the need for co-dependent lines of operation. It all works or not at all. Underpinning this explanation is the notion that altering the behaviour of the mosaic of peoples involved in an insurgency situation, when that behaviour is hard-wired by centuries of history, is the center of gravity of any insurgency and therefore the greatest question of plausibility.

Comprehensive-COIN theory is an interconnected approach that suggests that political reform cannot occur without the trust of the people and that that trust cannot occur without the provision of security. By extension, the security line of operation is connected to the development line. The population of a village may not for, example, be swayed to a pro-government stance if it cannot safely operate its village bazaar. Knowing this, insurgents will target the bazaar to discredit the government and so on.

In a failed state environment, comprehensive-COIN embodies an aggregate approach where ‘more can only be better’. David Kilcullen aptly captures the intent of comprehensive-COIN as used and espoused in Iraq and Afghanistan. In his “Counterinsurgency” introduction he says that...

...an insurgency is an organized, protracted politico-military struggle designed to weaken the control and legitimacy of an established government, occupying power, or other political authority while increasing insurgent control...A counterinsurgency, (he continues) is an umbrella term that describes the complete range of measures that governments’ take to defeat insurgencies. These measures may be political, administrative, military, economic, psychological, or informational and are almost always used in combination.<sup>9</sup>

From a political point of view, the COIN effort for the intervention force is ultimately about accomplishing national security objectives. By virtue of its inclusion in state reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, however, COIN has been erroneously elevated from a tactic to a national security strategy. Renowned strategist Colin Gray says that...

...COIN is neither a concept nor can it be a strategy. Instead, it is simply an acronymic descriptor of a basket of diverse activities intended to counter an insurgency. COIN cannot be debated intelligently as a general and generic project any more than can war and its warfare. COIN effort is a subset of effort in war and –save in a moral context – it makes no sense to attempt to argue about either, save with specific references to particular cases.<sup>10</sup>

Comprehensive-COIN and state stability operations have, however, become synonymous in doctrine.<sup>11</sup> The doctrinal interpretation therefore is that creating and/or

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<sup>9</sup> David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory," *PRISM* 3, no. 3 (June 2012): 17, accessed February 20, 2013 <http://www.ndu.edu/press/concept-failure.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Gian P. Gentile, "A Strategy of Tactics: Population-centric COIN and the Army," *Parameters*, Autumn 2009, 5, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/09autumn/gentile.pdf>; "Population-Centric Counterinsurgency: A False Idol?," in *SAMS Monograph Series*, ed. Dan G. Cox and Thomas Bruscino (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2011), 3, accessed May 10, 2013, <http://www.cgsc.edu/carl/download/csipubs/Population-CentricCounterinsurgency.pdf>; "Proponents argue that successful counterinsurgency can only be achieved through population engagement; stability operations and the creation of a functioning state...the modern day notion of nation-building [which] dovetails nicely into the non-kinetic emphasis of population-centric counterinsurgency".

leaving a 'stable' state behind should sufficiently disrupt and/or contain the threat to your own national security. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this generally involves the counter-proliferation of terrorism.

Comprehensive-COIN and its inherent need for broad popular support have become co-dependent in doctrine - thus the linkage to the population-centric approach.<sup>12</sup> To achieve its desired effect – the reasoning of which will be explored – the comprehensive approach focuses less on military engagement with the insurgent and more on securing support and agreement with the population. Its success or end state is therefore predicated upon the willingness and commitment of that population and its usually fragmented leadership to reform their state, such that it's responsive to the COIN force's reconstruction plan. The actions of the host state, its police and military forces and the COIN force must be in concert for any of this to be effective.<sup>13</sup>

It is equally vital in the midst of chaos, that there is a strong likelihood the people will 'see it your way' and assume risk to power, position, life and family to unravel the insurgents from their society in favour of a 'better way'. The intervention force and host nation leadership must therefore passionately share the Coalition's version of the end state in terms of governance (central or distributive, ethnicity or religions represented) and the future internal security apparatus. The interconnectedness of the comprehensive approach can only support a single end state or it will lose its cohesiveness. An in-depth comparison of classical versus contemporary COIN approaches exceeds the scope of this

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<sup>12</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, B-GL-323-004/FP-003 *Counter-Insurgency Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2008), 1-15, 1-17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-15 para 9-10, 1-17 Section 113 Focus on Population.

paper. Key to the premise of this paper however is the understanding that comprehensive-COIN theory contends that the same principles used in the more limited context of the classical engagements (e.g. Malaya, Algeria) are as equally feasible in a broad state-building context.<sup>14</sup> This is to say the hearts and minds of the people – a classical COIN principle- can only be secured if all aspects (underdevelopment, stable civil governance, and civil security) are simultaneously addressed. Classical COIN icons like Galula understood the importance of resolving popular grievances but saw their resolution – however temporary – as a means to a military ends. Military ends in that genre equalled a return to status quo. To Galula and Trinquier, French colonial dominance or state control was status quo. This is not the case in the comprehensive state building approach where the development of a new government is equal or superior in priority to military success.<sup>15</sup>

### **Operational Design, Campaign Planning Constructs and Comprehensive COIN.**

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<sup>14</sup> Gentile, *A Strategy of Tactics...*, 6-7. Gian Gentile's summary of population-centric COIN underscores its linkage to comprehensive COIN and its historical lineage. He says: "Its ideas and rules of tactics and operations should be familiar to anyone who has studied or thought about various approaches to COIN. They are: Populations are always the focus, the center of gravity, and they have to be protected; the enemy insurgent as a rule cannot be as important or given the same level of emphasis as the population; population-centric COIN requires patience on the part of the American people; it demands a certain tactical approach of dispersion into small outposts to live amongst the people to win their hearts and minds; this has become the concept of clear, hold, and build; population-centric counterinsurgency equals nation-building, and it requires a major investment in time to be successful; its historical model of success is the British in Malaya; (COIN's) supreme historical failure is the United States' involvement in Vietnam; its current narrative is that the techniques of population-centric counterinsurgency practiced by several additional combat brigades as part of the Surge of forces in Iraq produced success after February 2007; its historical "how-to" text is Counterinsurgency Warfare by a French Army officer who fought in Algeria, David Galula; its current set of rules are prescribed in FM 3-24. As the rules dictate, an Army unit must learn and adapt to improved population-centric tactics and operations; the unit cannot learn and adapt other methods in place of population-centric counterinsurgency.

<sup>15</sup>Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (Westport CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 5.



National and/or Coalition end states for military or military supported campaigns are expressed in broad and compelling terms all with the underpinning assumption that they are plausible. It is for the military to ‘find a way’ to make it so. End states in insurgency scenarios are often framed like:

A lasting peace in which the threat of violence and civil war has been resolved and Nation X has stable political structures, supported by reliable infrastructure, governance and regional leaders, providing prosperity and security for all the peoples.<sup>16</sup>

Threat factors or other vulnerabilities identified in the campaign planning process tend to be deemed as hindrances to the accomplishment of these objective statements rather than a critical challenge to their validity.

When countering an insurgency in a comprehensive campaign approach, principles are ‘operationalized’ as lines of operation (LOO) within an operational design.

Operational design...

...guides the development of the concept of operations...(and) is the Joint Force Commander’s vision, expressed in a graphic and conceptual model, of how actions and effects will be sequenced within a JOA to defeat the adversary and accomplish national or alliance objectives... it clarifies the End State to be achieved, identifies how the *adversary’s strengths will be countered and his vulnerabilities exploited.... [Emphasis added]*<sup>17</sup>

Typical LOOs for the three principles examined in this paper could be: ‘Secure popular support’; ‘Support state institutions’; and ‘Defeat the insurgency’. The LOOs are programmed, measured and validated for their own success and their mutual supportability at markers assigned by the planning staff. These markers are called ‘decisive points’. Subject matter experts within the staff will ‘work the plan’ to ensure

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<sup>16</sup> Canada, DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, 5-14.

<sup>17</sup> Canada, Department of National Defence, Canadian Forces College, *CFC Guide to CF Operational Planning Process*, CFC 230, II-8/17.

that their LOO has sufficient application of force or technique to ensure its success. A conceptual example of such a plan can be seen at Figure 2.

THEMATIC LINES OF OPERATION							
Governance		Security		Political Process		Reconstruction	
OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES							
Interim Governance Provided	Self-Governance Established	Secure Environment Maintained	Self-Sustaining Security	Electoral Process Reformed	Elected Government Empowered	Key Restoration	Sustained Infrastructure Established
DECISIVE POINTS/SUPPORTING EFFECTS							
Transitional government is established	Military control reformed	Provincial capitals secured	Militia B repatriated	Electoral process designed	Government structures reformed	Essential services re-established in all areas	Equitable control achieved
Provincial governments re-established	Police control reformed	Border crossings secured	Military training re-established	Ethnic leaders engaged	Political oversight of security institutions	Resource infrastructure secured	Accountability procedures in place
	Economic reforms for distribution	Militia B deterred	Police training re-established			Interim control of resources achieved	Enduring infrastructure re-built
		Militia B defeated if necessary					Sustained growth

Figure 1.1 Example of a Campaign Plan Showing Lines of Operation, Operational Objectives and Decisive Points / Supporting Effects<sup>18</sup>

Framed in operational design, COIN campaign planning is now formalized in the U.S. and Canadian comprehensive approach doctrine. As such, it now assumes an end state of state reconstruction based upon a stability operation campaign design. Canadian COIN doctrine now dogmatically states that...

...(b)y its very nature a COIN campaign will require a **comprehensive approach** so that elements of power other than the military may address and solve the underlying causes of the insurgency and morally separate the insurgency from its legitimacy and support base. Thus many lines of

<sup>18</sup> Canada, DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, Fig 5-8, pg 5-18.

operation and operational objectives will not only involve other agencies, but those agencies may well be the lead element. **(Emphasis in context)**<sup>19</sup>

Two complimentary models for the application of national power reinforce the validity and importance of the comprehensive-COIN approach in the eyes of its proponents. Use of the DIME (or now) DIMEFIL (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence and Law Enforcement) model to categorize the elements of national power is a near seamless fit to the usual delineation of comprehensive-COIN lines of operation. Another common method used to quantify national power is the “PMESII” model, which broadly identifies its Political, Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, and Information components.<sup>20</sup> In the current zenith of comprehensive-COIN doctrine, planners who use these models to frame the comprehensive approach tend to be praised for having employed a ‘whole of government’ methodology, popular for its presumed synergy and economy of effort.<sup>21</sup>

Once committed to a comprehensive-COIN solution, the use of military force is deemed a supporting or even *in extremis* line of operation. If as the manual says, the battle is won on the moral plane, then “offensive operations will only take you so far”.<sup>22</sup> The inference is that military force should be used “to foster the conditions for long term economic development and good government.”<sup>23</sup> The aim of this critique is not to say that the remedy to failing states and regional security challenges is strictly a combat oriented

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<sup>19</sup> Canada, DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, 5-14.

<sup>20</sup> United States, Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 2-0: *Joint Intelligence* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2007), IV-21.

<sup>21</sup> John P. McDonnell, "National Strategic Planning: Linking DIMEFIL/PMESII to a Theory of Victory" (thesis, Joint Forces Staff College, 2009), 5-20, accessed April 15, 2013, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a530210.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Canada, DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, 5-20.

<sup>23</sup> Bernard Finel, "A Substitute for Victory," *Foreign Affairs*, April 8, 2010, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66189/bernard-finel/a-substitute-for-victory>.

affair. It is however to highlight that the doctrine now explicitly calls for comprehensive-COIN as *the* solution when other military (counter-terrorist/insurgent hunting) or diplomatic solutions might avoid a costly and protracted campaign. Finel says that...

...(c)ritics of this (population-centric) approach cite three flaws. First, blaming bad governance for Afghanistan's problems, they say ignores the importance of other factors driving the insurgency, including ethnic antagonisms, ideological disputes, and old fashioned power struggles. Second, a theory of conflict focused almost exclusively on underlying factors, such as lack of government goods and services, rather than enemy action seems at odd with the history of warfare, which suggests that the real challenge comes from the actions and decisions of the adversary. Third, ...population-centric COIN requires building responsive governmental structures, promoting economic growth and eliminating endemic corruption – objectives that have almost never been successfully accomplished in the long, doleful history of international development.<sup>24</sup>

The choice between a population and enemy-centric COIN approach is not an 'either-or' situation - but this is tricky. Comprehensive-COIN campaign planning can include contingency plans for combat operations to "preserve the commander's freedom of action even under rapidly changing circumstances".<sup>25</sup> Branch planning for combat operations in COIN may account for situations such as 'fighting season' offensives where intensive attrition may need to occur while the remainder of combat forces focus on shaping and shielding functions such as reconstruction and force protection tasks. If, however, these branch plans are routinely required against (as the name suggests) 'fighting seasons', then the gradual attainment of popular support should perhaps take a secondary role to offensive operations and other LOOs more pre-emptive in nature.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Bernard Finel, "A Substitute for Victory," *Foreign Affairs*, April 8, 2010, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66189/bernard-finel/a-substitute-for-victory>.

<sup>25</sup> Canada, DND, *CFC Guide to CF Operational Planning...*, II 14-/17.

<sup>26</sup> Nathan R. Springer, "Stabilizing the Debate between Population-Centric and Enemy-Centric Counterinsurgency: Success Demands a Balanced Approach" (Thesis, Army Command and General Staff College, 2011), accessed March 2013, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a547334.pdf>. Springer advocates a hybrid enemy-centric/population-centric approach used, he says, by Briggs/Templer in Malaya – population protection and control while maintaining an aggressive offensive disposition against the insurgency.

All of this is to say that planners must have great certainty that the population – the underpinning foundation of the plan - will be receptive to the campaign plan end state. This must be so as planners have convinced Commanders and national authorities to accept great risk and side line their most intuitive tool; the use of military force. The question at play - to COIN or not to COIN – therefore must be predicated upon a center of gravity of analysis before any LOOs are decided. The fundamental question to a viable end state, therefore, is the true source of strength for the insurgency. How does the insurgency thrive and regenerate and what is the precise likelihood of its defeat? If there is substantial doubt in the answers or an ability to answer either of these questions, then planners and policy makers should recognize that they remain staring at a fork in the road - the COIN prong ‘bent’. Other options to the resolution of national security concerns should consequently take priority.

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### **The Rise of the New COIN Doctrine – Ignoring its own Principles**

Comprehensive COIN doctrine and its ‘more will be better’ promise offer the allure of a panacea solution to planners and tacticians. Responsible military officers and soldiers assume responsibility for their portion of the plan questioning later how well they and others executed their lines of operation. Discussion since 2008 – after five years into Iraq and seven into Afghanistan - tends to indicate that the greater part of valour is questioning the integrity of key premises of the plan. Most of these questions center on the undertaking of COIN operations in circumstances contrary to the theory.

COIN doctrine and theory in the U.S. military had been ignored for decades. The legacy of Vietnam had made it verboten to speak of, less those in Special Forces who were involved in counterinsurgency operations in Central America. Tired of apologizing for the outcome in Vietnam, a small cabal of U.S. conventional officers – including the future General Petraeus -examined British and French approaches to COIN in the early post colonial era and the ‘brush-fire’ fights on the periphery of the Cold War.<sup>27</sup>

The British had a somewhat chequered past in counterinsurgency, having suffered defeats in Afghanistan and Iraq (1919, 1920’s) and often seen to have used heavy-handed tactics in Palestine and Kenya in the 40’s and 50’s. On the other hand, their success against the Communist insurgency in Malaya in the 1950’s - a victory that seemed to emphasize less enemy-centric and more population-centric tactics - gave the British an almost legendary status amongst pro-COIN advocates like John Nagl. Nagl’s account of that campaign in his *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* applauded the British for what Nagl opined was the optimal approach to counterinsurgency – to win the fight through the eyes of the population.<sup>28</sup> The French legacy was equally chequered. Despite defeats in South-east Asia and Algeria they curiously made a lasting mark on COIN theory. The “Ink Spot” approach or “Clear-Hold-Build” (through the attainment of popular support) espoused by Roger Trinquier and later Colonel David Galula seemed to offer modern

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<sup>27</sup> Fred Kaplan, "The End of the Age of Petraeus: The Rise and Fall of Counterinsurgency," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2013, 78-81.

<sup>28</sup> John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). ; Rigden, *The British Approach*....., 10-11. Rigden speaks to the “myth...that the Malayan Emergency is the counter-insurgency exemplar” The campaign (1948-1960) he says was indeed successful but also a unique event. While the multi-agency approach is relevant to understanding the success, it must be put in context. Malaya only had one border (Thailand) and a secure operating base in Singapore aiding insurgent isolation and sanctuary denial tactics; the insurgents were non-indigenous and easily separated and had minimal internal or external support. Britain, he says, was able to diffuse the situation by openly setting Malayan independence a priority by 1957.

students of COIN an alternate approach to the ‘search and destroy’ tactics that had ‘failed’ in Vietnam.<sup>29</sup>

“This tendency to look back to the classical insurgencies of the twentieth century was pervasive”, Metz says. The problem, he continues, is that...

...[Galula and the British in Malaya] deal with wars of imperial maintenance or nationalistic transition, not with the complex communal conflicts where armed militias and organized crime play a key role... rather than rigorously examining twenty-first century insurgencies, America simply assumed that their logic...and dynamics were the same as the classic insurgencies of the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup>

Equally presumptuous was the notion that these classical COIN principles would be harmonious to establishing popular state institutions or modern, western style democracies. For their faults by today’s standards of governance, the desired end-states in Algeria and Malaya were the restoration or shoring up of the colonial or neo-colonial governments. COIN therefore was conducted with a view to this comparatively limited political-strategic end-state. While the British and French utilized population-centric tactics in Malaya and Algeria respectively, they were tactics with a view to the military defeat of the insurgency. Protection of the population as a tactic to isolate and defeat the insurgents in a tactical context is a far more limited and arguably achievable goal.

Why then were population-centric tactics from non-contextual conflicts assumed viable as guiding principles to COIN and state-building in Iraq and Afghanistan? Further still, was their validity ever sufficiently scrutinized as feasible in more complex operating environments? The answer may, in part, lie in reputation management. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century

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<sup>29</sup> Gentile, *A Strategy of Tactics...*, 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> Steven Metz, "New Challenges and Old Concepts: Understanding 21st Century Insurgency," *Parameters*, (Winter 2007-8): 21-22, accessed February 12, 2013, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA475666>.

context, Coalition forces operating on NATO and United Nations collective mandates would have feared the future of foreign intervention as a legitimate foreign policy tool, were they to leave Iraq and Afghanistan worse than they had found it. Comprehensive-COIN theory, based on the altruistic notions of legitimacy and popular support, seemed to offer a way to battle the insurgents and encourage the people of these countries to want to fight for themselves.<sup>31</sup>

The residual risk to military planners lies in the singularity of the comprehensive-COIN doctrine. The U.S., Canadian and the British doctrine is clear: comprehensive, population-centric planning will be undertaken. This assumes too much. The evidence may indeed indicate that the population-centric approach is simply unsuitable to the environment and will neither defeat the insurgency nor pave a road to reconstruction. In his recent examination of the U.S. Military's consumption of COIN as a state building strategy Fred Kaplan says that...

...a good field manual (U.S. FM 3-24 COIN) can provide a road map for success...(but) (i)n assessing the prospects for a COIN campaign, if the insurgents are out of reach, or if the government being challenged is too corrupt to reform, or if the war is likely to take longer and cost more than a President or a nation is willing to commit, then here, too, it is the commander's responsibility to say so.<sup>32</sup>

The remainder of this Chapter will demonstrate how the three classical principles are presumed to validate the comprehensive approach.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew F. Krepinevich, "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, (September/October 2005): 90.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 90.

<sup>33</sup> The 2010, RAND Institute study, *Victory has a Thousand Fathers - Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency*, is cited in this paper. This 'lessons learned' study quantitatively examined the success or failure of counterinsurgency situations in terms of the application of 'good and bad' classical and contemporary COIN practices. The analysis investigates thirty different COIN situations with geographic, regional and cultural variations since the late 1970's. The study takes care to indicate that the worst of 'bad



### **Popular Support: Hearts and Minds.**

In classical and contemporary COIN theory, the struggle between insurgent and counter-insurgent is won or lost in the struggle for the hearts and minds of the people. It is for this reason that the core motivation of the people and the insurgents be most understood before validating any desired campaign end state. This is to say that both antagonists will attempt to secure (sometimes coerce) the trust and tacit support of the people on as many levels as possible. Shared views on economic reform, respect for religious obligations, recognizing fear of reprisals will all help both parties to gain freedom of movement amongst the population with reduced fear of complicity with their adversary. The insurgent may have imported his political or theological radicalisation from elsewhere but his core grievances and lineage are shared as he comes from the same population base. The COIN force does not. The battle for trust often starts in the insurgent's favour; it is theirs to lose.

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practices' such as repression inevitably led to a failed COIN approach and so positive lessons derived from the study are mindful of but substantively discount such practices. The study does however note bad practices-effects (e.g. perception that the COIN force is an external occupier) that even the best intentioned COIN force could cause and is therefore useful to an examination of contemporary comprehensive campaigns. The study does not include the OIF and OEF-A campaigns (it seems made by RAND to inform the study of these campaigns) but for the most part finds the guiding principles of U.S. FM 3-24 in line with its own conclusions stating as a primary recommendation that those preparing to undertake COIN "plan (and build and maintain forces) that are capable of engaging in multiple, mutually supporting lines of operation simultaneously". In essence it says that 'if COIN', then it endorses the comprehensive approach. It is clear, however, that it does so purely from an aggregated statistical basis. As it does not examine an intervention on the scale of OIF/OEF-A and therefore overlooks the implications of comprehensive state-building. Other good practices such as "tangibly affecting the insurgent" are more transferable between conflicts. Christopher Paul, Colin P. Clarke, and Beth Grill, *Victory Has a Thousand Fathers: Sources of Success in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2010).

Perhaps *the* underpinning treatise to comprehensive-COIN doctrine, David Galula, author of, “Counterinsurgency Warfare, Theory and Practice”, speaks to the insurgent’s need for popular support. He states that...

...(a)fflicted with his congenital weakness, the insurgent would be foolish if he mustered whatever forces were available to him and attacked his opponent in a conventional fashion, taking as his objective the destruction of the enemy’s forces and the conquest of territory. Logic forces him instead to carry the fight to a different ground where he has a better chance to balance the physical odds against him. The population represents this new ground. If the insurgent manages to dissociate the population from the counterinsurgent, to control it physically, to get its active support, he will win the war because in the final analysis the exercise of political power depends on the tacit or explicit agreement of the population or at worst on its submissiveness.<sup>34</sup>

David Kilcullen, author of the very popular “28 Articles of Counterinsurgency” very practically captures the problem and the mission from the counterinsurgent’s point of view. He says that there is...

...a competition with the insurgent for the right and ability to win the hearts, minds and acquiescence of the population. You (the western U.S./Coalition counterinsurgent) are being sent in because the insurgents at their strongest can defeat anything weaker than you. For your side to win the people do not have to like you, but they must respect you, accept that your actions benefit them, and trust your integrity and ability to deliver on promises, particularly regarding their security. In this battlefield, popular perceptions and rumour are more influential than the facts and more powerful than a hundred tanks.<sup>35</sup>

The RAND *Victory* study says that there must be a strong likelihood, based on intelligence and cultural understanding, that the COIN force can universally and credibly impart its narrative. Otherwise, it says, the COIN force cannot attain or sway popular support nor disrupt tangible support. In the contemporary context when the insurgent has robust access to electronic media as well as his indigenous communication advantages, the COIN force will struggle to maintain information dominance. Despite a strategic communications LOO and the efforts of Public Affairs, PSYOPS and Information

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<sup>34</sup> David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 2005), 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 29-30.

Operations components, more is not better if the COIN force cannot overcome a fundamental distrust of foreign forces.<sup>36</sup>

RAND analysis also indicates that the legitimacy of authority of the COIN force and the government it hopes to install must be a pervasive perception through the eyes of the people. This is a tall order. Together, they must counter corruption, defeat any perception of a being a puppet regime, support a consistent rule of law and provide services and development. If successful, the COIN force will supposedly detect an increased flow of intelligence from a trustful population and a population willing to defend its gains from the insurgents. The use of force must be similarly ‘legitimate’ in the eyes of the population. Any collateral damage from operations must be proportionate to perceived improvements in security and no worse than treatment at the hands of insurgents. Finally, the COIN force must not be perceived as an occupying force despite its need for pervasive presence.<sup>37</sup>

Comprehensive-COIN is a *nation-wide* approach to addressing an insurgency and/or civil conflict. Consequently, tactical COIN success on a regional or village level is not truly a determinant of success at the operational level. This is particularly true if the success achieved is not analogous to the battle space conditions in other regions or other COIN theatres. General Petraeus’ ‘COIN success’ in Nineveh Province, Iraq in 2004 for instance was based on population-centric COIN approaches such as infrastructure and civil leadership development. Arguably, however, it was only successful because it was

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<sup>36</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 55-58.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-42.

supported by aggressive security lines of operation not in keeping with the population-centric approach.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, population-centric COIN success during the 2007 surge was mostly in homogeneous Sunni areas and never replicated in the more densely populated Shiite areas where locals were focussed less on grievances with Coalition forces and more on a reversal of fortunes with their Sunni rivals.<sup>39</sup> To the assumption of transferring that “success” to Afghanistan Kaplan says that...

...(t)he fact was that there were no parallels to what facilitated COIN in Iraq: the sectarian and tribal divides more complex; there was no foundation for, say a Pashtun Awakening; the main enemy the Taliban was home-grown, not foreign [Sunni foreign fighters and Iranian influence] – Afghanistan was not susceptible to COIN.<sup>40</sup>

Understanding the key social underpinnings of the population’s views towards family, history, and the cost of survival is critical to a feasibility analysis for any COIN campaign. Framing and structure of this analysis is equally important. In the normal approach to operational planning, feasibility and risk deductions may give a ‘failing grade’ to options or “courses of action”. In the end however the process will engineer itself to point to the most viable road to the demanded end state. The presumption is that ‘it can be done’ with the application of sufficient time and resources. A comprehensive, population-centric COIN campaign is dependent on popular support in an unknown land,

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<sup>38</sup> Steve Coll, "The General's Dilemma," editorial, *The New Yorker*, September 8, 2008, 6,14, accessed February 1, 2013, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/09/08/080908fa\\_fact\\_coll](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/09/08/080908fa_fact_coll); Kaplan, *The End of the age...*, 78

<sup>39</sup> Long Live COIN? Dealing with Insurgencies and Internationalized Conflicts on a Budget, Proceedings of SCUSA 64 *Leading in Lean Times: Assuring Accountability and Assessing American Priorities in an Age of Austerity*, USMA, West Point, November 2012, 4, accessed April 23, 2013, <http://www.usma.edu/sosh/scusa/siteassets/sitepages/round%20tables/3%20long%20live%20coin.pdf> ; Gentile, *Strategy of Tactics...*, 10; Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 85.

<sup>40</sup> General David Petraeus, U.S. CENTCOM Commanding General, stated, “Every case is unique. ...While general concepts that proved important in Iraq may be applicable to Afghanistan...the application of those ‘big ideas’ has to be adapted to Afghanistan.” General David Petraeus, Interview, Foreign Policy, (January/ February 2009), available at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story\\_id=4587](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=4587); Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*,89.

restrained in terms of the application of military force, attempts state-restructure in a highly fluid resource intensive environment and tends to take years to accomplish. Metrics such as attrition or prisoners taken, useful in conventional warfare or enemy-centric COIN, do not apply. Government reconstruction or civil reconciliation can only really be measured in terms of decades-long improvement in the quality of life of the affected population. Questions of feasibility cannot therefore be reasonably posed and examined in such a way that they are beholden to a positive outcome. An “NO-GO” conclusion is therefore reasonable and may force an examination of strategic alternatives to a comprehensive-COIN campaign. The critical elements of pre-campaign analysis necessary to scrutinize the potential for COIN success - depicted in a non-determinant manner - can be found in the Appendix.

### **The Need for State Support: Can't Wish it Away**

A successful COIN strategy is directly reliant upon the performance of the host nation government it supports. Fred Kaplan says that comprehensive-COIN proponents have forgotten this key premise. He says that...

...(a)s a general principle, it's a core principle of COIN doctrine. A French colonial officer, Col. David Galula, wrote a book in 1962 called *Counterinsurgency Warfare*. Petraeus, Nagl, Kilcullen - all the leading COIN thinkers read and re-read Galula's book. In it there's a chapter titled "Prerequisites for a Successful Insurgency." He lists the characteristics of a country that make it prime bait for insurgents that increase the odds an insurgency will win. They included: a corrupt central state, a largely rural and illiterate population, a bordering state that's used as a sanctuary... Add them up; it's a portrait of Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Octavian Manea, "The American Way of War after COIN's Waterloo: An Interview with Fred Kaplan," *Small Wars Journal*, March 5, 2013, accessed May 01, 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-american-way-of-war-after-coins-waterloo-an-interview-with-fred-kaplan>.

A comprehensive-COIN campaign must have a strategic metric or boundary to its efforts. Given its complexity, a campaign can only “secure and stabilize” a fixed set of boundaries. Historically, international approval mechanisms such as a UNSCR or NATO Treaty resolution restrict operations to the borders of the state in jeopardy. In combat operations, planning staffs will establish formation boundaries that maximize the use of combat power and the ground to establish conditions for the control of tempo and manoeuvre. It would seem equally imperative to challenge the integrity of assigned boundaries in terms of their viability as a legitimate playing field for optimized COIN operations.

Does restoration of the former state boundaries truly address the roots of the insurgency problem? The people of Afghanistan have historically rejected central government. This historical truth must at least in part explain why the essential conditions for a successful central government still seem to be missing.<sup>42</sup> Bing West says that since 2002, the reality of the strategy in Afghanistan has rested on premises contrary to COIN fundamentals. Prematurely handing discretionary agreement for the COIN strategy to a nascent and unsubstantiated host government coupled with an unrewarded track record of pouring billions of dollars in aid to secure its support, he says, have both been costly and unsuccessful. The Afghan government’s toleration of safe haven areas in Pakistan in the

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Biddle and Fotini Christia, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2010, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66450/stephen-biddle-fotini-christia-and-j-alexander-thier/defining-success-in-afghanistan>; Seth G. Jones, "It Takes the Villages," *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2010, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66350/seth-g-jones/it-takes-the-villages?page=show>. Both of these essays cogently describe the history of governance in Afghanistan and why de-centralized models provide valid and viable governance alternatives.

unlikely hope of real and enduring Pakistani interdiction and border control, has entirely allowed the Taliban to manage the tempo of the last twelve years.<sup>43</sup>

Comprehensive-COIN doctrine requires a transformation in governance conducive to supporting its other lines of operation and generally assumes that the “existing government is ‘legitimate’ or capable of becoming so (even if) this takes for granted existing relationships between the government, population and the insurgency”.<sup>44</sup> If for instance, the reduction of poppy cultivation is a means to obtain popular support and reduce tangible benefit to the insurgency, such a program requires regional if not national government involvement to support substitute crop selection, means of export and infrastructure requirements. This is difficult in relatively governed spaces. It is unlikely at best in an environment of nascent, mistrusted and unqualified government. That these programs must be done is not at question. That soldiers must remain at risk for undefined periods dependent on their unlikely outcome, is.

In both Iraq and Afghanistan, the supported interim governments were influenced to adopt western democratic practices to satisfy donor countries.<sup>45</sup> Democracy, the RAND “Victory” study says, has some relative merit to its alternatives if and only if it provides legitimacy, fair elections, human rights, improved quality of life and kept promises. It must at a minimum provide better governance than the insurgents and select leaders in a manner deemed just and fair for that region. As the other lines of operation in the

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<sup>43</sup> Bing West, "Groundhog War," *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 2011, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/68133/bing-west/groundhog-war?page=show>.

<sup>44</sup> USMA SCUSA 64, *Long Live Coin?...*, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Jones, *It takes the Villages*. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66350/seth-g-jones/it-takes-the-villages?page=show>.

comprehensive-COIN plan are interdependent and reliant upon a functioning and 'legitimate' government, the time to achieve such an effect and the appropriateness of doing so must receive critical and impartial examination.<sup>46</sup>

As a state stability construct, comprehensive-COIN requires the development and deployment of indigenous forces capable of assuming state security functions as soon as possible and until order is established. Comprehensive-COIN is also a resource intensive endeavour. Consider the troops and logistics necessary to civil affairs teams, partner training teams, engineering and reconstruction programs, SOF, manoeuvre and support arms. Force ratio predictions are only proven correct in this context if the cumulative effort denies sanctuaries, eliminates no-go areas, establishes useful relations with locals and develops policing. Incorrect or incomplete estimates of the likelihood of effective indigenous engagement have resulted in the need for substantial troop surges in both Iraq and Afghanistan. These surges have been costly in terms of troops and national risk and arguably create a perception of incompetence that can be exploited by the insurgent.<sup>47</sup> In enemy-centric COIN, the indigenous force merely needs to 'keep up'. In comprehensive-COIN, it must lead the way and function as an exemplar institution. The necessity of indigenous support to a comprehensive-COIN environment therefore requires an intensive feasibility study.<sup>48</sup>

### **Affecting the Insurgent**

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<sup>46</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 44; Michael J. Williams, "Political-Military Lessons from U.S. Operations in Vietnam and Afghanistan," *PRISM* 3, no. 4 (September 2012): 102-105, accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/political-military-lessons.html>.

<sup>47</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, xxiii, 64-65; Fulk, *An Evaluation of Counterinsurgency...*, 2-3.

<sup>48</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, xxiv, 66-67; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup...*, xiv.



In a comprehensive-COIN campaign where the lesser proportion of military forces are devoted to purely military operations, the potential potency of the insurgency must be critically examined to realistically understand the risk to mission and risk to the force. Classical COIN theory and experience was based on engaging predominantly single, mostly homogenous insurgencies, bent on a single goal.<sup>49</sup> An ability to affect the insurgent is a fundamental COIN principle in that context. The comprehensive-COIN experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, created a completely different set of challenges as Coalition forces attempted state reconstruction while engaged with multiple fighting factions. Once again, the interdependency of comprehensive-COIN can be its undoing. Failure to properly assess potential military challenges can quickly lead to an unfulfilled security LOO and wider plan failure.

Insurgencies are recognized as protracted struggles and are contrary to western appetites for closure. They are lengthy as they generally occur in a complex environment built upon decades or more of instability on civil, political and economic levels. They are also protracted because the insurgent may preserve his combat power almost indefinitely, releasing it incrementally, at a time of his choosing and with asymmetric effects. This forces a population-centric COIN force to spread itself thinly and ineffectively to protect the entire population and maintain trust and presence. Despite its overwhelming dependence on popular support to defeat the insurgency, comprehensive-COIN still retains the need to disrupt or if possible defeat the insurgent on the physical as well as the moral plane. All other LOOs are wasted effort if the insurgent can rely upon and achieve

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<sup>49</sup> Rigden, *The British Approach...*, 4.

decisive asymmetric engagements while consistently eluding a decisive blow to his own leadership, communications, combat ability and morale.<sup>50</sup>

Classical COIN experience and an assessment of insurgent vulnerability in that context were framed against a single, primarily homogenous insurgency. In Iraq, the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime unleashed a decades old power imbalance between the Shia majority and Sunni minority. Sunni factions, with the majority of state military experience became receptive to extremist support from Al Qaeda when threatened by what they perceived to be a U.S. facilitated shift in the balance of power. Although this alliance was for the most part short lived, Al Qaeda presence distracted Coalition forces from general security operations. In response, Shia factions, supported by Iranian state sponsorship quickly produced increasingly powerful militias that challenged both the Sunnis and U.S led coalition.

Confronted with Sunni and Shia factions, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and countless criminal factions, U.S. and Coalition forces faced upwards of a dozen insurgent factions.<sup>51</sup> Given this experience, it is somewhat remarkable that the U.S. field manual merely says... "(c)ounterinsurgent commanders may face a confusing and shifting coalition of many kinds of opponents some of whom may be at odds with each other".<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> RAND, *Victory...* 50, 70; David H. Petraeus, James F. Amos, and John A. Nagl, *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24: Marine Corps Warfighting Publication No. 3-33.5* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 5(I-14), 176 (5-58), 61. (2-21).

<sup>51</sup> Amatzia Baram, "Who Are the Insurgents? Sunni Arab Rebels in Iraq", United States Institute of Peace Special Report 134, April 2005, 5-6, accessed May 20, 2003, <http://www.usip.org/publications/who-are-the-insurgents-sunni-arab-rebels-in-iraq>.

<sup>52</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency FM...*, 9.

In both population-centric and enemy-centric approaches to COIN, there are common questions and challenges as to the feasibility of tangibly affecting or disrupting the insurgent. In comprehensive-COIN where state security is necessary to enable other LOOs, the underpinning question becomes one of scale. How much of the COIN force can be allocated to offensive operations without risking the safety and protection of the population. Prevalent in all COIN theory is the tenet that tactical success by the counter-insurgent is crucial to achieving the trust and support of the population. The insurgent is far less concerned with his reputation for battlefield success; all he has to do is not lose the war. The COIN force in a comprehensive, population-centric approach must therefore be successful in the eyes of the population, throughout the country, despite whatever tactical, geographic and popular support advantages the insurgents may enjoy, without consuming the majority of its forces.<sup>53</sup>

It is therefore vital that COIN forces are able to find, clearly identify and when necessary kill insurgents and supporting elements even if they are amongst the local population or in other safe havens, without negatively affecting their own support base and reputation. If COIN forces cannot tangibly affect the insurgent through attrition and decisive and sustained interruption of recruiting and supply lines, the security line of operation will fail and so consequently will the dependent lines of operation in the comprehensive plan.

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### **The Adaptability Juxtaposition**

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<sup>53</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 41-44; Gray, *Concept Failure...*, 25.

The new COIN doctrine has two supporting assumptions that are important to this critique. Critics of this paper will answer that the comprehensive-COIN approach will always be ‘feasible’ because soldiers will sufficiently adapt to the cultural and tactical surroundings of the battle space. This seems straightforward enough. The issue then is one of limits and supposition; just how much can armies adapt and is there a space in ‘cultural understanding’, where a foreign force can convince the population to side with them in the midst of chaos and insecurity? This paper offers that a thorough pre-campaign risk analysis may indicate that there is no reasonable, sustainable measure of effort or adaptability that will compensate for certain cultural and historical predispositions. Colin Gray says that...

...COIN can and does succeed if the contexts are permissive. For example, COIN was always much more likely to be successful in the Philippines, Malaya, and El Salvador than in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq...do not assume that COIN is always doable. A host of showstoppers can rain on the parade.<sup>54</sup>

The presumption of adaptability, championed by John Nagl and David Kilcullen, lays the responsibility for finding this ‘trust space’ – in any culture and in any environment - on the soldier. Expectations of adaptability are daunting. Kilcullen asks...

...(w)hat if the theatre situation shifts under your feet? It is your worst nightmare: everything has changed and invalidates your efforts. Think of the first battle of Falujah, the al-Askariy bombing, or the Sadr uprising. What do you do? Here is where having a flexible, adaptive game plan comes in....and retain the initiative.<sup>55</sup>

Early post-invasion operations in Iraq – including Nagl’s tour – taught the U.S. (and even the more COIN-experienced British Army) that aggressive cordon and search

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<sup>54</sup> Colin S. Gray, "Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2007): 51, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/2007/Winter/gray.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 47.

operations were not degrading insurgent activity.<sup>56</sup> Some measure of adaptation was called for and Coalition forces adapted from a conventional force on force way of business to one better suited for urban control operations. These developments rightly indicated that the U.S. Army could adapt. To conduct population-centric COIN however, adaptation has to overcome vast gaps in cultural understanding and learn the art of discretionary use of force, in a battle space susceptible to collateral damage. Some U.S. commanders immediately had doubts. Brigadier Aylwn-Foster states:

...commanders believed that there was a pragmatic limit to the range of skills and approaches a front-line soldier could be expected to acquire, which de facto limited their value in terms of significant hearts and minds activity.<sup>57</sup>

Special Forces, U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) in particular, are specially trained to live with and persuade indigenous people and militaries in a counterinsurgency. Highly adaptable, Special Forces have accomplished remarkable engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan but as in Vietnam they are fewer in number and can only accomplish pockets of success.<sup>58</sup> Many SF leaders observe also that they have been ill positioned to maximize their effect. In Afghanistan they are distributed rurally to engage with the people – with some success – but then have to integrate ethnically varied and conventionally focussed indigenous troops from the north into the southern problem areas. SF has always

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<sup>56</sup> Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency in Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 40.

<sup>57</sup> Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," *Parameters*, November/December 2005, 6, accessed April/May 2013, <http://milnewstbay.pbworks.com/f/aylwin.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 166.

maximized their effect by training irregular troops who are *motivated* to fight for local equities. This has not been the predominant experience in OIF and OEF-A.<sup>59</sup>

Doctrine needs to point to things that must be done *and* to options in the face of failure and casualties. The “Learning and Adaptation” sections of FM 3-24 says that the adversary will ‘adapt to your adaptation’ and if there are multiple competing groups (like Iraq and to a degree Afghanistan), the environment becomes even more complicated.<sup>60</sup> If a tactic works this week, it will not work in the next and if a tactic works in this province it will not work in the next.<sup>61</sup> How then are soldiers – in particular rotational soldiers with short corporate memories to measure a consistent road to success if there is no baseline or military outcome (as prescribed in population-centric COIN)?<sup>62</sup>

At some point, adaptability has a breaking point. It exceeds the capacity of the best ‘lessons learned’ system to process an implement change and leaves soldiers with a sense that they can never start the day prepared. Soldiers don’t like that. The use of military force is the imposition of will. Soldiers are adaptable and learners and can sit in a tribal *shura* and listen to grievances. If they lack the means and empowerment to address those grievances, they cannot overcome fundamental flaws in the campaign estimate. Adaptation in a comprehensive-COIN context therefore, equals national endurance. National endurance and tolerance for casualties in western societies is short.

### **Cultural Intelligence – No Cheat Sheets**

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<sup>59</sup> United States, Department of Defense, Headquarters, Department of the Army, *Special Warfare: “It Takes a Village to Counter and Insurgency”*, by Matthew D. Coburn, 4th ed., vol. 20 (Fort Bragg: JFK Special Warfare Center, 2007), 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency...*, 196-197 (5-115)

<sup>61</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 59.

<sup>62</sup> Gray, *Irregular Warfare...*, 48, 52.

Shortcomings in the feasibility analysis of comprehensive-COIN cited in this paper are in large part underpinned by a misunderstood aspect of the cultural identity of the insurgent and the affected population. Like the siren call of adaptability, the new COIN doctrine similarly assumes that COIN forces can sufficiently and uniformly understand and compensate for these differences. The doctrine extensively checklists cultural intelligence and learning as a pre-deployment imperative. It does not and arguably cannot, however, predict when a force is culturally ready to embark.

The importance of cultural training and understanding to a COIN practitioner is relatively obvious and cannot be overstated. The problem is a matter of volume and time. Producing cultural affinity, Dr Emily Spencer of the Canadian Defence Academy says “should not be merely a tool to be utilized, but rather a fundamental critical enabler to success in the contemporary operating environment”. The goal she says is ‘cultural comprehension’; understanding not just what is said but what is meant”.<sup>63</sup> From experience in Afghanistan and the Balkans, this level of understanding requires language competency and a period of immersion that exceeds even the U.S., year-long tour of duty.<sup>64</sup> Even in a deliberate manner, there is simply not enough time and resources to ‘culturally prepare’ a force of the size necessary for state-building operations.

Flynn, Sisco and Ellis very cogently argue that the time for socio-cultural analysis is “left of bang” and that the time for understanding a people’s view on governance,

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<sup>63</sup>Emily Spencer, "Brains and Brawn: Cultural Intelligence 9CQ) as the 'Tool of Choice' in the Contemporary Operating Environment," *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol 11, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 17-18.

<sup>64</sup>The author conducted over 100 intelligence-gathering interviews in Kabul and environs in 2003 and 2004.

grievance and their future is before conflict radically alters their views.<sup>65</sup> This makes eminent sense noting that only the U.S. intelligence apparatus would have the resources to attempt to harness sufficient subject matter expertise to pre-emptively analyze the world's problem areas. Understanding the behaviour of the indigenous culture, when that culture or the former status quo is under threat, requires dedicated study and cultural immersion. To the 'right of bang' Gray says...

...(w)ith all the enthusiasm of a convert, our military is being encouraged to believe that understanding culture is the key to victory. We must comprehend the people and the society that we aspire to rescue from chaos and capture by dangerous creeds. This is an excellent idea, as it always has been. The main problem is that it is not achievable. Some cultural empathy certainly is attainable. But to acquire anything more than a superficial grasp of local mores and social structure demands years, if not a lifetime, of exposure and study. Our practice of tours of duty with rapid rotation is incompatible with the acquisition of cultural expertise.<sup>66</sup>

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This chapter has examined the circumstances behind the development of comprehensive-COIN theory and its doctrinal relationship with stability and state-building operations. It has introduced how the three historical COIN principles have been transferred from an enemy-centric COIN context to the vastly different undertaking of state-stability operations without being evaluated for their feasibility and with a pre-determined outlook of success. Chapters Two through Four will now look in greater depth at the risk of applying comprehensive-COIN doctrine without validating the three principles against reasonable pre-campaign analysis requirements.

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<sup>65</sup>Michael T. Flynn, James Sisco, and David C. Ellis, "Left of Bang: The Value of Sociocultural Analysis in Today's Environment," *PRISM* 3, no. 4 (September 2012): 13, accessed April 11, 2013, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/left-of-bang.html>.

<sup>66</sup>Gray, *Irregular Warfare...*, 52.



## CHAPTER TWO: BETTING ON HEARTS

*When I took a decision or adopted an alternative, it was after studying every relevant – and many an irrelevant – factor. Geography, tribal structure, religion, social customs, language, appetites, standards – all were at my finger-ends. The enemy I knew almost like my own side.*

- T.E. Lawrence, 1933<sup>67</sup>

The history and continuum of COIN operations dictates that the people are the center of gravity or ‘vital ground’ in any counter-insurgency. In order to succeed, an insurgency must be able to elicit or coerce support with relative ease as it manoeuvres through the population. In 20<sup>th</sup> century COIN operations, where altruistic state building and integrity was less the concern (Vietnam, Malaya and Algeria the most classic of examples), popular support was without a doubt an important combat enabler. Areas cleared of insurgents need only be held for shorter periods of time if insurgents were denied support from the locals. The requirement for popular support, codified in COIN theory by Galula and Trinquier was therefore obtained at a lower moral cost than the methods now permitted. Coercion, through pacification, relocation, and forcible interrogation were commonly used alternatives in the ‘classical’ campaigns when incentives could not otherwise persuade. What was ultimately important was that the population saw their treatment at the hands of government troops as ‘somewhat’ better than that offered by the insurgents.<sup>68</sup>

A comprehensive-COIN campaign is at its heart, a population-centric approach.<sup>69</sup> Given a choice, the comprehensive campaign will devote greater forces to the protection

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<sup>67</sup> Andrew M.Exum, "Cultural Intelligence and the American Experience in Iraq." (Thesis, American University of Beirut, 2005), 1. Obtained by special order.

<sup>68</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency...*, xxxiv; RAND, *Victory...*, 42.

<sup>69</sup> Canada DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, 5-1, 5-2.

of the affected population than it will to combat operations all in the spirit of ‘zero collateral damage’ and often at a price to its own security. Some critics observe that the approach has fundamentally altered COIN from its military roots as an application of military force aimed at the destruction of the insurgency.<sup>70</sup>

A population-centric approach *is* necessary if the campaign’s strategic end-state calls for rapid and comprehensive state-reconstruction. Reducing the insurgent’s leverage of poverty is directly linked to the people’s willingness to build and protect new development. New development leads to prosperity and ideally a more favourable view towards regional and hopefully national government. It is intended to reverse the cycle of state failure as depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 2.1 – Kilcullen’s Depiction of the Cycle of Instability and Violence.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 87-88; West, *Groundhog War...*, 168.

<sup>71</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*. Diagram found at:

[http://books.google.ca/books?id=A8amtX\\_z1WkC&pg=PA53&dq=kilcullen+afghanistan+cycle+of+instability+and+violence&hl=en&sa=X&ei=2nufUcO6EMWx4AOXy4HAAQ&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=kilcullen%20afghanistan%20cycle%20of%20instability%20and%20violence&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=A8amtX_z1WkC&pg=PA53&dq=kilcullen+afghanistan+cycle+of+instability+and+violence&hl=en&sa=X&ei=2nufUcO6EMWx4AOXy4HAAQ&ved=0CDEQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=kilcullen%20afghanistan%20cycle%20of%20instability%20and%20violence&f=false) ; Accessed 24 May 2013.

Genuinely winning hearts and minds is however a matter of genuine understanding and trust between the counterinsurgent, the indigenous leadership (tribal, religious, political) and the people. Without this trust, it is doubtful at best that anyone will risk their family's safety or future prosperity on a promise of a better way ahead. To do so, the doctrine now says, soldiers must earn and maintain a 'beat-cop' presence in their patrol area.<sup>72</sup>

The insurgent, in general, is a disaffected and/or aggrieved member of one of the religions, ethnicities, tribes or factions from within the affected state's or region's population. His vulnerabilities would certainly lie in the fundamental narrative of his origins. Unlike other forms of warfare, this co-dependency is unique and vital in COIN.<sup>73</sup> Success in turning or defeating the insurgent would therefore also lie in the likelihood that his grievances, motivation and resilience could also be understood and leveraged to the counterinsurgent's advantage.

Comprehensive-COIN proponents such as Kilcullen, Nagl, and Petraeus and now the official doctrine, all assert that this classical COIN principle is as vital to state building COIN today as it was to the counter-insurgency approaches in Algeria, Malaya and to a degree in Vietnam.<sup>74</sup> It follows then that the pre-campaign feasibility analysis must include an uncompromising assessment of the likelihood of penetrating the cultural fabric of the population and the insurgency, before a Commander can understand if PMESII (or other) LOO frameworks will effectively guide his overall campaign. If

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<sup>72</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 61-62; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup...*, xiii. Nagl says: "To defeat an insurgency you have to know who the insurgents are and to find that out you have to win and keep support of the people".

<sup>74</sup> Robert M. Tomes, "Relearning Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Parameters*, (Spring 2004), 27, accessed March 10, 2013, [strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/.../tomes.html](http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/.../tomes.html); Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 6; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup...*, 29.

interpersonal trust cannot be achieved between the COIN force and the population, interdependent lines of operation like government legitimacy, rule of law and infrastructure development cannot succeed. This chapter will show grave flaws in the assumption and interpretation that the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan could have been persuaded to cooperate to the extent needed to enable a comprehensive, population-centric COIN approach.

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### **Gaining Trust in a Hostile Social Order**

“All Taliban are Pashtuns, but all Pashtuns are not Taliban”.<sup>75</sup> Severing the insurgent from the people is a key classical COIN principle applied in the modern doctrine. To have overlooked the impenetrability of the Pashtun people and its ties to the Taliban was to look easily attainable history in the mouth and a failure in pre-campaign analysis. To forecast that the Pashtuns could be widely amenable to a population-centric approach was to have ignored their complex culture and rich history as tribal warriors. The ideal Pashtun man, Griffiths says, “...is the warrior poet, the man bold in battle, eloquent in counsel and moving in love”.<sup>76</sup> Having served in Kabul and Kandahar the author was struck by the noticeable mistrust of the Pashtun Afghans to western presence in comparison to the relative openness of the northern Tajiks.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Pervez Musharraf *et al.*, "Afghanistan: An After-Action Report - What Went Wrong?" editorial, *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2013, 58.

<sup>76</sup> John Charles. Griffiths, *Afghanistan: A History of Conflict* (London: Carlton Books, 2001), 107.

<sup>77</sup> Authors experience in Afghanistan 2003-4, 2007.

The Pashtuns have been the dominant ethnicity in southern Afghanistan and the northern tribal frontier of (since 1947) Pakistan for 3000 years. In 2001-2002, the Pashtun – Taliban co-dependency would have been apparent to U.S. Special Forces during their clearance of Al Qaeda and the Taliban from the southern half of the country. Twenty years earlier, the Central Intelligence Agency and the wider intelligence community knew the Pashtun as a fierce and resilient element of the anti-Soviet *mujahideen*. The Pashtun people are divided into six, periodically rival, tribal confederacies (the Durrani and Ghilzai and to a lesser extent the Karlani being North of the Durrand line and key to Afghan history).<sup>78</sup> Throughout Pashtun history, tribal rivalry is traditionally set aside when outsiders pose a threat.

In 2011, protecting the Pashtun people as a means to separate them from the Taliban had become “a fundamental goal of U.S. counterinsurgency strategy”.<sup>79</sup> This chapter will offer several reasons why the Taliban could not and cannot be substantively separated from the Pashtun people even if the COIN approach had been adopted ten years earlier. To that end, it is important to understanding how the relationship between the Pashtun people and the Taliban insurgency was initially overlooked.

In the emotional years immediately after “9-11”, the Taliban’s ideology, not its ethnicity, was of greater importance to the Bush administration’s homeland security regime given its anti-Islamist agenda. Second, the appointment of Hamid Karzai, a

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<sup>78</sup> Shahid Afsar, Maj, Samples Chris, Maj, and Woods Thomas, Maj, "The Taliban: An Organizational Analysis," *Military Review*, May/June 2008, 62, accessed March 12, 2013, [http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/repository/Understanding\\_Taliban\\_Organization\\_Mil\\_Review\(May-Jun08\).pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/repository/Understanding_Taliban_Organization_Mil_Review(May-Jun08).pdf); Robert D. Kaplan, *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 235.

<sup>79</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 165.

Durrani Pashtun, as leader of the Afghan Transitional Administration drove the political narrative towards the positive aspects of his ethnicity and the likelihood that his appointment would appease and inspire Pashtuns. Finally, while U.S. forces were focussed on Iraq, most NATO effort in the 2002-2005 period was directed towards more politically palatable police and infrastructure reconstruction programs. These were conducted in the safer, northern half of the country and were eagerly desired by former Tajik and Uzbek Northern Alliance leaders keen on retaining power.<sup>80</sup>

In stark contrast to the Uzbeks and Tajiks of who have historically sought alliances of convenience with foreign invaders - including the Soviets - the Pashtuns have remained resolute in their resistance.<sup>81</sup> Binding them together by birth is the code of honour and Pashtun identity known as *Pashtunwali*. Predating Islam, the significance of the code cannot be underestimated when attempting to understand the relationship between Pashtun culture and the Taliban.<sup>82</sup> The code rests principally upon a tribesman's obligation to fulfill and protect his family's honour or *nang*. Should the family's honour be offended, then *badal* or revenge must be exacted. This is particularly true if a family member is murdered or a female's honour has been violated. Mere presence of a non-Muslim in a family compound would constitute such an insult.

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas H. Henriksen, "Afghanistan Counterinsurgency and the Indirect Approach," *JSOU Report* 10, no. 3 (April 2010): 41.

<sup>81</sup> Carl Forsberg, Institute for the Study of War: *Afghanistan Report*, no. 3, December 2009, 15, accessed February 5, 2013, [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The\\_Talibans\\_Campaign\\_For\\_Kandahar.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The_Talibans_Campaign_For_Kandahar.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 61; Griffiths, *Afghanistan...*, 107; Seth G. Jones, "It Takes the Villages," *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2010, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66350/seth-g-jones/it-takes-the-villages?page=show>.

To an ancient people such as the Pashtun, *badal* can be exacted generations later when the offended tribe or family is in an advantageous position. Such a code speaks to the endurance and resolve of the Taliban insurgency. Families seeking revenge for losses as a result of Coalition operations often give their sons to the Taliban as a gesture of *badal*. *Melmastia* or hospitality is the obligation to provide hospitality to another Pashtun despite differences. *Melmastia* provides the Taliban with food and lodging when operating in Pashtun tribal areas. *Hamsaya* (one who shares the same shadow) demands servitude in return for protection and could involve an obligation for service in the insurgency, in exchange for land. *Hamsaya* is also consistent with the Pashtun and wider Afghan inclination to change sides in favour of the victor to preserve future honour.<sup>83</sup>

The link between the Pashtun and the Taliban is a somewhat tortured marriage of ideology and social convenience but includes indelible ethnic links. The Taliban's ability to maintain a persistent level of insurgent activity and a shadow government in the south of Afghanistan has been based in large part on its firm links to Pashtun society. Given their co-lineage as insurgents, the rise of the Taliban is also ironically linked to the excess of the Pashtun *mujahideen* in the post-Soviet period.<sup>84</sup>

The majority of Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war were Pashtun. For over a decade, Pashtun youth and Pashtun *mujahideen* fighters were radicalized in extremist *madrassas* and mosques run by *Wahabbist* clerics, funded by Saudi Arabia. New *Talibs* or 'students' were then armed

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<sup>83</sup> Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 61, 68; Joseph D. Celeski, "Operationalizing COIN," *JSOU Report* 05, no. 2 (September 2005): 67-68.

<sup>84</sup> Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign...*, 15.

and facilitated by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI).<sup>85</sup> During this period, *mujahideen* affiliation in ethnically Pashtun areas followed and strengthened tribal lines and tribal leadership was seized by increasingly powerful and abusive warlords. The predominantly Pashtun Taliban, led by a renown and pious Pashtun *mujahideen* fighter (Mullah Omar), seemed like a force of liberation to the Pashtuns and was able to easily manipulate tribal alliances and rivalries to successfully supplant the warlords. When the Taliban eventually won the civil war and control of Afghanistan in 1998, they popularized their movement by making Kandahar their seat of power. Kandahar Province in particular would benefit from Taliban favour including a blind eye toward to opium cultivation.<sup>86</sup>

In 2001-2002, U.S. intelligence analysts would have very likely discounted the Taliban as a fighting force or future insurgency of import. Six years after its initially popular arrival, many Pashtuns, especially city dwellers in Kandahar and Ghazni, had grown tired of the Taliban's ironclad enforcement of Sharia law and its extensive conscription. Popular support for the Taliban would have no doubt been assessed as low. U.S. analysts would have been similarly optimistic at the speed – albeit with the aid of U.S. air and Special Forces support – with which Barakzai and Popolzai tribesman rallied to the return of Hamid Karzai. Further fuelling this optimistic outlook was the relative ease with which Pashtun leaders seemed to revoke or withdraw their support toward the Taliban. Given the enthusiastic support offered by the Northern Alliance and what

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<sup>85</sup> Kaplan, *Soldiers of God...*, 222; Ali Ahmad. Jalali and Lester W. Grau, *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* (Quantico, VA: U.S. Marine Corps, Studies and Analysis Division, 1999), xvii. Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 60.

<sup>86</sup> Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign...*, 12-16.



seemed to be a collapse of Pashtun support in the south, the possibility of country-wide, popular support to a new, western backed Afghanistan might have seemed only a matter of resources. Underestimating the Taliban and the xenophobia of the Pashtun people was short-sighted and an ill-fated mistake.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, transfer of power from the Taliban to Pashtun warlords and tribal leaders was as much at the bequest of the Taliban and consistent with *Pashtunwali*. No doubt mindful of widespread losses to U.S. Air and ground forces, Mullah Omar publicly offered to surrender Kandahar to Afghan tribal leaders in December 2001. In doing so, Fotini and Semple say, Mullah Omar effectively released sympathetic tribal leadership from their honour bound oath to his leadership, establishing honourable conditions for ‘*hamsaya*’ (share the same shadow) with Karzai. The Alokzai chieftain Mullah Naqib similarly took sides with Karzai and played a central role in negotiating the Taliban terms of surrender. In doing so, he retained his position and control of land that would later be used for Taliban infiltration routes.<sup>88</sup> Mullah Omar’s tactics and manipulation of his own cultural norms, served a far more practical and strategic long term purpose than assessed.

In effect, Mullah Omar had left a sympathetic, shadow political apparatus in play throughout southern Afghanistan. He also left for Pakistan with some confidence that pro-Karzai, Barakzai and Popolzai leaders would re-adopt their warlord persona, alienating the poor and rural population. Of Karzai the Pashtun, Barfield says...

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas Barfield, "Afghanistan's Ethnic Puzzle," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2011): 60.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Biddle and Fotini Christia, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2010, 36-37, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66450/stephen-biddle-fotini-christia-and-j-alexander-thier/defining-success-in-afghanistan>. ; Forsberg, *The Taliban's Campaign...*, 17.

...(i)ronically, the major expected benefit of making Karzai, a Pashtun from Kandahar, President – winning the support of the southern Pashtuns – never materialized, because politics among rival clans in south divided the community between pro- and anti-Karzai factions to the benefit of the Taliban.<sup>89</sup>

Leaving the cities in the hands of the pro-Karzai administration, the Taliban retreated to conservative countryside districts such as Panjawi and Maiwand, collecting intelligence and dropping night letters, promising the Taliban's eventual return. By the end of 2002, the Taliban was reconstituting in Pakistan, its leadership firmly established in Quetta, Miran Shah and Peshawar. While it re-built, it began to slowly test the new government and Coalition forces, introducing the phenomenon of suicide bombers to areas thought safe such as Kabul.<sup>90</sup> Such a practice was contrary to western assessments that such action would have been deemed anti-Islamic by the Taliban – a first indicator of resolve and an adaptive enemy.<sup>91</sup>

In Vietnam, West says, 200,000 South Vietnamese participated in the pro-U.S. South Vietnamese Popular Force guarding their villages against 80,000 Viet Cong. Though there are eleven million Afghan Pashtuns, not a single unit of the Afghan National Army has any notable Pashtun numbers and there are fewer than 100 self-defence militias amongst thousands of villages. While many Pashtuns could indeed do without the Taliban, they seldom fight them in part due to fear of retaliation but to a greater degree because they absolutely believe that the Taliban is coming back. These

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<sup>89</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan's Ethnic Puzzle...*, 61.

<sup>90</sup> Forsberg, *That Taliban's Campaign...*, 17, 21-23; Daniel J. Smith and Raymond Millen, "Intelligence Gathering in a Counterinsurgency", 9. Accessed November 20, 2012, <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA449813>.

<sup>91</sup> The author was present during two suicide bombings against ISAF forces in Kabul in 2004. Official dialogue with respect to martyrdom not being contrary to the Koran emerged later; Scott Peterson, "Taliban Adopting Iraq-style Jihad," *The Christian Science Monitor*, September 13, 2006, accessed July 29, 2013, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0913/p01s04-wosc.html>. ; Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 69.

pervasive sentiments are both indicators of the continued impenetrability of the Pashtun people and a noted flaw in the feasibility of a population-centric approach in this environment.<sup>92</sup> After 40 years of intense and sustained warfare and a centuries' old tradition of repelling invaders, even a people of lesser resolve and xenophobia than the Pashtuns would likely be inclined to hedge their bets, before siding with a foreign force. A basic examination of the history should have made this reticence and resilience clear to population-centric COIN planners when the need for population support is so fundamental to a complex campaign. Williams says that...

.. for the strategic outcome, it does not matter if the population does not endorse the Taliban as much as it matters that they are onside with NATO/U.S. Forces. In Afghanistan, much of the population has chosen to sit on the fence rather than root out the Taliban because NATO and American forces have been unable to provide enough security in the most volatile part of the country. Victory for the Taliban, like the Communists in Vietnam, is not a matter of winning any battles against the United States; instead the goal is to wear the opponent down.<sup>93</sup>

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Pre-campaign analysis for Operation Iraqi Freedom was singularly focussed on the defeat of the Iraqi Army and the Saddam regime. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the ethno-cultural considerations outlined below were simply not considered as there was no post-war stability plan. Andrew Krepinevich agrees (in 2005) that an “inexplicable lack of U.S postwar planning was a one of three key sources of the insurgency.<sup>94</sup> For these reasons, U.S. Officers would later say, they missed the overwhelming complexity of Iraqi culture.<sup>95</sup> As ‘inexplicable’ as this all is, even a cursory look at T.E. Lawrence’s history of the British in Mesopotamia should have served

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<sup>92</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 167.

<sup>93</sup> Williams, *Political Military Lessons...*, 99.

<sup>94</sup> Krepinevich, *How to Win...*, 89.

<sup>95</sup> Exum, *Cultural Intelligence...*, 35.

as sufficient warning of the disposition of aggrieved Arab tribes. Such an examination of Iraqi culture would point to the extreme difficulty a COIN force - one of similar cultural polarity - would have when attempting to attain the interpersonal trust necessary to an effective, comprehensive campaign.

Ahmed Hashim says that tribal ancestry and its role in social hierarchy quickly fed the ranks of the insurgency. The conservative underpinnings of Iraqi tribes served as a lightning rod, he says, for radical Islamist inspiration and the fight against occupation by an 'infidel nation'. The Albueissa clan in Falujah for example, played a particularly brutal role in the insurgency and fought along clan hierarchical authorities. Saddam's financial patronage to the tribal Sheikhs also created a tradition of dependency causing many to look to the financial and criminal opportunities offered in the chaos of the insurgency and abuse of Coalition cash handouts. Despite Saddam's tribal lineage, Iraqi tribes had a history of resistance to central authority. In 1995, The 750,000 strong Dulaim tribe openly rebelled against him. To further underscore the complexity of Iraqi society, it should be noted that Saddam for all his cruelty, carefully brought this rebellion under control, given the Dulamis' pervasiveness in the state bureaucracy.<sup>96</sup>

Study of the ancient and feudal nature of the tribes and ethnicities of Iraq should have indicated the ease with which they are provoked and the enduring nature of their grievances. This to say that grievances caused in the immediate post invasion period caused an enduring antagonism that no measure of confidence building measures could repair. By the end of 2003, Hashim says, house to house searches and aggressive response

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<sup>96</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 104-108.

against locals after hit-and-run attacks by insurgents as well the disdain they perceived by U.S. troops, had seriously alienated tribal Iraqis who viewed subsequent U.S. and Coalition efforts as nothing less than occupation.<sup>97</sup> The Sunni struggle in Mosul, Hashim continues, was as much based upon the perception that U.S. forces were going to hand Mosul to the Kurds as it was to U.S. presence itself.<sup>98</sup>

Given the time and treasure spent on western backed peace enforcement Coalitions in the remnants of Tito's Yugoslavia, the likely effects of suddenly un-caging a centuries' old, ethno-religious grudge match, should have been better understood. In Iraq, the key to unlocking the fundamental roots of the insurgency is an understanding of the fundamental hatred between its Sunni and Shia populations and their history of manipulating foreign occupiers to alter the balance of power. Rayburn says that...

...(t)he British occupation of Iraq drew heavy criticism at home almost from its inception. In 1920, a large-scale Shiite insurgency cost the British more than 2000 casualties...their (British) assessments ignored the fact that Iraq's Sunni elite planned to consolidate its control of the country by excluding from politics Iraq's Shiites, Kurds, and smaller minorities. These disenfranchised groups, however could read the writing on the wall and viewed the prospect of a British withdrawal with alarm; by 1929 they had come to view the British administration as a check against Sunni domination.<sup>99</sup>

Minority Sunni domination would however characterize Iraqi governance for the next 80 years. Iraq's Sunnis, indelibly affected by the *Wahabbist* influence of their first King and the Hashemite bureaucracy saw Shiite Islam as heretical and Shiites as

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<sup>97</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 104-108.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>99</sup> Joel Rayburn, "The Last Exit from Iraq," *Foreign Affairs*, (March/April 2006): 36.

backwards peasants.<sup>100</sup> Shiite rebellions were brutally suppressed in 1930's and 1940's. Saddam's treatment of the Shiites continued this tradition.<sup>101</sup>

Through the lens of this paper, the question put is the feasibility of the comprehensive-COIN approach without establishing fundamental trust and rapport with *all* of the people of Iraq, in the middle of a *de facto* civil war - a war caused by the Coalition's intervention. To the Sunni Iraqis, it was as if the fabled Crusaders had returned and placed their blood rivals on the throne. To the Shiites, it was all that with one unexpected and exploitable benefit; a new balance of power and a chance to be Prime Minister. By 2006, analysts in the quarterly periodicals began to support this analysis. Kaufmann said that...

...(t)hree different civil wars are now raging in Iraq: the first between U.S.-led Coalition forces and antigovernment insurgents, the second between the Kurds and other communities in northern Iraq, and the third between Sunni Arabs and Shiite Arabs in the center of the country. The last is the most important because it represents the greatest potential for humanitarian disaster as well as for long-term instability in Iraq and in the region.<sup>102</sup>

Krepenivich says that because the U.S. failed to conduct thorough pre-COIN campaign analysis or form a plan, it missed two key aspects of Iraqi culture and society. The first is "Iraq's tradition of rule by those best able to seize power through violent struggle". The second was the linkage between Sunni Arab Ba'athists (mostly from Sadaam's defunct military leadership) and the growing number of avowed and/or foreign jihadists.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Rayburn, *The Last Exit...*, 38.

<sup>101</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency in Iraq...*, 98.

<sup>102</sup> Chaim Kaufmann, "Separating Iraqis, Saving Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2006): 156.

<sup>103</sup> Krepinevich, *How to Win...*, 89.

In 2003, on the cusp of the Sunni insurgency, Paul Bremer the U.S. appointed head of the Coalition Provisional Administration (CPA), in a process called ‘de-Ba'athification’, took the decision to dissolve the Sunni dominated Iraqi Army. As a result, the power structure in Iraq was quickly and violently shaken and would be forever changed.<sup>104</sup> Hashim opines that almost immediately, a sense of nationalism, honour, revenge and most significantly, collective humiliation overtook the Sunnis – the former ruling elite, the merchant class and the former bureaucracy.<sup>105</sup> It was clear early on that the Sunnis felt they were in a fight for their way of life, a narrative not embraced by the Coalition. Indeed, favouritism or indeed forgiveness towards the Sunnis was contrary to official policy.<sup>106</sup>

Saddam’s Ba’ath regime was commonly thought to be secular in its practices. In fact, Sadaam’s policy of outreach to faith – an unintended effect of the 1991 Gulf War - in the last decade of his regime set the conditions for a radicalized insurgency. Following his 1991 defeat, Saddam began to promote the re-Islamization of Iraqi society in an attempt to bolster his legitimacy. This policy re-introduced Islamic education and empowered Sunni clerics just as deteriorating economic conditions - caused by international sanctions - caused a reverse migration to more rural, tribal and more Islamic surroundings. Hashim says that this context set the conditions for the religious radicalization of Sunni Arabs when they sought answers to their new marginalization.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 80-83. Baram, *Who are the Insurgents?...*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 98-99.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; Baram, *Who are the Insurgents?...*, 15.

During the crucial summer of 2003, Sunni clerics focussed their increasingly Salafist sermons on the occupation of the ‘unbeliever’. Religion and nationalism were consequently bonded into a cohesive narrative that spoke to the inner emotion of men bound by tradition to fight for their families’ honour. Underpinned by the omnipresent fear of Shia militias and increased clashes with U.S. Forces, it is at least unsurprising that Sunni insurgent organizations embraced the arrival of foreign radicals such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and AQI. The unfortunate side-effect was that Al Qaeda presence would dominate the attention of U.S. forces further distracting them from the wider needs of the Iraqi population.<sup>108</sup>

These and other events in the 2003-2007 period set the worst possible conditions under which to embark upon a population-centric comprehensive-COIN approach. The battles for Falujah (to include the use of Shia troops by Coalition Forces against the Sunnis), the proliferation of crime and kidnapping, the failure of the economic development program and the collateral damage in the battle against AQI left the Sunni population with little more than distrust and resentment. As previously discussed, perceived COIN success in Anbar, and Tal Afar and the 2006 Sunni rejection of AQI were all short lived. Attempts to reconcile Sunni and Shia through an integrated, representative government were at best an optimistic outlook to a centuries old conflict. Sunni based terrorist attacks against Shia mosques and gatherings continue today.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 104, 110-13, 116.

<sup>109</sup> “At least 50 people died and 160 others were wounded in the co-ordinated wave of suicide, car and roadside bombings in and around Baghdad... 200 civilian killed in Feb 13”, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Claims Deadly Baghdad Bombings," *BBC News*, March 20, 2013, accessed June 14, 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-21857424>.



U.S. intervention in Iraq rapidly changed a longstanding and unpopular monopoly of power by a minority over a majority. In such volatile conditions, the intervention force becomes the buffer between hostile factions with arguably irreconcilable grievances. Establishing conditions of trust and understanding with the Shia majority became as problematic as the situation with the Sunnis. That lack of trust and a growing divergence of agenda with the U.S. led Coalition was yet another unsuitable factor for the pursuit of population-centric COIN and state restructure.

The U.S. intervention and the interruption of Sunni dominance offered the Shia an opportunity to exercise their popular majority and step out of decades of persecution and economic inequality. Prior to the invasion, Shia areas such as Basra and the Sadr City section of Baghdad were left vastly underdeveloped and were routinely targeted by Sadaam's security forces. Shia political leadership therefore supported the CPA's plans for democratic elections exacerbating suspicion and mistrust among the Sunnis. While the Shia had legitimate grievances they were undoubtedly vengeful and desperate for change.

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Iranian political influence and the sudden reversal of empowerment in Iraqi society caused irreparable mistrust between the U.S. led coalition and the Shia. The Iranian-trained 'Badr Corps' soon took control of the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior under Shia government leadership and effectively ran the state's military and paramilitary forces.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Iran used its influence over the Shia clergy to ensure that a pro-western government could never control its volatile neighbour. Financed by Iran, his

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<sup>110</sup> Kaufman, *Separating Iraqis...*, 157; Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 253.

<sup>111</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 248.

‘soldiers’ trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, popular Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr ran his own well-oiled insurgency from the streets of Sadr City and in Basra. Soon Shia death squads rivalled Sunni insurgent cells in their ferocity. Of the resulting cycle of violence Kaufmann (in 2006) says that...

...(t)oday no Iraqi Sunni is safe anywhere within the reach of Shiite militias or Shiite controlled police forces and no Shiite whom Sunni suicide bombers or assassination squads can get to is safe either. The danger is greatest and the violence worst where the two communities cohabit, as in Baghdad and in parts of the four surrounding provinces – Anbar, Babil, Diyala and Salahuddin.<sup>112</sup>

The British had similar difficulty with the Shia in Basra. Critics would cite British hubris and their ‘soft touch’ (a euphemism for population-centric) counter-insurgency approach. The Telegraph’s analysis concluded that “...smiles and handshakes could never alone have worked. Even previous peace support operations, such as Bosnia, had only been resolved by the use, or threat, of sufficient force”.<sup>113</sup>

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FM3-24 COIN FM, Apolitical Motivations, “CAUSES” states that...

...(i)nsurgents employ deep-seated, strategic causes as well as temporary, local ones, adding or deleting them as circumstances demand....Without an attractive cause, an insurgency might not be able to sustain itself. But a carefully chosen cause is a formidable asset; it can provide a fledgling movement with a long term, concrete base of support. The ideal cause attracts the most people while alienating the fewest and is one that counterinsurgents cannot co-opt.<sup>114</sup>

There is no more formidable cause than the real or perceived threat to cultural identity. Noted COIN advisor Dr. Terry Tucker states: “*placelessness* – no land to own – (a) threat to my roots, my culture, my identity and the fear that it will be displaced or lost

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<sup>112</sup> Kaufman, *Separating Iraqis...*, 157.

<sup>113</sup> "Iraq War: 'We Have to Face the Truth and Admit We Failed'" *The Telegraph*, March 9, 2013, accessed May 23, 2013, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/9919666/Iraq-War-we-have-to-face-the-truth-and-admit-we-failed.html>.

<sup>114</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency...*, 17-18.

– feeds the insurgent narrative.<sup>115</sup> This paper is not a validation of the insurgent’s cause. Rather it is intended to shine a spotlight on the timelessness of ingrained cultural values and the lengths that desperation – exacerbated by anarchy and foreign agendas – will drive villagers, shop keepers, clerics and deposed generals to defend their cause.<sup>116</sup> As thorough and as culturally aware as the U.S., UK and Canadian comprehensive-COIN manuals are, the thoroughness of their application cannot and will not wave away the suspicion that the COIN force is building a lasting government of occupation. Bing West says that...

...(there is) mutual suspicion and alienation between the troops and the local tribes. [U.S. (COIN) doctrine (now) includes state building] which is “vastly more ambitious than the enemy destruction focus in Vietnam”. (This) equal weight to security and the promotion of good governance, economic development and rule of law makes U.S. soldiers essentially responsible for building a nation among unreceptive and recalcitrant Islamic tribes – an impossible mission for foreigners.<sup>117</sup>

How indeed can a foreign force ‘win hearts and minds’ when its very presence is or becomes the “attractive cause”? Galula and Trinquier would undoubtedly agree that the ‘hearts and minds’ approach was difficult enough in its intended setting; one insurgency, one (functioning) government and one intervention force. The task becomes vastly more complicated when multiple parties oppose you (the COIN Force and/or the government it

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<sup>115</sup> Terry Tucker, *The Operational Art of Counter-Insurgency: A Handbook for Instructors and Advanced Practitioners of Irregular Warfare* (Norderstedt: GRIN Verlag, 2011), no pagination. See: The Op Art of Counter-Insurgency; Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 68-69.

<sup>116</sup> Smith, *Intelligence Gathering...*, 3-4. Is insurgent propaganda more effective and believable – Galula: insurgents develop a myth of grievances when the population feels unattached to government.

<sup>117</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 168.

has created) for different and equally profound reasons thereby pre-empting a coherent single message.<sup>118</sup>

Hashim's time on the ground in 2003 and his extensive interviews with Sunnis led him to the conclusion that even 'moderate insurgents' from the middle class held an overwhelming and intractable perception that the United States had come to occupy Iraq *ad infinitum*; a strategic intervention to place the U.S. between Iran and Syria. To the Iraqi at a personal level, any incursion into family life (a house or vehicle search) by a foreigner against a proud Arab people would be taken as an act of hostility provoking a sense of duty as a man, a Muslim and a Sunni. Soon the Coalition force became the 'terrorist' and all casualties even sectarian would be blamed on the foreign occupier.<sup>119</sup>

Not including the rich body of historical and anthropological literature on these two nations and their peoples, it seems clear that warning signs were sufficiently available from spring 2003 to Christmas 2006 in Iraq and from the end of counter-Al Qaeda operations in 2002 in Afghanistan, to have questioned the feasibility of winning popular support necessary to prosecuting a comprehensive-COIN campaign.<sup>120</sup> As examined in this Chapter, the likelihood of establishing a broad and comprehensive atmosphere of trust in the population necessary to defeating the insurgent agenda was low at best. Put in the words of the counterinsurgent; "Dialogue with the villagers a U.S. Captain says,"

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<sup>118</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 42.

<sup>119</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 102-103. United States, Congressional Research Service, War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress, by Steven Bowman and Catherine Dale (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2009), 61, accessed April 5, 2013, [www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40156.pdf](http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40156.pdf).

<sup>120</sup> Exum, *Cultural Intelligence...*, 42.

borders on parody – money produces little in results – Many Afghans see foreign troops as people who’ve just landed from the moon”.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 167.

### CHAPTER THREE: THE NEED FOR A STATE TO SUPPORT

*Afghanistan is a country, not a nation. It has four distinct national groups in it – three tied by ethnicity and/or religion to one of the country’s neighbours and divided from the fourth by the Hindu Kush; the fourth being a collection of loosely confederated tribes.*

- *Dr. (Col ret’d) Douglas McGregor to a U.S. House Committee, 2009.*<sup>122</sup>

*Officials now dismiss the 2004-2005 years ... as a fruitless ‘rush to transition,’ as one senior defence official here put it, ... ‘as they stand up, we’ll stand down’... has been all but banished from the Green Zone, as has the notion of measuring U.S. progress in Iraq by the number of Iraqi troops trained or by changes in U.S. casualty counts.*

- *Senior U.S. DOD Official*<sup>123</sup>

The central premise of this chapter is that comprehensive-COIN theory is gravely flawed as it assumes that comprehensive state re-construction can occur in the midst of a state-wide counter-insurgency fight. As the success of comprehensive-COIN is based on maintaining an even paced tempo of population support, development, military operations and governance, the notion that governance (bureaucracy, judiciary, and financial system) can be hewn from the ashes of state collapse while maintaining the initiative over an insurgency, defies sound reasoning.

Strictly speaking, this paper challenges this premise as it distorts the historical context upon which this core principle is based. Galula, Trinquier, Thompson and Templar for all their relative and temporal success, provided COIN approaches (adopted by today’s doctrine) in the context of existing and functional governments, even if those governments were colonial administrations or quasi-states. Success against the insurgency was measured against the rule of law imposed by those administrations. Galula stressed

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<sup>122</sup> Finding a New Way Forward in Afghanistan, Selected Members - House of Representatives Cong., 7 (2009) (testimony of Douglas Macgregor, PhD. Colonel (ret) U.S. Army.). [www.douglasmacgregor.com/Presentation for House Members 6 OCT...](http://www.douglasmacgregor.com/Presentation_for_House_Members_6_OCT...)

<sup>123</sup> United States, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, Stand Up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces, by Lorry M. Fenner (Washington, D.C., 2007), pg. 22, accessed May 25, 2013, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hasc\\_iraq\\_sec\\_forces\\_27jun07.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hasc_iraq_sec_forces_27jun07.pdf).

that a nation resistant to insurgency has: “national consensus [behind the regime]; resoluteness of the counterinsurgent leadership [to forestall the gradual growth of the insurgency]; the machine for the control of the population [political structure, the administrative bureaucracy; the police; the armed forces]; and political structure [political parties and a tolerance for political opposition that would counter the insurgents narrative]”.<sup>124</sup> None of these existed in the transition from combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. While the CPA in Iraq was certainly resolute in its opposition to insurgency, we have seen in the previous chapter how it was perceived as an occupying force. The Afghan transitional regime will be examined in this chapter but suffice is to say that it lacked all of the strengths defined by Galula. Kaplan says that...

...in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the central governments, which COIN was ultimately supposed to strengthen, were another matter. If the identity and interests of government obstruct the regime’s willingness or ability to govern its people with legitimacy, and if the intervening power has little leverage to alter this fact, then a counterinsurgency campaign may be futile.<sup>125</sup>

Haines says that ‘FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency’, “places significant emphasis on the value of capable institutions [and] the authors assume that resources necessary to develop a capable institution will be available even if the embattled government is unable or unwilling to provide them”.<sup>126</sup> In fairness, FM 3-24 and its Allied cousins are intended to be enduring documents and not purely outputs of OIF and OEF-A where all vestiges of the state apparatus were absent. That said, the doctrine provides a plethora of military obligations in support of the development of state institutions but provides very little advice for COIN in a political vacuum. FM 3-24 simply says that...

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<sup>124</sup> Galula, *Counterinsurgency...*, 26-27.

<sup>125</sup> Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 90.

<sup>126</sup> David R. Haines, "COIN in the Real World," *Parameters*, (Winter 2008-9) 45, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/08winter/haines.pdf>.

...(w)here a functioning civil authority does not exist, COIN forces must work to establish it. Where U.S. forces are trying to build a HN (host nation) government, the interim government should transition to HN authority as soon as possible. Counterinsurgents must work within the framework of the institutions established to maintain order and security. In these conditions, COIN operations more closely resemble police work than combat operations.<sup>127</sup>

Proponents of the comprehensive approach will no doubt challenge that a functioning government exists in Iraq and that despite grave challenges to security and governance, Afghanistan is in a better place than it was in 2001. This paper would argue that Iraq remains extremely fragile and the gravity of asymmetric attacks between Sunni and Shia is not reflective of a state-stability plan gone well. The same situation or worse exists in Afghanistan.<sup>128</sup>

The paradox, as discussed in Chapter One and explored further in this Chapter is that the current comprehensive (population-centric) COIN doctrine assumes the need for a strong central state but relies upon an undefined strategy and assumption that this is possible and appropriate to each situation. The West Point Conference on U.S. Affairs says that...

...this central government approach “may be appropriate for specific conditions and political objectives; empowering or co-opting local elites (such as tribal sheikhs in Anbar) may prove superior in others cases. In still others it might be preferable simply to balance insurgents and the central state, or to create tacit deals within a federal-style system that balances peripheral elites against the central government. Once the role of the counterinsurgency recedes, recognizing the diversity of both strategically acceptable outcomes and alternate means for accepting these outcomes becomes essential.<sup>129</sup>

Clear then, is the point that even if the military component of COIN operations goes well, it cannot assure the same for the ‘good-governance’ line of operations. Military planners, responsible for security, protection and offensive lines of operation require these

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<sup>127</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency...*, 247. (7-29)

<sup>128</sup> Emma Sky, "Iraq, From Surge to Sovereignty," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 2 (March/April 2011): 125,127; CRS-*War in Afghanistan...*, 5.

<sup>129</sup> SCUSA 64, *Long Live COIN...*, 5.



institutions to be operational and balanced. If they are not, detainees remain in detention, the rule of law has no standard and the insurgent narrative takes advantage of these inconsistencies. The legitimacy of soldiers attempting to earn the trust of the population is compromised, tempers lead to mistakes and someone gets killed. It holds therefore, that for a comprehensive-COIN force to maintain the initiative, the likelihood of operative, acceptable governance ‘soon’ after the start of operations must be high. The substantiation rests in the classic COIN axiom that the physical and chronological initiative rests with the insurgent. Gray says that...

“(w)ith respect to COIN, military setbacks and a growing public conviction that ever greater defeats loom in the fairly near future are likely to be much more deadly to established authority than to its armed foes. If insurgents are beaten in the typically small-scale combats of largely guerrilla-style warfare, if they suffer damaging loss of political agents to the security services, they usually have the strategic option of retreating, repairing and recovering and returning when time has wrought its hoped-for magic by improving the context for violent action...The insurgent’s political cause or causes, can survive a period of strategic weakness promoted by military defeats whereas the government cannot. Political legitimacy is in part a matter of public confidence earned by providing credible evidence that the future is ‘ours and not theirs’.”<sup>130</sup>

### **Build a Government...Then Support it?**

The undertaking of nation building in Afghanistan and Iraq has been likened to the Marshall Plan and the post-war reconstruction of Germany and Japan; a deliberate attempt to establish modern western democracies where no such tradition truly existed.<sup>131</sup> Pre-campaign analysis of the history of governance of Iraq and Afghanistan should have brought such a resource intensive course of action into question. The likelihood of establishing civil governance and reliable security forces in an atmosphere of civil and insurgent provoked conflict should have been assessed as unlikely at best.

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<sup>130</sup> Gray, *Concept Failure?...*, 27.

<sup>131</sup> Paul R. Pillar, "Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 18.

Its borders carved out the remnants of the Ottoman Empire; Iraq has known nothing other than central, totalitarian governance by the Sunni minority since its creation in 1921. The borders, as the previous Chapter opines, would also serve to cage fiercely independent Kurds and deeply antagonistic Sunni and Shia Arabs all under one hastily constructed tent. Saddam's state-capitalist regime (1968-2003) was underpinned by the suppression of ethnic or secular rebellions at a rate of one per decade. Iraq had never known a popular vote or representative government. For over a century, power was based on identity (mostly Sunni) and protection of power and privilege all enforced by patronage and state-sponsored coercion.<sup>132</sup> Failure to evaluate the gravity of sudden change caused by the Coalition invasion had immediate and negative effects on the state reconstruction plan. Cordesman says in his 2004 analysis of Intelligence Lessons Learned that...

...(p)ost conflict planning faced many complications as it was difficult accurately to predict what conditions would exist in post-Saddam Iraq. In particular the degree to which Iraqi administrative structures would remain to provide a ready framework for continuity and the extent to which the international community would engage were unknown. It was only after the fall of the regime that the extent of Ba'ath party domination of nearly all aspects of the Iraq state and society became clear. The impact of the sudden collapse of the regime was enormous, with the removal not just of top officials but the whole of senior and most of middle management. The sudden liberation of the population that had suffered under such a long-ruling and viciously repressive regime also led to outbreaks of anarchy, looting and crime. These effects significantly complicated the post-conflict task.<sup>133</sup>

Worse still, the literature indicates that there was a resistance to acknowledge and deal with the post-combat operations scenario. Cordesman says that from a British perspective, detailed post-conflict planning took place in parallel but all in the hope that a diplomatic solution was forthcoming. Consequently, Whitehall carefully restricted any

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<sup>132</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 66-67.

<sup>133</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Intelligence Lessons Learned of the Iraq War*, working paper (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), 92-93, accessed March 14, 2013, [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/iraq\\_intelligenceiraqwar.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/iraq_intelligenceiraqwar.pdf).

assessments of the post conflict outcome to a small planning group to avoid giving the impression that conflict was inevitable.<sup>134</sup>

In the midst of wrestling with the WMD dilemma Pillar says that...

...(b)efore the war, on its own initiative, the intelligence community (IC) considered the principal challenges that any post-invasion authority in Iraq would be likely to face. It presented a picture of a political culture that would not provide fertile ground for democracy and foretold a long, difficult and turbulent transition. It projected that a Marshall Plan-type effort would be required to restore the Iraqi economy, despite Iraq's abundant oil resources. It forecast that in a deeply divided Iraqi society, with Sunnis resentful over the loss of their dominant position and Shiites seeking power commensurate with their majority status, there was a significant chance that the groups would engage in violent conflict unless an occupying power prevented it. And it anticipated that a foreign occupying force would itself be the target of resentment and attacks-including by guerrilla warfare-unless it established security and put Iraq on the road to prosperity in the first few weeks or months after the fall of Saddam. In addition, the intelligence community offered its assessment of the likely regional repercussions of ousting Saddam. It argued that any value Iraq might have as a democratic exemplar would be minimal and would depend on the stability of the new Iraqi government and the extent to which democracy in Iraq was seen as developing from within rather than being imposed by an outside power. More likely, war and occupation would boost political Islam and increase sympathy for terrorist objectives- and Iraq would become a magnet for extremists from elsewhere in the Middle East.<sup>135</sup>

Attempts by the CPA to restore portions of the economy in the critical early post combat operations days failed due to cultural and historical ignorance. Surprisingly overlooked were simple studies like food supply and infrastructure. Saddam's neglect of the agricultural and food supply system, the health and public infrastructure systems (like power) represented a national crisis before the arrival of Coalition troops.<sup>136</sup> The notion that Iraq could be quickly re-developed based on its oil wealth was another ill-informed illusion. Plunged into and kept in debt by the decade long Iraq-Iran war, the 1991 Gulf War, and post '91 UN sanctions, Iraq's oil, industry and public infrastructure had fallen

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<sup>134</sup> Cordesman, *Intelligence...*, 92.

<sup>135</sup> Pillar, *Intelligence, Policy...*, 18-19.

<sup>136</sup> Cordesman, *Intelligence...*, 92.

into grave disrepair. Iraq's economic system was based on state-owned industry, a system not known for incentives or entrepreneurial inspiration. Iraqis knew little else.<sup>137</sup>

As the CPA routinely failed to address these issues, the burden of reconstruction fell on the military precisely when it needed to focus on the security situation. Cordesman says...

...(a)t the end of the combat phase of the operation Coalition forces occupied the key cities and towns in a country with a ...population of some 24 million people and total land area of over 437,000 square kilometres...The almost wholesale collapse of the Iraqi administration presented Coalition forces with a triple challenge of simultaneously securing, administering and rebuilding the country. The continued absence.. for security reasons...of NGOs meant that the military had to combine their primary role of providing security with reconstruction tasks...(and) has placed a greater burden on them...and contributed to the need for force level adjustments.<sup>138</sup>

No where in the preceding scenario is there sound foundation for COIN operations in a comprehensive or even classical context. On the contrary, and as we have seen in the preceding Chapter, a competition for resources in a power vacuum creates a near perfect environment for deeply entrenched grievances when there are multiple, competing factions. The slightest mistake by the COIN force could (and did) lead to an unrecoverable spiral of violence. It would take four more years, blood, treasure and a surge of 20, 000 troops to gain sufficient security to achieve compromise between the rival factions and a fragile, power sharing arrangement. A failure to conduct pre-campaign analysis placed the COIN force in a dangerous and untenable position.<sup>139</sup>

While Afghanistan's chronology as a state is twice that of Iraq, its modern history does no more to explain or substantiate its borders. The history of Afghan governance, Barfield says, is about local, regional, ethnic compromise and agreement; it must be

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<sup>137</sup> Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life...*, 124-131.

<sup>138</sup> Cordesman, *Intelligence...*, 93.

<sup>139</sup> Gentile, *Strategy of Tactics...*, 10.

allowed to self police itself.<sup>140</sup> The process of consensus across the breadth of Afghanistan is only truly achieved through tribal counsel or *Loya Jirga* conducted under a banner of truce.<sup>141</sup> This centuries old practice is carefully staged to set conditions for success and the consequences of an unsuccessful outcome will result in blood feud. Afghan democracy, one COIN practitioner observed, might not look like what Westerners expect – it is Greek style democracy and the most pure democracy he has ever witnessed – ‘what works for them may not look like what works for us’<sup>142</sup>

In fact, centrality and legitimacy are counter-intuitive in Afghan culture and sense of governance. The most peaceful periods in modern Afghan history were under the Shahs who left governance to regional and tribal leadership.<sup>143</sup> Ali Jalali says that...

...(t)he issue of legitimacy has figured prominently in the country’s development during the past three turbulent decades. Since 1978, the unsuccessful struggle by successive governments to establish legitimacy became a major factor in destabilizing the state. The bloody Communist coup of 1978 sparked a crisis that haunted the country’s political infrastructure for decades. None of the ruling powers that succeeded the old regime managed to gain long-term legitimacy. All, including the Communists (1978-92), *mujahideen* (1992-96), and the Taliban (1996-2001) based their political authority on ideology enforced by military power – a process alien to mainstream Afghan values. The regime’s efforts were challenged by religious and cultural resistance and hampered by factional divides, structural deficiency, economic failure and foreign interference....(b)uilding effective governance at the provincial and district levels is the key to legitimacy and stabilization.<sup>144</sup>

The path to comprehensive-COIN in Afghanistan (and arguably Iraq) was no doubt intended as incremental but once again, a failure in pre-campaign analysis seems clear.

The likelihood of a unified political structure, resolute against the insurgency, should

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<sup>140</sup> Barfield, *Afghanistan’s Ethnic Puzzle...*, 55-56.

<sup>141</sup> Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN...*, 64.

<sup>142</sup> COIN Symposium Conference Report, proceedings of COIN in Afghanistan, Fort Leavenworth (USA/USMC Counterinsurgency Center, 2011), 2, [http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/repository/coin\\_symposium\\_may\\_2010/final\\_products/COIN\\_symposium\\_2010\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/coin/repository/coin_symposium_may_2010/final_products/COIN_symposium_2010_Final_Report.pdf).

<sup>143</sup> Jones, *It Takes the Villages...*, 127.

<sup>144</sup> Ali A. Jalali, "Afghanistan: Regaining Momentum," *Parameters*, Winter 2007-8, 8-9, accessed March 12, 2013, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/07winter/jalali.pdf>.

have been deemed unlikely at best. In the Afghan context, a proper historical and cultural analysis should have indicated that such a government would be counter-intuitive to the COIN message. A suspicion of central government backed by non-Islamic powers to the ultra-conservative Pashtuns and even to the wider tribal populace could only reinforce the insurgent's message that an infidel occupying power was the cause of all woe. The Taliban on the other hand...

“... (s)ince being toppled in 2001.. have mercilessly targeted tribal elders who support the Karzai government, apparently viewing them as one of their greatest rivals. At the same time, President Karzai's weak government has struggled to protect and strengthen tribal elders, hundreds of whom have been killed in assassinations and bomb attacks”<sup>145</sup>

Fundamental to any COIN effort (in particular a comprehensive one) is the critical aspect of initiative. The window to substantively overcome the Taliban narrative through compatible and appropriate governance was during the 2001 to 2003 period while the Taliban were reconstituting in Pakistan. Failing to have invested in a true understanding of governance appropriate to the traditions and needs of the people, this initiative was lost. Kilcullen says that like in Iraq...

“... (i)nternational assistance efforts focussed on building police and courts and ministries and institutions at the level of the central state ...bogged down in bureaucracy, duplication and inefficiency. This break down created a vacuum at the local level, which the Taliban filled. They came in at the grassroots level and took over the functions of security, mediation, dispute resolution and community policing, and they brought the world's most convenient cash crop – the poppy – to the Afghan farmer. The Taliban thus successfully sidestepped our top down approach and were able to out govern the Karzai government at the local level”<sup>146</sup>

The miscalculated approach towards central government started out of necessity in the hope that appointing Karzai President would cause Pashtuns to withhold support from the Taliban. Later, as the U.S. withdrew forces for the OIF campaign, it looked to

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<sup>145</sup> Ruhullah Khapalwak and David Rohde, "A Look at America's New Hope: The Afghan Tribes," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2010, *The Nation* sec, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 157.

increased NATO troop contributions to maintain security. European members complied but demanded a road to ‘legitimate’ democratic government as their price of membership. Tribal leadership at the 2002 *Loya Jirga* – including the Pashtuns – consented to Karzai’s transitional Presidency in deference to his royal, Durrani lineage. They no doubt misunderstood that that consent would lead them down a path to a western style of central governance.<sup>147</sup>

The likelihood that such a government would be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the rural population was vastly over-estimated if properly evaluated at all. Corruption, Griffith’s says...

.. has always presented a major problem in Afghan government, whether under an absolute monarchy, a democratic monarchy, or a Marxist autocracy...(t)he problem was (and is) to draw a dividing line between corruption and the customarily permissible nepotism – indeed, to know just how far it is practicable to go in the tightly-knit society of the Afghan governing classes in breaking down that nepotism in favour of meritocracy....it is a question of survival.<sup>148</sup>

If not in 2001 then certainly by the time (2007-) comprehensive-COIN was the order of the day, this relatively well known norm should have cast considerable doubt as to the likelihood of conducting COIN with a partner of equal legitimacy. At the grass roots level where COIN is won or lost, Afghans, Williams says...

...want a government that performs traditional administrative functions such as resolving disputes in a just fashion. If someone violates their irrigation rights, they want the authorities to exact the standard fine of 31 pounds of wheat...In such administrative matters, the Taliban’s shadow governments have generally proven more energetic and impartial than Hamid Karzai’s government.<sup>149</sup>

At the operational and tactical level, making allies of tribal leaders keen on ousting the Taliban makes sense; it’s commonly seen as good COIN practice. In 2001,

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<sup>147</sup> Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 97; Barfield, *Afghanistan’s Ethnic Puzzle...*, 61.

<sup>148</sup> Griffiths, *Afghanistan...*, 157.

<sup>149</sup> Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 102.

those allies were the same warlords who had fought over the scraps of power during the 1992-96 civil war. Karzai's appointment of family and friends – many of whom were the same warlords – was indeed 'the Afghan' way but set a pattern of promises (recall the Afghan view of betrayal) to self-interested leaders that fundamentally undermined future 'development' and 'legitimacy' lines of operations.<sup>150</sup> In order to turn the Shinwari tribe against the Taliban for example, the U.S. was forced to promise that its one million dollars in aid would go directly to the tribe's elders and "bypass (local) Karzai government officials, whom Shinwari elders dismiss as corrupt and ineffective".<sup>151</sup> Examples of government corruption would exceed the length of this paper. This example, however, highlights a key COIN transaction that required a consistent message between the COIN force and the indigenous government. The COIN force could not produce one.

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### **Can't Stay Forever – This Is Your Fight**

"Better the Arab do it tolerably than you do it perfectly" The fifteenth and perhaps least politically correct of Lawrence's 'Twenty-Seven Articles' on insurgency continues to be a fundamental principle of any COIN approach.<sup>152</sup> The British Army Field Manual on "Countering Insurgency" reminds COIN practitioners that...

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<sup>150</sup> Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 104; Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 40.

<sup>151</sup> New York Times, *A Look at America's...*, 3.

<sup>152</sup> See T. E. Lawrence, "The 27 Articles," *The Arab Bulletin*, 20 August 1917. Accessed at [http://telawrence.net/telawrencenet/works/articles\\_essays/1917\\_twenty-seven\\_articles.htm](http://telawrence.net/telawrencenet/works/articles_essays/1917_twenty-seven_articles.htm). ; Celeski, *Operationalizing COIN...*, 74: Celeski says, "The Army and militia and police forces...put on a local face when dealing with the populace. The nuances of language, customs and cultures can only be navigated by native-born people. We are not operating against a terrain oriented enemy; we are operating on 'human terrain'".



“(the indigenous police and army) will be the forces ultimately responsible for security. Until they can take the lead, external support will be required... *The issue at stake* will be how quickly indigenous forces can take the lead and sustain security operations”. As to quality, the manual says, Lawrence’s aphorism will signify a ‘reasonable’ transition point for the COIN force to transfer the lead.<sup>153</sup>

Simply, a willing, progressively competent and trustworthy indigenous force must exist – or be produced rapidly – to be consistent to the fundamental principles of counterinsurgency.

Also important to the point of this paper is the relationship between a comprehensive-COIN plan and the indirect approach to fighting insurgencies through the use of indigenous forces. Strategically, the indirect approach – transferring the fight to the host nation security forces – is supposed to relieve the burden of large American conventional deployments. As it applies to the conduct of a comprehensive-COIN campaign, it is necessarily predicated on the COIN force’s ability to “win over the population to furnish recruits for ...security forces, to turn over information on ...insurgents and to bestow loyalty on...(the) central government.”<sup>154</sup> There is therefore an intrinsic link between lines of operation; support of the people equals support of the security forces equals support of government policies. This is not necessarily true of enemy-centric COIN like Vietnam or Algeria where the destruction of the insurgent took primacy and the foreign intervention forces retained the lead. The question returns to the

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<sup>153</sup> RAND *Victory...*, 66-67. The study shows successful COIN outcomes when local/regional/national authorities (police, military) who “can establish long-term relationships with their own people are developed and empowered. A successful outcome will embrace training and equipping of the indigenous forces and will take care not to upset cultural and societal representation between the forces’ composition and the population that they will engage. Local militias are not bad practice per se but their goals and techniques must not be at cross purposes with the overall framework of governance and enforcement intended as the outcome”.

<sup>154</sup> Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 3; Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup...*, xiv.

likelihood that an indigenous force could be created quickly, effectively and with national popular support. Was pre-campaign analysis in Iraq and Afghanistan flawed or ignored?

The 2007 U.S. House Armed Services Committee summarizes the government's assessment of this question. It says that...

...(m)ost people now accept that the assumptions about how challenging the Iraq war would be were seriously flawed. Many people argue that the sudden, and unanticipated, disbanding of the Iraqi military was a mistake, and that extreme De-Ba'athification was also an error. In addition, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Government as a whole, did not adjust its policies, plans, and practices fast enough, or extensively enough, once these errors became clear.<sup>155</sup>

The report also indicates that at a cost (then) of \$19 Billion, the U.S. had created a force of about 350, 000 soldiers but of questionable quality, capability and sustainability. The capability and willingness of the police was of even greater question.<sup>156</sup>

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Grossly miscalculating the importance of Iraq's sectarian divide caused grave challenges to the formation of a cohesive Iraqi Army. Kaplan argues that Sunni tribal support for the 2007 surge against AQI was as much to do with Sunni fears of Shia dominance in the civil struggle as it was tribal rejection of radicalism. That said, it was, for a time, a moment when many of the Sunni tribes seemed to understand the population-centric message. When, however, the Pentagon urged the Shia dominated Maliki government to absorb the same Sunni tribal militias into the new national army it only marginally acquiesced and actually jailed many. In terms of future state stability, there

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<sup>155</sup>United States, House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, *Stand Up and Be Counted: The Continuing Challenge of Building the Iraqi Security Forces*, by Lorry M. Fenner (Washington, D.C., 2007), 6, accessed May 25, 2013, [http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hasc\\_iraq\\_sec\\_forces\\_27jun07.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/hasc_iraq_sec_forces_27jun07.pdf).

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

was no net gain. Henriksen says that this was a lost lesson of the Vietnam conflict when U.S. forces tried unsuccessfully to merge Montagnard units, an ethnic minority, into the greater Vietnamese Army despite its fear and loathing of the Montagnards.<sup>157</sup>

As a population-centric COIN effort, Kaufmann says that...

...(t)rying to create a genuinely Iraqi security force will not work either, because there is no powerful, legitimate political movement loyal to 'Iraq', in or out of government. Nor could most members of the security forces be persuaded to identify with such a force if it did indeed exist. Some Iraqi army units, under tight U.S. control, have been deterred from using violence for purely sectarian goals but others are openly loyal to Kurdish or Shiite leaders.<sup>158</sup>

The likelihood of a cohesive national force for COIN operations came into question early in the insurgency. The U.S. House report says that...

...(s)oon after the April 2004 Battle of Falujah, with the return to Iraqi sovereignty and the dissolution of the CPA in June 2004, interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi ... created the Iraqi National Task Force (INTF) division. The INTF had been formed in response to the debacle with the 2nd Battalion failure in combat...While being moved to participate in that April 2004 siege...battalion members refused to fight other Iraqis... The INTF division was trained specifically to conduct counterinsurgency operations throughout the country. Members were recruited nationally from ICDC soldiers who were willing to fight other Iraqis.<sup>159</sup>

The frustration that U.S. soldiers experienced with the tempo and willingness of Iraqi soldiers, Exum says, was a clash of cultures (that could have been anticipated). Forty years of rigid Ba'athist state control of armed forces activities combined with an *in'shallah* (what God wills) mindset led to constant frustration with U.S. Officers eager to see the Iraqis assume responsibility for security operations.<sup>160</sup>

Indeed while Afghanistan has had numerous so-called standing armies it has never embraced the tradition of a central army. Even the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan

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<sup>157</sup> Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 86; Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 22-23.

<sup>158</sup> Kaufmann, *Separating Iraqis...*, 158.

<sup>159</sup> Committee on Armed Services, *Stand Up and Be Counted...*, 93.

<sup>160</sup> Exum, *Cultural Intelligence...*, 34; Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 310.

Army under the Communist regime was only ever at half of its official 90,000 strength and many Regiments deserted to join tribal militias when the Soviets arrived in 1979.<sup>161</sup>

A number of Afghan Officers attended staff-college in the Soviet Union but were not instructed in COIN or could read a map alongside their future western colleagues.<sup>162</sup>

Centrality of armed forces in Afghanistan is as counter-intuitive to its culture as centrality of government. Jalali and Grau say that...

...Afghanistan's ancient roots and strong tie of kinship provide an anchor against progress, but also the means to cope when central authority has collapsed. Historically, the collapse of the central government...or the destruction of its standing armies has never resulted in the defeat of the nation by an invader. The people, relying on their decentralized political, economic and military potential have always taken over the resistance against the invaders. This was the case during the two wars with Great Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century...(and) happened again in the Soviet Afghan War. (T)hey fought to defend their Qawm [sub-national identity based on tribe, clan, religion etc.] and their religion against a hostile ideology, an atheistic value system, an oppressive central government and a foreign invader.<sup>163</sup>

The RAND study, "The Long March – Building an Afghan National Army" concurs. It states that...

"...(a)lthough Afghanistan has a relatively long tradition of having a national army; it has a much longer tradition of tribal militias. Indeed, when the country has found itself in dire straits, the militias, not the national army, have tipped the balance against external foes".<sup>164</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Taliban in 2001-2002, all substantial military resources, were under command of Northern Alliance or Pashtun warlords. If there was to be a truly national army to support and defend a democratic Afghanistan, the comprehensive-COIN plan would have to institutionalize a fresh start. The outcome was predictable and thus far has not substantively contributed to national cohesion or tactical

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<sup>161</sup> *Jalali & Grau, The Other Side...*, xvi.

<sup>162</sup> The author's personal experience 2003-4.

<sup>163</sup> *Jalali & Grau, The Other Side...*, xiv; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 42. (Local Forces should mirror the enemy not ourselves.)

<sup>164</sup> Obaid Younossi, *The Long March: Building an Afghan National Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009), 7.

success. The Afghan National Army (ANA) is essentially the Army of the north, composed primarily of Tajiks and Hazaras with less than three percent Pashtun participation. Coalition forces who have worked with the ANA in the south observe that the Pashtuns see it as a ‘foreign army’ that does not speak the language or enjoy the same culture and is therefore symbolic of a much resented, Kabul-based regime. This sentiment feeds the Taliban’s narrative and destabilizes the synchronization and efficacy of a population-centric, comprehensive approach.<sup>165</sup>

In 2011, Bing West and others observed that the Afghan’s have yet to field an army self-motivated to fight the Taliban.<sup>166</sup> While it is true that the force nears 200,000 in strength (near its 220, 000 target for 2014 and the withdrawal of Coalition combat troops) and as an institution is the most respected in the country, its efficacy varies greatly from district to district. The ANA performed well for example when integrated with US and UK forces in 2009 in Helmand and Kandahar. This rarely holds true when U.S. and UK forces move into observer and supporting roles. Lacking direction and operational tempo, ANA soldiers rarely display the thoroughness required to counter Taliban tactics or to work aggressively enough to accomplish their objectives – at least in the eyes of their Coalition minders.<sup>167</sup> If the Taliban doesn’t present an immediate threat to the Afghan Army - and they rarely do for fear of U.S. airpower- Afghan soldiers would prefer to bide their time. It is the Afghan way.

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<sup>165</sup> USA/USMC COIN Symposium; Robert D. Blackwill, "Plan B in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 1 (January/February 2011): 43; Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 41.

<sup>166</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 168.

<sup>167</sup> Azam Ahmed, "In Effort for Afghan Autonomy, U.S. Soldiers Take a Step Back," *New York Times*, May 26, 2013, International sec.

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The new comprehensive-COIN doctrine thoroughly lays out a how-to manual for military assistance to nascent governments and their institutions and warns that it is a “slow and painstaking process”.<sup>168</sup> The doctrine is also clear (circa 2007) that a COIN force must establish a knowledge base of history and culture, education, religion, military and security norms and governance to avoid (it doesn’t say so) the mistakes outlined in this chapter.<sup>169</sup> It retains however, the flawed premise that all of this can be done simultaneously while the military component is engaged with the insurgent and while maintaining a consistent narrative of government legitimacy. Comprehensive COIN proponents solve the discrepancy by advocating adaptability, more time, and more resources. They will admit that it is difficult to find the right style and colours but rarely admit that one size does not fit all. Haines says...

...(t)he reason behind the occasional foreign power success and the underlying assumption supporting the current counterinsurgency doctrine is either that the affected government is capable of implementing such a strategy or the required structure and resources will be provided by first-world nations. The literature makes no allowances for the challenges associated with uncooperative institutions, corruption, the vagaries of constitutional form, wealth disparity, demographic politics...;(w)inning a counterinsurgency in a region that is resource deficient and institutionally weak is a difficult endeavour.<sup>170</sup>

Biddle, Fotini and Thier (speaking of Afghanistan) say that counterinsurgency can be described as a form of violent competition in governance; it is much easier to win when the form of government offered is closer to the natural preference of the governed”.

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<sup>168</sup> Petraeus et al, *Counterinsurgency...*, 207 (3-34).

<sup>169</sup> Canada DND, *Counter-Insurgency Operations...*, 7-3-7-4.

<sup>170</sup> Haines, *COIN in the Real World...*, 57.

<sup>171</sup> Having observed the 2003 *Loya Jirga*, it appeared as if Afghan solutions for Afghans were underway. Instead it seems that the inclination to loosen Kabul's grip on the country was heresy to COIN campaign planners who unfortunately took centralization as the given start point. The formal partition of Iraq along sectarian and ethnic lines would have been equally heretical (and of course would have never have been considered by the Bush administration).

A thorough pre-campaign analysis unburdened by the presumption of success would have indicated that a state-building COIN approach was highly questionable under these circumstances. Framing a COIN campaign against multiple and in some cases competing insurgent forces with no reasonable expectation of support from effective indigenous institutions is contrary to fundamental COIN principles. Gray says that...

...(i)f success in COIN requires prior or at least temporally parallel, success in nation building, it is foredoomed to failure. Nations cannot be built. Most especially they cannot be built by well-meaning but culturally arrogant foreign social scientists no matter how well intentioned...A nation (or community) is best defined as a people who think themselves as one. Nations build themselves by and through historical experience. Cultural understanding is always useful...but (w)arfare (is) ...transcultural....My argument is strictly practical and strategic; it is not normative. The issue is not whether Iraq, Afghanistan, or anywhere else either needs to be, or should be 'improved.' Instead the issue is whether or not the job is feasible. Even if it would be well worth doing, if it is a mission impossible or highly improbable at a sustainable cost to us, then it ought not to be attempted."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Stephen Biddle and Fotini Christia, "Defining Success in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2010, accessed February 8, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66450/stephen-biddle-fotini-christia-and-j-alexander-thier/defining-success-in-afghanistan>.

<sup>172</sup> Gray, *Concept Failure?...*, 29.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DON'T FORGET THE INSURGENT

*The Taliban may not be able to win militarily but they can't be defeated and sooner or later the Western alliance will be forced with pullout...*

- *Lieutenant-General (ret'd) Ruslan Sultanovich Aushev – Soviet Regimental Commander in 1986*<sup>173</sup>

There comes a time - even in population-centric COIN - when offensive action against the insurgent is required. Cox and Brusolino highlight that Galula was not averse to offensive action in his treatise. They say that...

...(p)opulation-centric proponents often fail to mention that Galula clearly identifies two key points in an insurgency when kinetic force will work...early in the insurgency formation stages when mobilization is just beginning (and when) the insurgent must eventually switch (from terrorism and harassing attacks) to a conventional force and defeat the national government through conventional means...(when) the counterinsurgent can attack and destroy the insurgency in one fell swoop.<sup>174</sup>

The population-centric proponent's selective advocacy of Galula's treatise notwithstanding, their (Brusolino and Cox) point presents two key questions with respect to 'metrics of success' in the campaign estimate. First, can the insurgent be distinguished from the population or denied its safe haven early and dealt a pre-emptive blow? Second, is it ever likely that the insurgency will mass against the intervention force? Is its strength in fact precisely the opposite; the destruction of the intervention force's morale through hit and run, asymmetric tactics?

It is vital therefore that COIN forces are able to disrupt insurgent lines of support and destroy insurgents whose motivation, endurance and tactical expertise pose a persistent and serious threat to the counterinsurgent's state building narrative. Equally vital then is the assessment of likelihood that an offensive line of operations can support

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<sup>173</sup> Paul Koring, "It's Impossible to Conquer the Afghans," *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), July 12, 2008, A9 sec.

<sup>174</sup> Cox et al, *A False Idol?...*, 3.



comprehensive efforts and protect the population. If this likelihood is improbable, because collateral damage is deemed unacceptable or because the insurgent force enjoys a politically protected safe haven (predisposed to support the insurgency on tribal, historical and religious grounds), then the comprehensive approach is excessively costly in terms of time, troops and treasure.

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In Iraq, insurgent sanctuary was found amongst sympathetic ethnic and sectarian populations or in other words, ‘hiding in plain sight.’<sup>175</sup> This was clear before the implementation of the population-centric approach. By 2005, it was also clear that the Iraqi insurgency would predominantly be an urban focussed conflict.<sup>176</sup> Having seen the swift and decisive power of massed U.S. ground forces and aviation it would have been unwise at best to mass against or be isolated for targeting by U.S. forces. Krepinevich said in 2004 that...

... (a)t present, the Iraqi insurgents are principally operating inside urban areas. Getting them out and keeping them out will require a protracted investment in providing security and enabling reconstruction. In this respect, the recent arrangements reached with Sunni and Shiite insurgents in Fallujah and Najaf, respectively, that allow residual forces to operate in those cities, as opposed to government security forces, represents a setback for the United States’ counterinsurgency campaign.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Suadad Al-Salhy, "Iraq Sunni Insurgents Keep Fighting after U.S. Pullout," *Reuters*, February 29, 2012, accessed April 13, 2013. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/02/29/uk-iraq-insurgents-idUKTRE81S0YI20120229>. Iraq's main Sunni Muslim insurgent groups have rejected laying down their arms to join the political process and will keep fighting, nearly three months after the last U.S. troops withdrew, a senior security official and militant leader said.

<sup>176</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 131. Hashim says the insurgency was urban and rural. The distinction made here is that in contrast to Afghanistan, the Iraqi insurgency was predominantly fought from built up areas including cities and large rural villages.

<sup>177</sup> Andrew Krepinevich, *The War In Iraq: The Nature of Insurgency Warfare*, issue brief, section goes here, accessed May 27, 2013, [www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/.../B.../B.20040602.NatofInsurge.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/.../B.../B.20040602.NatofInsurge.pdf).

Motivation for the Sunni insurgency was discussed in Chapter 2 but it bears repeating that the Sunni insurgency drew support from all ages and backgrounds in the major villages and cities. Engineering students, young bureaucrats, merchants as well as displaced military and Ba'athist figures filled the ranks of the insurgency.<sup>178</sup> John Nagl's experience was that the Iraqi insurgency was more like "breaking up a Mafia crime ring".<sup>179</sup> Indeed, as the economy fell apart many insurgent groups looked to revenue ventures as a necessary (or just lucrative) bi-product of the insurgency. Consequently, kidnapping, extortion and black-market activity were common. Haussler's thorough examination of the linkages between gang-like activity and the urban nature of the Iraq insurgency points to the already well developed pre-invasion black market economy, a bi-product of the 1991 UN imposed sanctions. Haussler aptly shows how the hierarchy of these organizations nested efficiently into the "Islamic Army of Iraq" and other avowed resistance movements.<sup>180</sup>

Hashim, also points to a body of evidence that the post-invasion resistance and Saddam's *Fedayeen* was pre-planned and deliberately designed to draw the U.S. Coalition into a prolonged guerrilla war, that would tax and blunt U.S. technological superiority.<sup>181</sup> All of these factors describe a complex urban insurgency, difficult to degrade through offensive action and resistant to a population outreach approach.

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<sup>178</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 131; Baram, *Who Are the Insurgents...*, 14-16.

<sup>179</sup> Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup...*, xiii; Hashim, *Insurgency in Iraq...*, 169.

<sup>180</sup> Nicholas I. Haussler, "Third Generation Gangs Revisited: The Iraqi Insurgency" (thesis, U.S. Naval Post-Graduate School, 2005), 92, accessed April 23, 2013, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a439455.pdf>.

<sup>181</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 133-134.

The U.S. military adapted to the urban targeting challenge by creating purpose built, Special Operations Forces targeting units. TF 121 created in October 2003, focussed on ‘network-centric targeting’, learning from each operation how best to locate faction cells and high-value targets and was far more effective than the blunt sweeping operations that had characterized the early approach to the insurgency.<sup>182</sup> If the population-centric approach was to work, however, conventional units had to clear and hold ground. It was during these operations that the effectiveness and most importantly the endurance of the insurgency would exceed the trickle down benefits of the population-centric approach. In his examination of General Petraeus’ command and his advocacy of the new COIN doctrine, Coll says that...

...initially as U.S. soldiers pushed into Baghdad neighbourhoods (in 2007) they had not previously occupied, violence rose and that spring more U.S. soldiers and marines died in combat than during any previous period of the war. It was a time when it seemed that Petraeus could not complete a routine meeting without ...an aide handing him a .. report (of) the latest assassination of an Iraqi ally or the detonation of a car bomb in a Baghdad marketplace. American helicopters crashed; soldiers ...were kidnapped and mutilated...<sup>183</sup>

Trinquier said that the guerrilla’s perfect knowledge of his operating area is his greatest advantage; his dependence on it his greatest disadvantage. A successful COIN force Trinquier says will separate the guerrilla from the population and then hold that ground until it is no longer of advantage to the guerrilla.<sup>184</sup> In order to win the struggle for legitimacy therefore, the COIN force has to maintain a persistent presence even in a

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<sup>182</sup> Tomes, *Relearning Counterinsurgency...*, 18-19.

<sup>183</sup> Coll, *The Generals Dilemma...*,

[http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/09/08/080908fa\\_fact\\_coll](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/09/08/080908fa_fact_coll).

<sup>184</sup> Tomes, *Relearning Counterinsurgency...*, 18-19.

complicated urban operating space. A populated area denies the COIN force their advantage in firepower and increases their vulnerability.<sup>185</sup>

In this type of battle space, there is precious little that can go consistently well. In complex urban insurgencies, significant measures must be taken to reduce civilian casualties. Here the process of “clear-hold-build” can lead to unintended effects. In order to target an insurgent base of 500 with as few civilian casualties as possible, coalition forces had to cut the power to the fragile and war damaged city of Falujah (2004) and force an evacuation of up to 50, 000 people. Families were consequently forced to evacuate into even less secure areas. Nor could it be held without a significant increase in troops. Al Qaeda affiliates subsequently re-established their stronghold.<sup>186</sup>

In tightly packed neighbourhoods, civilians are as susceptible to improvised explosive devices (IEDs) as the COIN force. In Iraq (and Afghanistan) insurgents leverage such outcomes in a ‘martyrs’ narrative - a small price to pay to free their lands. The pursuit of insurgents leads to multiple house to house searches. Such incursions (no matter how necessary) are deemed a grave insult, demanding revenge. Weapons smuggling is also considerably harder to intercept and vehicle check points are seen as intrusive to local residents. Curfews and other measures intended to restrict the flow of contraband only breed further resentment.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> United States, Congressional Research Service, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Strategies, Approaches, Results, and Issues for Congress*, by Catherine Dale (Washington, D.C.: CRS, 2009), 73.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>187</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 127-133.

Despite their success in precision targeting, OIF Forces found that holding ‘cleared’ urban areas was costly and in the long run did not produce intended effects. In Iraq, units were consumed by the urban environment where a 10:1 force ratio is required.<sup>188</sup> The reluctance to hold ground was based on three principle reasons: persistent presence exposed troops and supply lines; the troops needed; and because it exacerbated the notion that U.S. Forces were occupiers.<sup>189</sup> Clearly, the COIN fight in Iraq would become an entrenched urban dilemma that continually proved detrimental to the COIN force’s narrative of trust and overall state reconstruction.

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In Afghanistan, a critical shortcoming in pre-campaign analysis was a failure to appreciate the Taliban’s ability to defy decisive engagement and remain a potent insurgency. The most significant aspect of this resilience is the perhaps the most remarkable flaw in the COIN campaign plan; a population-centric approach that exchanges security for trust and loyalty cannot work if the target population knows that the insurgent can run away, winter, regroup in safety and return at a time of their choosing.

U.S. and British Forces had been up against tough insurgencies in the past – Vietnam, Aden, Malaya, Kenya, Palestine and Northern Ireland - but the Taliban posed a number of unique challenges. These included: its religiously based cause; its rich fighting

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<sup>188</sup> Smith, *Intelligence Gathering in a Counterinsurgency...*, 7.

<sup>189</sup> John J. McGrath, Matt Matthews, and Thomas A. Bruscino, *Between the Rivers: Combat Action in Iraq, 2003-2005* (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2012), 29, 31, 47; Harry D. Tunnel, *Red Devils: Tactical Perspectives from Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth: CSI Press, 2006), 33.

heritage; its freedom of movement within its own ethnic base and most importantly its well established safe-haven in Pakistan. Any one of these should have caused COIN planners to fundamentally challenge the likelihood that an intervention force and its nascent indigenous partners could substantively reduce the Taliban's regenerative capability. Taken together, they represent a fundamental violation of COIN principles. Even in a population-centric approach, the COIN force must be able to tangibly affect the strength, morale, recruiting base, supply lines and tactical integrity of the insurgency.<sup>190</sup>

Journalists Robert Kaplan and Ahmed Rashid spent decades among the *mujahideen* and Taliban. They say that the ferocity and endurance of the Taliban as a fighting force is in its recruiting base. Recruits are primarily drawn from generations of war orphans, radicalised in extremist *madrassas*, willing to fight to avenge their lands and culture and proliferate their view of Islam.<sup>191</sup> In 2001 and 2002, U.S. immediate objectives were deemed accomplished if the Taliban no longer offered a viable safe haven to Al Qaida.<sup>192</sup> Having forced the Taliban into Pakistan – and having changed focus to Iraq – U.S. and Coalition partners failed to properly look at its fighting potential and endurance.<sup>193</sup> And, as previously observed, all they have to do is 'not lose'.

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<sup>190</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 70, 98; Cox et al, *A False Idol?...*, 3; Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency...*, 66-67.

<sup>191</sup> Kaplan, *Soldiers of God...*, 237-238; Afsar et al. *The Taliban...*, 68; Fotini Christia and Michael Semple, "How to Flip the Taliban," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (July/August 2009): 40-41.

<sup>192</sup> CRS, *War in Afghanistan...*, 8.

<sup>193</sup> Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 94.

The tactical lineage of the Taliban can be traced to its *mujahideen* origins and the wider history of Afghan tribal tactics.<sup>194</sup> Having witnessed the Taliban's victory in the civil war, Anthony Davis said that...

...in 17 years of war no Afghan force, either government or opposition, had ever carried out such a swift and complex series of operations over such a wide area. This was mobile warfare at its most effective. To suggest that semi-literate Taliban commanders whose military experience had never extended beyond the hit and run attacks of guerrilla warfare could have risen to this level of planning and execution defies belief....<sup>195</sup>

Yet despite significant study of the military history of the *mujahideen* during the Soviet occupation by Grau and others, the notion that the Taliban could similarly launch a daunting insurgency from Pakistan did not seem to resonate.<sup>196</sup> The Taliban's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2001-2002 was not without a fight and was certainly not a decisive rout. Rather than a victory over a simple enemy, planners and advisors should have seen their tactics and training as a product of their 'tactical heritage' and a foretelling what was to come.<sup>197</sup> The Taliban inherited *mujahideen* expertise in tactical surprise and understood the importance of not concentrating force in the face of superior firepower. They were the grand masters of 'hit and run' and mobile tactics. Grau and Jalali say that...

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<sup>194</sup> Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 58.

<sup>195</sup> Griffiths, *Afghanistan...*, 243.

<sup>196</sup> Jonah Blank, "Invading Afghanistan, Then and Now: What Washington Should Learn from the Wars of the Past," review of *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of the Great Powers*, by Peter Tomsen, *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 5 (September/October 2011): 159.; CRS, *War in Afghanistan...*, 58.

<sup>197</sup> Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 39. Henriksen describes how the Taliban were routed by the full brunt of precision U.S. air power and US Special Forces. The SF both conducted precision raids and enabled and fused the effect of the Taliban's blood rivals the Northern Alliance. Against such daunting odds a mobile withdrawal was exactly in line with tribal and mujahideen tactics; Bernard Finel, "Underestimating the Taliban," BernardFinel.com, September 2, 2009, accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.bernardfinel.com/?p=618>. Finel says, "Even more impressive to me is that the organization is still alive and still under much of the same senior leadership. How many groups have been able to survive a military defeat and being forced out of power with as much cohesion as has the Taliban? I have not researched the issue systematically, but the cohesion of the Taliban post-2001 and its resurgence since 2004 is, I think, close to unprecedented."

...(i)n many respects the tactics of the Anglo-Afghan wars 1839, 1842, 78-80, 1919, still applied. Technology has added range and accuracy, but the terrain still dictates and the *mujahideen* were quite comfortable applying their time honoured tactics against a modern foe. Tactical innovation occurs only where tactical innovation is required and the *mujahideen* eventually found ways to work around the problem technology. Where innovation was not required, the *mujahideen* stayed with the tried and true. Thus the basic *mujahideen* ambush and pursuit were little changed from the (19<sup>th</sup>) century whereas their actions against an air assault or a fortified security post were quickly developed out of necessity.<sup>198</sup>

The Taliban learned the valuable effect of applying asymmetric tactics against an occupying force from the *mujahideen*. Such attacks erode morale, force troop dispersion for force protection and inhibit presence patrols needed to gain the trust of the population. As to IED's, the Taliban, like the Afghan *mujahideen*, "(are) inveterate 'tinkerers' who prefer to make their own (more powerful) anti-tank (AT) mines from other AT mines and unexploded ordnance".<sup>199</sup> The Taliban, like their predecessors, effectively used such weapons and tactics against rural convoys and troop busses in urban settings. The *mujahideen* taught them that it was good deception to attack on *Ramadan* when the enemy thought you were at prayers.<sup>200</sup> The *mujahideen* also very effectively made use so called 'green on blue' attacks during the Soviet occupation.<sup>201</sup>

Like the *mujahideen*, the Taliban displays a warrior spirit 'in search of glory' and in the name of piety and were (are) prepared for a long war through hit-run-survive, light infantry tactics.<sup>202</sup> Their zeal and ability taken together presents a daunting insurgency unlikely to be swayed by any temporal loss of popular support to the Afghan government

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<sup>198</sup> Grau and Jalali, *The Other Side...*, 399.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-43

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 370, 133; Afsar et al, *The Taliban...*, 69.

<sup>201</sup> Grau and Jalali, *The Other Side...*, 119.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.



or its western backers.<sup>203</sup> Today, The Taliban's media bureau monitors the western press and is able to measure doubt in the comprehensive plan achieved by sewing mistrust between Coalition and indigenous forces.<sup>204</sup>

In 2006, Coalition forces heralded a decisive victory over the Taliban when they for the first time (since 2002) concentrated their forces in a pitched battle for the Arghandab valley. However, while the Taliban endured significant casualties during this fight, it also consumed NATO resources from across the country and demonstrated that they were not easily defeated in the face of superior firepower. Interesting too is the ease, with which they lured NATO forces into a replay of the same costly battle, amongst the difficult grape rows, that the *mujahideen* had inflicted on the Soviets, years earlier.<sup>205</sup> Looked at through this perspective, it may have been a greater symbolic victory for the Taliban than a NATO operational success.

### **Affecting Tangible Support**

The Taliban is a military focussed insurgency not necessarily reliant on popular support. The population-centric approach can therefore only ever succeed in part, as the Taliban can accomplish their military and political objectives with or without direct assistance from the population.

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<sup>203</sup> CRS, *War in Afghanistan...*, 5, 27. "Meanwhile for several years...observers have expressed concerns about a worsening security situation...including the greater frequency and sophistication of attacks, exacerbated by the ability of the insurgents to find safe haven across the border in Pakistan".

<sup>204</sup> Tim Foxley, "Countering Taliban Information Operations in Afghanistan," *PRISM* 1, no. 4 (September 2010): 87, accessed May 15, 2013, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/countering-taliban-information-operations.html>. (Foxley provides a thorough analysis of the Taliban's Information Operations capability reaching back to 2001.

<sup>205</sup> Grau and Jalali, *The Other Side...*, xix, 125; Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 98.

The perfection and paradox of the Taliban is their expert manipulation of their tribal and ‘supratribal’ hold on the population. Christia and Semple say that...

...(t)he Afghan insurgency combines, on the one hand, the original Taliban idea that the movement is supratribal and that its fighters are pledged to a single leader and, on the other, traditional Afghan affiliations with multiple local and other groups...The bulk of the Taliban’s’ military operations are conducted by fighters operating within their home provinces , where the relationship to the population is defined by their tribal status and political backgrounds rather than by the authority invested in them by the Taliban leadership in Quetta or Waziristan.<sup>206</sup>

Afsar *et al* too say that the Taliban is prepared to use the obligations of *Pashtunwali* and- or intimidation to get what they want from their own tribal families to support their broader objectives. Control and leverage of poppy planting - the only viable cash crop – and the opium trade is a key example.<sup>207</sup> The Taliban paradox they say...

.. has driven a wedge between the Coalition forces and the people, whom the Coalition forces see as de facto supporters of the Taliban. Conversely, the people believe that Coalition forces are culturally insensitive, cause unnecessary civilian casualties [as the Taliban draw them intentionally toward the people] and fail to offer appropriate reparations for those casualties. The people then embrace *badal*, increasing passive support for the Taliban and creating a pool of potential new fighters.<sup>208</sup>

The Taliban is a well organized political apparatus prepared to operate in a shadow government capacity for as long as it takes to achieve its goals.<sup>209</sup> Although the Taliban maintains a loose, cell-based command and control structure in the field (making it difficult to penetrate), politically and at a senior military level, its senior hierarchy reflects the much overlooked fact that it was the government of Afghanistan for nearly five years.<sup>210</sup> The Taliban had foreign ambassadors and representatives abroad and had a wide range of ministries occupied in many cases by experienced civil-servants. While its policies are abhorrent, it was and is a mistake to underestimate its operational and ‘long-

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<sup>206</sup> Fotini & Semple, *How to Flip the Taliban...*, 41.

<sup>207</sup> Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 40; Jones, *It Takes the Villages...*, 126.

<sup>208</sup> Afsar et al., *The Taliban...*, 68.

<sup>209</sup> Forsberg, *The Taliban’s Campaign...*, 33.

<sup>210</sup> Afsar et al., *The Taliban...*, 64-68.

game' planning ability. By 2005, it was clear that the Taliban could organize coherent plans for the annual fighting season including preparation and organization of supply routes. It also demonstrated operational patience for deep operations well inside Afghanistan reflective of broader campaign planning. Terry Tucker categorizes the Taliban campaign strategy as a composite approach of urban and rural tactics that began with a discernable "re-group and re-base phase" between 2002 and June 2005.<sup>211</sup>

Underpinning these notable and daunting challenges is perhaps the most serious oversight in terms of the misapplication of COIN principles: that a COIN campaign can be successfully waged against the Taliban given their robust, proximate and accessible safe-haven in the Tribal and Baluchi areas of Pakistan. A decade earlier and with Pakistani support, the *mujahideen* successfully used this safe-haven to launch operations against the Soviets. In 2001-2002 future state security concerns took a back stage to the destruction of Al Qaida and its staging bases. In the post '9-11' environment, the U.S. concentrated troops and tremendous firepower on their pursuit of Al Qaeda in areas such as Tora Bora. Coalition forces did not, however, concentrate on the interdiction of the Taliban before it withdrew over the Pakistani border. Ten years later, the oversight lies in failing to recognize the potential for a re-play of this history.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Petraeus et al., *Counterinsurgency...*, 15. Tucker, *The Operational Art...*, Appendix B.

<sup>212</sup> Henriksen, *Afghanistan Counterinsurgency...*, 41 There is very little in the literature as to why the Taliban's reconstitution was overlooked less the stock answer of Pakistani neglect or complicity. This may in part be due to the fact that it was the CIA's responsibility to ensure that the Pakistani ISI did not support the Taliban. Also, commonly known, is the fact that the focus during this period was on Iraq. Henriksen says: "By early 2005, Taliban insurgents staged a comeback with newly borrowed tactics from Iraq – roadside bombs and suicide attacks on both civilians and security personnel. The scattered outburst of violence became more frequent as the Taliban fighters re-established strong holds on Afghan soil or infiltrated across the Pakistani border. In time, the mounting attacks compelled the United States to pay head to Afghanistan, deploy troops and devise new strategies for defeating a resurgent Taliban threat."

RAND's *Victory* Report says that tangible support (men, material, lines of communication) transported on well used trade and smuggling routes, typically across natural obstacles from cross border safe havens, is a common insurgent strategy. The study found that the ability of the COIN force to establish border control, cut insurgent supplies and enhance national legitimacy was a strong predictor of COIN success. The study says the ability of insurgents to replenish and obtain personnel, materiel, financing, intelligence and sanctuary is a consistent predictor of insurgent success or COIN failure.<sup>213</sup> As that predictor speaks to state stability operations in Afghanistan, Seth Jones says that...

...Shkin (on the Af-Pak border) serves as a microcosm of one of the most significant weaknesses of the U.S. war in Afghanistan: a failure to address the insurgent sanctuary in Pakistan (and Pakistani state support). As U.S. officials pointed out at Shkin, the Taliban and other insurgent groups use their safe haven in Pakistan to live, train, rearm, and conduct strategic and operational planning. The U.S. failure to stop Pakistan is particularly egregious because the United States was involved in an almost identical program 30 years ago -- with the ISI's help -- against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Neither the United States nor Pakistan has targeted the Taliban's command-and-control network there. Instead, the Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar, is thought to reside in Baluchistan, well outside the area where drone strikes are occurring. The Taliban's inner shura, its most important decision-making body, has also been safe from U.S. strikes. The inner shura provides strategic guidance for the insurgency, exercises some command and control, and is the largest fundraiser.<sup>214</sup>

Another revelation from the RAND report is useful to understanding the significance of the Pakistani-based safe haven. The study found that in 25 of the 30 insurgencies it examined, insurgencies could continue to thrive without popular support as long as their tangible support from external sources (materiel, recruits, intelligence, and finance) was left predominantly intact. The study therefore posits an important caveat to the conventional wisdom that winning hearts and minds is the center of gravity in a

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<sup>213</sup> RAND, *Victory*..., 50-51.

<sup>214</sup> Seth Jones, "Foreign Policy Magazine," *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2013, accessed May 27, 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/04/what\\_went\\_wrong?page=0.3](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/03/04/what_went_wrong?page=0.3).

COIN effort. On the contrary, it says that tangible support to the insurgent – wherever they get it - is the real center of gravity. In other words removing popular support without cutting tangible support is a COIN ‘fail’.<sup>215</sup>

Colin Gray’s examination of “Concept Failure?: COIN, Counterinsurgency and Strategic Theory” makes a compelling point with respect to the significance of cross-border sanctuary and cross-border supply lines that may be available to the insurgent.

Gray says that...

...it can be argued...that since COIN is war about the people, primarily it has to be effective “amongst the people” where they live. (A)n insurgency that has cross border sanctuaries is akin to a cancer that it either in temporary remission or only lightly active. Afghanistan in the 2000s offers ...a classic object lesson in why cross-border sanctuaries should not be tolerated strategically in COIN. Should the benefits of anti-sanctuary action not be judged sufficient to offset the probable costs, then it is likely to be the case that the insurgency out not to be countered.<sup>216</sup>

An inability to tangibly affect the insurgent due to his ability to seamlessly blend into the population and/or a politically protected safe haven is a predictable outcome.

That sort of situation undermines the ‘security’ lines of operations and reduces or fractures the cohesiveness of the comprehensive approach. William’s says that...

...(t)he problem for the United States is that no matter how well crafted a COIN strategy is, unless the United States can stop Pakistani assistance, the campaign will fail. Two factors work against U.S. interests in this regard. First, the Taliban is an indigenous Afghan entity. For better or worse it is part of Afghanistan and it seems dubious that the United States can eradicate it any more than the British could eradicate the Irish Republican Army.<sup>217</sup>

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This Chapter has focussed on what *must be* one of three critical pre-campaign ‘go/no go’ requirements namely a satisfactory response to the question: Who are the

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<sup>215</sup> RAND, *Victory...*, 66-70.

<sup>216</sup> Gray, *Concept Failure?...*, 27-28.

<sup>217</sup> Williams, *Political-Military Lessons...*, 101.

insurgents as a fighting force and can they be defeated in a timeline and at a cost that the COIN force, the supported government and the affected people can endure? Any examination of the insurgents and their vulnerabilities therefore speaks to the adaptability and lethality of the insurgency as well as the COIN force's ability or inability to close with and destroy them.<sup>218</sup> Factors here include the insurgent's ability to hide in plain sight amongst their own culture and safe havens protected by political boundaries. This Chapter briefly described how both the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies proved adaptive and able to take maximum advantage of their respective circumstances, and argues that these facts could have been known before a commitment to the new population-centric/comprehensive doctrine was made. While FM 3-24 and its allied equivalents do not purport these campaigns to be resounding successes, they leave military planners with a clear sense that iterative, post engagement changes to a comprehensive plan will absolve the COIN force of ignoring fundamental truths of the operating area. The cost and outcome of OEF-A and OIF should tell us that that analysis must speak for itself before any pre-determination is made as to outcome.

Consistent with previous chapters, this chapter submits that the likelihood of a reasonable probability of success can only be derived by thorough analysis of history, culture and motivation and their impact on the fighting potential of the insurgent, through a lens not beholden to a positive outcome. There is simply too much at risk to national

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<sup>218</sup> Karen DeYoung, "Taliban Surprising U.S. Forces with Improved Tactics," *Washington Post*, September 02, 2009, accessed July 30, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/01/AR2009090103908.html?hpid=topnews>. U.S. rules of engagement restricting the use of air power and aggressive action against civilians have also opened new space for the insurgents...Western development projects, such as new roads, schools and police stations, have provided fresh targets for Taliban roadside bombs and suicide attacks. The inability of rising numbers of American troops to protect Afghan citizens has increased resentment of the Western presence and the corrupt Afghan government that cooperates with it, the officials said.

reputation to overlook this question or assume that it is answerable in terms of blood and treasure. The answer to the question is of utmost importance in a population-centric COIN approach to state reconstruction as the approach and campaign plan deliberately de-emphasizes the use of offensive action.

This question of tangibly affecting the insurgent is a classic COIN principle and is equally applicable in an enemy-centric COIN approach. In modern terms however, against a higher standard of state conduct, the new doctrine denies the COIN force, albeit understandably, a periodic heavy hand, pacification or relocation options to which Galula and Templer had access.<sup>219</sup> If we nevertheless accept that the U.S. and her Coalition allies cannot ‘kill their way to victory’ to accomplish national security objectives, then the population-centric state building approach must have at least one achievable line of operation upon which to base and synchronize the others. Determined insurgents will not however stand idly by. An Afghan Mullah says: “If I talk, they’ll cut my throat”.<sup>220</sup> If intractable insurgents threaten day to day security and must be dealt with, the COIN force must be truly and consistently able to decisively engage them without negatively affecting their popular support (i.e. cause collateral damage) or draw excessive resources away from protecting state institutions and the population in general.

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<sup>219</sup> Riley M. Moore, "Galula in Algeria: Counterinsurgency Practice versus Theory," review of Galula in Algeria: Counterinsurgency Practice versus Theory, by Gregor Mathias, *PRISM* 3, no. 4 (September 2012): 147. Mathias demonstrates that Galula’s population-centric technique worked tactically but had no lasting effects in Algeria. In his review Riley M. Moore says: “Galula’s experience in applying this strategy was the primary point of influence on current U.S. doctrine; therefore, one would assume that it would have been further investigated before it became the centerpiece of American strategy.”; Rigden, *The British Approach...*, 10-11.

<sup>220</sup> West, *Groundhog War...*, 167.

## CONCLUSION: THE SINGLE THEORY.

This paper has taken the position that with proper pre-campaign analysis, it is possible to arrive at the determination that prerequisites for successful comprehensive, population-centric COIN simply may not exist. It has argued this point along two parallel themes. First that failing to assess a reasonable likelihood of; securing popular support, working in concert with effective indigenous institutions, and achieving a lasting disruption of the insurgency entails the conduct of COIN contrary to its historic principles. It is therefore flawed doctrine. Argued in parallel is that the current comprehensive, state stability COIN cannot succeed when these principles are unachievable. Comprehensive COIN is based on mutually supporting lines of operation that will fail without reliable support from the other lines of operation. It is therefore a flawed approach.

It was never the intention of this paper to write off COIN from the national security inventory. Key, however, is the understanding that COIN is a means, not an ends; a tactic, not a strategy. Colin Gray very cogently explains that,

...decisions to counter or not to counter an insurgency should not gravitate precipitately to essentially tactical matters of COIN method at the likely expense of strategic reasoning and direction. To be blunt, the most effective strategy to counter and insurgency may be one that makes little use of COIN tactics.<sup>221</sup>

If, as he expounds, state building (for which the U.S. military et al are ill-suited), fighting an enemy with a safe haven and other fatal criteria are the price of countering the insurgency, then a strategic options analysis must take place. When the narrative is dominated by exit strategies rather than suitable and sustainable entrance strategies, other

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<sup>221</sup> Gray, *Concept Failure?...*, 25.



strategic options require examination. A single theory to complex, high risk operations is inherently dangerous. Gray again says...

...the idea has taken root that the solution to our irregular warfare nightmares is adoption of the right COIN doctrine. This is a half truth at best. In historical practice, each case is so unique that although there are some valid principles which should govern irregular warfare, there can be no reliable template for all contexts.<sup>222</sup>

It is perhaps not so curious then that population-centric COIN works best when supported by significant troop surges that provide - for a time - the promised protection of the population. The subsequent deduction is that it works when the insurgent is overwhelmed and afraid to show his hand. But this sounds more like enemy-centric COIN. Finel says that...

“...the (2010) offensive in Marja (Afghanistan) – a relatively sparsely populated area with little economic potential – was an unlikely target for a population-centric campaign. But given insurgent strength in the area, it made an ideal target for an enemy-centric approach...Although many COIN experts see enemy-centric campaigns as the second best option, the truth is that such efforts are both more likely to succeed and to showcase U.S. Army strengths....This approach is appropriate for Afghanistan because the conflict there is much messier than a typical two-sided battle...combined with the inherent difficulties of promoting economic development and good governance in one of the poorest and most war-torn countries on the planet – makes a U.S. victory along the lines envisaged by population-centric COIN advocates essentially impossible”.<sup>223</sup>

If suitable environmental conditions are unlikely for state stability operations to exist, as this paper argues, there are other options to accomplish national and Coalition security objectives. Gian Gentile says however, that....

“...(r)egrettably, the American Army’s new way of war, otherwise called population-centric counterinsurgency has become the only operational tool in the Army’s repertoire to deal with problems of insurgency and instability throughout the world. Populations centric COIN may be a reasonable operational method to use in certain circumstances, but it is not a strategy.”

According to Gentile, the COIN ‘*zeitgeist*’ is attributable to three key factors: an overreaction to the perceived failure of conventional forces in Iraq (2003-7); the fallacy

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<sup>222</sup> Gray, *Irregular Warfare...*, 53.

<sup>223</sup> Bernard Finel, "A Substitute for Victory," *Foreign Affairs*, April 8, 2010, accessed June 3, 2013, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66189/bernard-finel/a-substitute-for-victory>.

that the 2007 surge in Iraq validated the nascent doctrine; and a misreading of the history of COIN in Vietnam and Malaya. The danger, he says, is that it will define future intentions towards national security threats posed from failing state environments. (E.g. Syria).<sup>224</sup>

COIN, is a far more resource and endurance intensive activity that is prone to dangerous overreaction. Expeditionary COIN forces tend only to force the insurgents into safe havens until the COIN force leaves and so the effects are temporal and at great strategic cost. The consequences of a failed raid are far less than the consequences of failed state-building. Other strategic options therefore, can include limited counter-terrorism operations focussed on the key threat to national or coalition security. Counter-terrorism operations also allow militaries to focus their inherent strengths while COIN operations expose them to prolonged vulnerability.<sup>225</sup>

Ahmed Hashim offers that in counterinsurgency, “the old real-estate adage ‘location, location, location’ is all about intelligence, intelligence, and yet more intelligence”. Having relied almost exclusively on Iraqi defectors who told them what they wanted to hear, he says, senior (U.K. and U.S.) officials recognized that they fully missed the potential for a post-invasion insurgency.<sup>226</sup> If proper analysis had been done, as this paper argues, perhaps the U.S. would have chosen an alternative exit strategy to

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<sup>224</sup> Gentile, *A Strategy of Tactics...*, 10.

<sup>225</sup> Fulk, *An Evaluation of Counterinsurgency* (Summary of his thesis).

<sup>226</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency...in Iraq...*, 319; CRS, *Operation Iraqi Freedom...*, 36.

sustained reconstruction.<sup>227</sup> Hashim aptly captures the crucible of professional courage in pre-campaign analysis:

...(s)trategic intelligence analysts must be able to make sober assessments about the particular country in which we are engaged. Each step of the way, they must be cognizant of and ready to accept the fact that they could be wrong or that their extrapolations will not necessarily lead to the result they desire. That is very difficult for human beings to accept...Moreover even if we develop a formidable strategic intelligence capability the experts' analysis will not be worth the paper they are written on if policy-makers are addicted to a rigid and inflexible ideological frame of mind that is reinforced by listening to 'instant experts' who sprout like poisonous toadstools during times of crises. While we all see the world through an ideological prism, the so-called worldview, the prosecution of effective counterinsurgency requires a flexible and ruthless professionalism shorn as much as possible of overt biases and ideological predilections."<sup>228</sup>

Comprehensive-COIN campaigns – state-building - require a daunting if not overwhelming front end load of information, analysis and understanding before a plan can be deemed feasible for execution. The current COIN manuals are replete with checklists intended to drive the tactician and the planner towards this understanding all with a pre-arrived notion of “it can be done’. However, if the planning enterprise is to truly set conditions for realistic analysis, it must look agnostically at the most fundamental aspects of the insurgents’ strength, when judging the capability its own forces to degrade that strength. It must be understood for its enormity, complexity and risk and therefore planned and deemed feasible against the most crucial of criteria. If a passing grade cannot be attained then as discussed, then alternative paths to national security objectives should be explored.

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<sup>227</sup> Kaplan, *The End of the Age...*, 80-81. Fred Kaplan explains that after the 2006 Sunni bombing of the Shiite “Golden Mosque’ in Samara, Iraq was on the brink of civil war. Then OIF Commander, General Casey reversed his decision to adopt a COIN approach (against the earlier advice of COIN advocates Kavlev Sepp and Colonel William Hix). Casey saw COIN, “...as a trap, in which the locals took advantage of the large U.S. presence to shirk their own responsibilities even as their resentment of the outsiders grew...(t)he war as Casey saw it, had degenerated into a battle for political and economic among many ethno-sectarian factions, and with no single insurgency, it made no sense to pursue a counterinsurgency strategy”.

<sup>228</sup> Hashim, *Insurgency... in Iraq...*, 320.

## **APPENDIX – COMMANDERS CRITICAL INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS FOR COIN PRE-CAMPAIGN ANALYSIS.**

**Pre –Campaign Planning CCIR: Who are the people in the region according to the people in the region? What is the likelihood of earning and keeping their loyalty and trust?**

- What are their history, culture, religion, code, ethnicity, relationships and alliances according to them? How are those concerns divergent to our state-building efforts?
- What fundamentally motivates (money, ideology, conscience, ego) the peoples at play inside and outside Country-X? How significantly are those motivations divergent to the motivations we wish to instil?
- Does the current conflict condition actually change any of those motivations or are they ‘hard-wired’ through history and tradition?
- What is their will and desire to see their future as their past?
- Is it in their basic interest to risk conflict with the insurgent? Would they form forces to fight the insurgent with support and assurances from us (or are they better without us)?

**CCIR: How will this Coalition effort be perceived across the spectrum of international, regional and local stakeholders in this problem?**

- Does anyone but us see the Coalition as a legitimate solution?
- What is the likelihood of presenting our message in a way found acceptable to key groups and/or numbers of people who can influence the problem?
- Will we be seen as anything other than a foreign invader with no legitimate policing function in their lives?
- Will any faction truly cooperate with our forces and at what cost/expense to us, themselves and others?
- Will any faction truly cooperate with our forces and at what cost/expense to us themselves and others?

**CCIR: Is Country-X actually a state and what is the Coalition actually trying to restore?**

- To what degree was the previous regime’s power based on minority control?
- Is the majority (along any combination of ethnic or religious composition) actually inside the border or does its’ power structure straddle the existing line?
- Is partition or regional independence acceptable to the people of the area and the international community?
- Do the people have any sense of or willingness to entertain new forms of central government?
- Are there any enduring examples of fair and acceptable government on a regional or local basis prior to the dictatorship, monarchy or religious committee? What is fair and acceptable government?

- What does rule of law mean to them? How do they self-police and is the concept of state –run courts and police alien to their way of life? Would they ever trust a national army, police force or court again?
- What is the role of this state in the regional power dynamic?
- Is there a viable resource based economy upon which to grow – how dependent is it?
- Were the original boundaries post colonial, ethnically based, geographically based or ‘stalemate’ based?

**CCIR: To affect this state building effort Coalition forces must be with the people to influence the people. We must protect the populace, the state institutions that we support, the humanitarian effort and protect ourselves both in transit and in our bases. These shaping operations must be reinforced by decisive, offensive operations to disrupt if not defeat those who persist in their threat to security. We have adaptive troops but adaptation is a two-way street. Who are the insurgents as a fighting force?**

- Is there a way to ascertain the enduring strength of threat forces or is each fallen insurgent the catalyst for one or two more?
- Can Coalition forces identify and target the threat without collateral damage or is this our start point? What is the worst-case asymmetric offensive capability scenario the threat elements can imagine?
- Can I overcome their inherent intelligence and counter-intelligence advantages?
- Who do they hate more – the Coalition or the local who cooperates; if I clear a village, how long do I have to hold it?
- How adaptive could the (various components) of the threat be? Can they plan as I plan?
- Can tangible support to the insurgent and supporting criminal elements be neutralized?
- How many insurgencies or fighting elements are we likely to engage? How potent are they? How similar or disparate are their motivations?
- Does the insurgency enjoy genuine popularity or does it demand it at knife point. Can it continue to elicit tangible support amongst a neutral population?
- Can the Coalition interdict foreign support (weapons, fighters, intelligence, and supplies) without international incident?
- Do they have a sense of victory vs. time vs. the will to fight?
- Can the Coalition interdict cross border safe havens or at a minimum watch and decisively interdict their ratlines without becoming decisively engaged in border security? Are safe havens and holes in the border THE most significant source of tangible support?

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