



The Perilous Slog of Asymmetric Warfare: A Better Way Forward in Afghanistan^[1]

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Insurgency is the most widespread form of warfare today.

David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*^[3]

Introduction

The situation on the ground in Afghanistan remains tenuous. Despite a strategy that has been under the auspices of a population-centric counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign—as presented by General McChrystal, officially sanctioned by President Obama during his historic address at West Point, and likely to be continued under the command of General Petraeus—military and political progress have been nominal relative to the resources committed. The latest operations in Helmand Province illustrate this point. Though initial reports suggest that coalition forces were effective in clearing the area—liberating villages and expunging Taliban resistance—the Taliban have been successful in what Rajiv Chandrasekaran describes as being able to wait-out the initial phases, and then strike against the “soft underbelly” of coalition operations—slowly reasserting their presence in the area by launching sporadic kinetic strikes, as well as a staunch “campaign of intimidation” toward the local population.^[4]

With such a security and political package meant to pacify the area—the hallmarks of General McChrystal’s plan—the “box has come up empty.”^[5] To paraphrase comments made by Dr. Andrew Bacevich, the events of the first five-to-six months of this year were meant to demonstrate the feasibility of the McChrystal strategy. Marja was the place where that strategy was going to be rolled-out, but it has thus far not paid any grand dividends.^[6] Afghanistan, therefore, exhibits the quintessential problem-set found in other historical COIN experiences, beckoning the revelation of past lessons drawn from conflicts in Malaya, Algeria and various other past conflict zones. All of those cases provide contextual pillars of military, social, political and economic solvents which have assisted to eradicate an array of virulent and endemic problems within a particular society. But the immediate problem is not so much what is needed over an extended period of time to address these key areas of COIN, but what remains politically feasible as the December 2011 review date approaches.

Though General Petraeus recently assured that the date set is meant to “review the conditions,” as opposed to “turning off the lights” during his recent testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee, there has undoubtedly been increased skepticism over the U.S. commitment in Afghanistan, arguably enhancing the Taliban information campaign^[7]—suggesting that they will still remain long after the U.S. departure. Such an ebb-and-flow not only touches upon the

sheer extent of difficulties inherent in conducting COIN operations, as Dr. John A. Nagl, president of the Center for a New American Security, points out—“counterinsurgency campaigns are messy and slow—the one in Afghanistan will be no different”—but the granular and unique cultural dynamism across the entire landscape makes this situation particularly daunting.^[8] Therefore any recipe for success will be incredibly challenging—politically and economically—for any modern nation-state, especially one on an arbitrary timeline. However, a strategy that aims at lessening the footprint may be the most effective means to support the Afghans over a longer period of time, while still having the capability to effectively disrupt and dismantle active Al Qaeda cells.

How can this effectively be accomplished? First, it’s important to note that all elements of statecraft will still be necessary in order to address the broad spectrum of issues related to COIN operations. Typically, such comprehensive resolve toward stabilizing zones wrought in conflict originates from institutions that fall outside the realm of military affairs (e.g., the State Department, USAID, etc.).^[9] Up until now, there have been various programs like that of Afghan-Hands, Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) and various other interagency and reconstruction measures that have assisted in pacifying some areas of the country. But in many other cases, the effects have been mediocre. The fact of the matter is that Afghanistan is a country that has existed, over the past 30 years, in a constant state of turmoil, with little-to-no infrastructure and a populace that is mostly illiterate. And though new hopes exist with regard to newly discovered natural resources, there should be no illusions of how long it will take for Afghanistan to define itself as *stable*.^[10] There is no silver bullet.

Therefore, what type of approach is most *malleable* for success, as conventional forces potentially draw down in the coming months and where the security situation may be untenable for interagency and NGO groups to continue operations on the scale that they are at present?^[11] Since there remains an unparalleled ability of the U.S. military to deploy, maintain logistics, and sustain an overseas force, I argue that smaller elements of U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) should perform the majority functions of pacification, while serving as an economy-of-force measure. This is the most appropriate way forward during this transitional phase, given our planned conventional withdrawal and recent, abrupt change of command.

In this article, I first review Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s strategic interaction (SI) theory, which suggests that when strong actors utilize a differing force-on-force approach against weak actors, the strong actor typically fails at achieving their proscribed mission.^[12] Second, I outline the two basic approaches to operationally fulfilling this strategy through either conventional or unconventional forces. I argue given the December 2011 withdrawal date, command and control issues, organizational inhibitions, and costs associated with conventional forces, that the strategic utility found in SOF as an alternate application of military power can successfully fit into SI theory, and provide us with a better approach in practice given the particularities of this case. Third, I introduce the Gant mode, as proposed by Major Jim Gant in his widely read paper, “One Tribe at a Time,” as a real-time means to prosecute the strategy at an operational and tactical level, correlating with the appropriate force-on-force method against our asymmetric opponents in

Afghanistan—and therefore, leveraging the vast strategic utility of SOF, instead of painfully integrating general purpose forces (GPF) into a COIN strategy, which has proven to be less than successful in most cases, not to mention extremely costly. The forth and final section presents some concluding remarks and considerations for shifting to such an approach.

Literature Review

Strategic Interaction Theory

Data collected by the Correlates of War Project (maintained since 1963) has identified over “464 wars that occurred between 1816 and the end of the twentieth century, of which only 79 (17 percent) were “conventional” interstate conflicts between the regular armed forces of nation states, while 385 (just under 83 percent of recorded conflicts) were civil wars and insurgencies.”[13] In *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Arreguin-Toft focuses on 202 asymmetric conflicts fought between 1816 and 2003 in order to decipher how the weak win wars in such environments. These statistics, coupled with numerous government and academic publications citing increased concerns with regard to global warming, youth bulges, contested commons, infectious diseases, and ungoverned territories, only exacerbate the potential for warfare to continue at the pace and trajectory measured. The following figures show some interesting developments over time up through 2003:

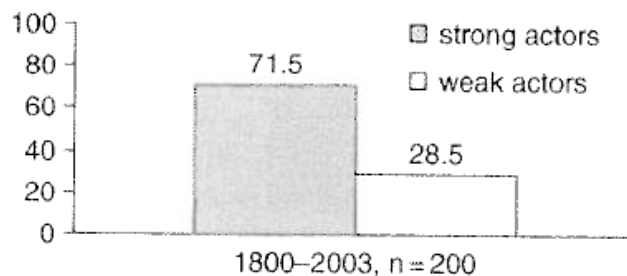


Figure 1: In this chart Arreguin-Toft shows the percentage of asymmetric conflict victories by type of actor between 1800-2003[14]

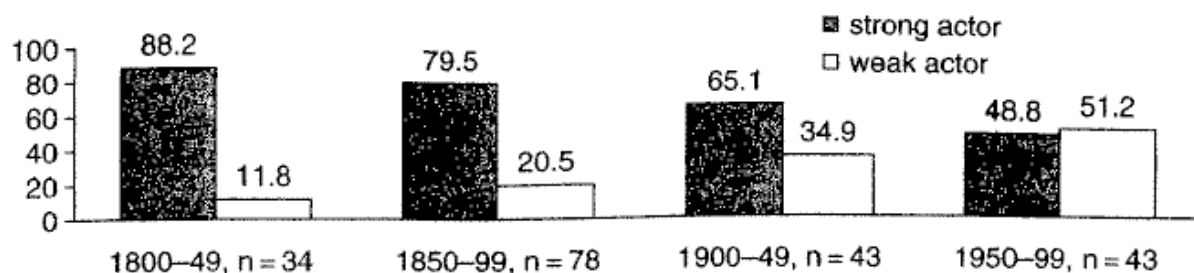


Figure 2: Despite the overall strong-actor victories in asymmetric conflict since 1800, Arreguin-Toft shows in this chart that the percentage of victories by strong actors has depreciated steadily. [15]

These trends show a very interesting dynamic in asymmetric environments where strong actors are losing more and more over time.[16] Arreguin-Toft notes that “realist international relations theory leads us to believe that in a two-actor conflict, the larger the ratio of forces favors one actor the more quickly and decisively that actor will win” (as seen in Figure 1).[17] However, “strong actors lost nearly 30 percent of all conflicts in which they out-powered their adversaries by a factor of at least 5:1.”[18] He notes that “when the aggregate data are divided into [these] discrete time periods, the expected correlation between power and victory becomes significantly less useful as a guide to policy.”[19] In this sense, perhaps size does not matter.

Arreguin-Toft still takes into account other theoretical frameworks— like that of relative power, the nature of the actor, arms diffusion, and interest asymmetry—as reasons associated with the charted trend. He speculates that there are various historical explanations (drawing comparisons between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) for the latter. For instance:

Perhaps the strong actors won because of their technological advantage: artillery, firearms, and blue-water navies must have been tremendous force multipliers. Perhaps the strong actor defeats concentrated in the last period were due to the rise of national self-determination as a norm of interstate politics? ... We might also observe that after World War I and especially World War II, the number of authoritarian strong actors declined. And after 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and ceased to be authoritarian actor in interstate politics. If authoritarian strong actors fight asymmetric conflicts better than democratic strong actors, perhaps the nature of the actor explains the trend.[20]

After a thorough analysis of these other probabilities, he argues that “although relative power matters, the interaction of the strategies actors use matters more than how much power they have in the start of the conflict;” therefore, the “best predictor of asymmetric conflict outcomes is strategic interaction.”[21] This theory is broken down into two parts, direct and indirect, and contends that “when actors employ similar approaches (direct-direct or indirect-indirect), relative power explains the outcome: strong actors will win quickly and decisively. When actors employ opposite strategic approaches (direct-indirect or indirect-direct), weak actors are much more likely to win, *even when everything we think we know about power says they shouldn't.*”[22]

Arreguin-Toft follows Liddell-Hart’s definition stating that strategy “is an actor’s plan for using armed forces to achieve military or political goals.”[23] Such goals can be achieved, he explains, through the strong actor’s application of “offensive strategies” via conventional attack and barbarism, or “defensive strategies,” via conventional defense and guerilla warfare. But what is “direct” and “indirect” (according to this theory), and how does it function in the realm of strategy?

		weak actor strategic approach	
		direct	indirect
strong actor strategic approach	direct	strong actor	weak actor
	indirect	weak actor	strong actor

Figure 3: Expected effects of strategic interaction on conflict outcomes as presented by Arreguin-Toft.[24]

The *direct* strategic approach, applied through conventional attack and defense, targets an “adversary’s armed forces with the aim of destroying or capturing the adversary’s physical capacity to fight, thus making will irrelevant.”[25] On the other hand, an *indirect* strategic approach, through barbarism or guerrilla warfare, is most often aimed at destroying the adversary’s *will* to resist, thus making physical capacity irrelevant.[26] Arreguin-Toft contends that:

Same approach interactions (indirect-indirect or direct-direct) imply defeat for the weak actors because there is nothing to mediate or deflect a strong actor’s power advantage. Barring a battlefield miracle, these interactions should therefore be resolved in proportion to the force applied. By contrast, opposite-approach interactions (direct-indirect or indirect-direct) imply victory for weak actors because the weak refuse to engage where the strong actor has a power advantage (i.e. on the latter’s terms). They therefore tend to be protracted, and time favors the weak.[27]

Perhaps one of the most challenging factors when considering the situation in Afghanistan is noting the almost completely unchecked border and sanctuary with Pakistan across the British demarcated Durand Line. As Arreguin-Toft notes in the Soviet case, external support was a significant inhibitor to conducting operations, regardless of the shift to a similar approach.[28]

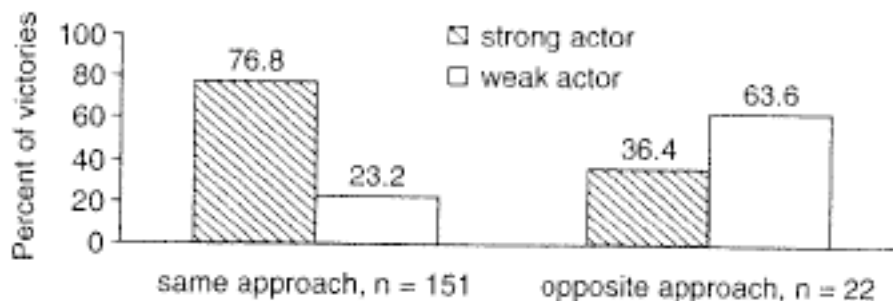


Figure 4: Arreguin-Toft shows strategic interaction and asymmetric conflict outcomes.[29]

For instance, the initial Soviet-Afghan strategy was that of conventional offense against a guerilla operation (an opposite, direct-indirect approach), but they shifted to a barbarism strategy around 1981 during the Panjsher IV campaign (thus, equalizing the approach to indirect-indirect). One could speculate, based on the statistics presented by Arreguin-Toft, that the Soviet strategy would be more effective in subduing the asymmetric foe. But as the Soviet Union expanded its operations, it became increasingly dependent on supporting conventional logistics and communications—primarily through air-mobile assets, and as a result their overall effectiveness declined. Not only had the Muhajadeen adjusted tactics, exploiting the various base targets as a result of increased lines of communication and supply, but the topography of the country presented a natural adversary all unto itself.

Arreguin-Toft concludes that the barbarism strategy was in part an “explanatory factor” as there was a limited mission established. He further suggests that the “territory of Afghanistan is 245,000 square miles; and even acknowledging that the Soviets only needed to control some lesser portion of that, they did not have enough troops [with] which to do it.”^[30] But still, why did this indirect-indirect approach not work—especially since a barbarism strategy did not cause any vulnerability to the political situation in the Soviet Union, while it should have devastated the logistical, communications, and intelligence capabilities of the Muhajadeen and the supporting population? Arreguin-Toft explains that:

The very real destruction of Afghan infrastructure and the mass killings and forced emigration of peasants did hurt the Mujahideen, but most ... managed to reorganize themselves and their resources to compensate. After 1983 they began to rely more for intelligence on sympathizers within the DRA, and more on logistical support from foreign sympathizers. ... In sum, the Afghan Civil War makes it clear that the more independent guerillas are of their popular support base due to outside support, the more insulated they will be from devastating effects of barbarism...^[31]

So what could be different for the United States? One significant difference comes to mind—our indirect approach through a population-centric COIN campaign, as opposed to the harsh and grotesque barbarism strategy that was wantonly directed against not only the Mujahideen by the Soviets, but the population writ large. Thus, the United States has adopted the correct same-approach strategy as outlined by Arreguin-Toft, and vastly different from the Soviet model. Now the strategic thinking needs to take another layer off-the-onion, and pragmatically consider the type of force that is charged to conduct those operations—keeping the very important issues of time and resources close at hand, as these are not fungible when it comes to outlining military strategy.

Conventional vs. Unconventional Applications

The problem with our current population-centric COIN strategy is that it has become synonymous with conventional-based operations.^[32] What were once the particular affairs of

Army Special Forces during the 1960-70s, has become the primary mission of general purpose forces (GPF) since 2001.[33] This is especially problematic when considering the cost of conducting large-scale conventional operations and nation-building activities (as will be further discussed below).

Political scientist Robert Pape recently indicated that there needs to be at least a 1:40 ratio of troops to civilians in order to properly secure the country.[34] John Nagl has further stated in a *Frontline* interview that withstanding classical COIN principles, there would need to be more than 600,000 troops on the ground to fully pacify the country. Currently, only two-thirds of those numbers are on the ground today.[35] The idea is that over time, the United States will be able to advise and train a competent national army and police force in order to compensate for the lack of coalition boots on the ground and provide their own security. However, the situation is neither sustainable politically, nor monetarily.

For instance, per U.S. soldier costs for deployment are staggering—it now costs over US\$775,000 a year to deploy a U.S. soldier or Marine in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.[36] This is roughly three times as much than any war that America has been involved in the past. According to Linda Bilmes, co-author of *The Three Trillion Dollar War*, “in today’s dollars, the amount that we spent per troop in WWII was about 50k—we are spending 10 times that per troop in Iraq. ... We can expect that the per troop cost in Afghanistan is higher than that. ... I expect between 20 to 50 percent higher in upfront cost per troop.”[37] But why? One word—logistics. Of course there are long-term-benefits, dependents (spouse and children housing and benefits), and other costs that are factored into this figure, but the bulk of expenditures comes at the expense of the topography, just as was the case for the Soviets.

In terms of the topography, the supply routes in Afghanistan are very different from, say Iraq, for two reasons: first, Afghanistan is a very rural country ranging from steep valleys and rolling grasslands to the arduous mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush; and second, it is landlocked. Currently we are sending the majority of our supplies through Pakistan and opening up other supply routes through the North from several of the “stans” countries. This is far more expensive compared to having access to Gulf country ports (e.g., Kuwait), and modern thruways in Iraq. Such costs will continue to rise, commensurate with the increase in the number of ISAF forces. Through FY09 alone there has been more than \$185 billion spent in the war in Afghanistan.[38]

Therefore a conventional (GPF) force may very well be tasked to execute an indirect strategy against an irregular enemy, but may not have the same positive effect on its strategic goals as would an unconventional (SOF) element tasked in the same manner. Similarly, a SOF direct approach may not mesh well against an embedded and heavily defended conventional force. In the case of the current situation in Afghanistan in particular, reverting back to core mission competencies of SOF by working closely with indigenous forces could be done at a fraction of the cost of a broad, conventionally-based COIN campaign by GPF. Due to the shortcomings of GPF in the current COIN operations, it may be better to apply SOF strategically in the region

given their small footprint. As will be presented later in this paper, Major Jim Gant's model is one that fits well into the current literature supporting the strategic utility of SOF.

The Strategic Utility of SOF

A recent op-ed in the *New York Times* described foreign intervention in Afghanistan as “an imperial history that seems to be repeating itself with uncanny precision.”^[39] Since the United States began its campaign in 2001, the perceptions on the population over time could easily fall within this statement.^[40] Though the beginning of operations was marked by a heavy SOF emphasis that was successful in temporarily eliminating the opponent from the battlespace, as the conflict subsided, large-scale nation-building ensued that required a significant conventional force for security and population engagement. However, as the insurgency grew, most conventional units were unable to adapt to the changing battlespace due to the restricting doctrine enmeshed in conventional Air-Land Battle warfare. Therefore, SOF units—working as what Gant describes as Tribal Engagement Teams (TETs)—are a better option for Afghanistan's near-term for the following reasons: the nature of SOF as an unconventional force, and the strategic utility SOF harnesses as both a direct and indirect means to engage asymmetric actors.^[41]

Christopher Lamb defines SOF as “what conventional forces are not.” In other words, “Special operations are those that conventional forces cannot accomplish or undertake without unacceptable levels of risk and expense of resources”—both are relevant when it comes to dealing with tribes in Afghanistan, and the amount of time it will take to do so.^[42] The level of risk attached to instilling the image of an occupier with an influx of conventional forces is easily gleaned in a country strongly allergic to such a heavy foreign presence. As mentioned before, the massive amount of blood and treasure needed to conduct conventional operations shows the difference between these two distinct applications of force.

But when considering Colin Gray's concept of strategic utility of special operations,^[43] the question arises as to whether or not SOF has been applied effectively in Afghanistan with regard to the directed mission. The short answer is no they have not, as the majority of operations conducted by SOF have been kinetic in nature and in support of broader conventional operations. Therefore, by not harnessing the strategic utility of SOF, the prospect for SI to be successful becomes limited, based on either the conventional-heavy and costly *indirect* approach through GPF COIN and the kinetic-centric SOF direct approach.^[44] This is not the best application of SI theory in the “Petri dish” of asymmetric conflict.

However, there are portions of the literature which suggest that SOF *must* become a part of the broader conventional campaign in order for there to be any strategic dividends.^[45] Yet, there are numerous historical cases that demonstrate SOF can be an unconventional force that effectively integrates with indigenous forces as force multipliers in an economy-of-force scenario: El Salvador, 1980-1994; Philippines 2001-present; and even Afghanistan October 2001-February 2002 provide some great examples.^[46] With that said, SOF can harness significant strategic

value as an economy of force element.[47] Moreover, an immediate cultural awareness and language skills are core competencies harnessed by SOF, specifically Army Special Forces teams, which correlate with the necessary “granular knowledge” that are necessary for situational awareness throughout Afghanistan.[48]

But the latter attributes have been placed on the proverbial back-burner, as Gant himself explained that his Operational Detachment Delta’s (ODA’s) mission was simply “to kill and capture anti-coalition members.” This is hardly a strategic application of SOF, and is purely direct in nature. Though SOF may be supporting a broader conventional effort, as outlined by James Kiras, the indirect capabilities described by Lamb and Tucker have been placed by the wayside.[49] To “kill and capture” enemy forces is something that any conventional infantry unit can accomplish; in other words, this is a blatant misuse of resources. Broader policy or strategic guidance was, and has been, lacking throughout the past eight years—perhaps this is still the case today. Only a small fraction of units like Gant’s adapted correctly to the environment early in the conflict. More can be done in this arena.

Applying such a strategy would shift SOF from a dependent, supporting role—which harnesses a low level of strategic utility and potential misuse of SOF altogether. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article describing the application of SOF (and conventional forces, for that matter) in Afghanistan depicts this low return on SOF’s strategic utility by directly supporting conventional forces in a COIN campaign, and does not bode well with a population-centric COIN approach:

U.S. Special Operations Forces ordered an air strike that killed at least 27 civilians in southern Afghanistan. ... [such a misguided operation] underscored the risks of the expanding use of Special Operations Forces, whose primary mission is hunting down Taliban, as the leading edge of the fight against insurgents. Many Special Operations missions by their very nature emphasize the use of violent force, and coalition officials say that they have led to a string of recent success against valuable targets. By contrast, operations now being carried out by conventional forces, such as Marines fighting in Marjah, place a greater emphasis on protecting ordinary people.[50]

William H. McRaven describes the importance of special operations theory stating, “A successful special operation defies conventional wisdom by using a small force to defeat a much larger or well entrenched opponent.”[51] He argues that a SOF can reduce the “frictions of war to a manageable level,” and “by minimizing these frictions the special operations force can achieve relative superiority over the enemy.”[52] But when SOF units are utilized in this manner, the frictions of war increase and relative superiority for other operations—indirect in the case of Gant—are lost.

Moreover, the general perception of the force becomes that of a video-game-like persona, and diminishes its practicality to the strategic thinker; this again follows a direct approach not conducive to an asymmetric environment. Gant’s model, on the contrary, would place SOF in an

independent, “warrior-diplomat” role, which achieves a proportionally greater strategic utility and interaction without minimizing the skill set to simply “violent [direct] force.” The need to revert to what Gant calls “influence without authority”—the most reliable and lasting influence that happens by acting as partners, not distant superiors, strangers or trigger-pullers—is imperative not only for a successful strategy in Afghanistan, but the future of SOF writ large. This is not to mention the ramifications of conventional forces becoming too SOF-like, and losing their principal warfighting luster.[\[53\]](#)

What is needed, under Gant’s model of TETs is coordination between SOF and conventional forces between now and when SOF can take over the bulk of operations. During this transition period the tribal area would be ideally “turned into a Joint Special Operations Area (JSOA), where everyone and anyone who wanted to pass through would get approval from TET on the ground.”[\[54\]](#) Therefore, the chain of command would start with the SOF team, not the conventional force commander in that same area. This would be a good way forward in shifting to a SOF, indirect approach. This would be a polar shift from Kiras’ theory, as well as the conduct of SOF in a conventionally-dominated command environment. Yet, alleviating the potential of a drone strike or raid ruining 15 months of TET progress (not to mention placing the team in direct danger), emphasizes this very necessary change in coordination.[\[55\]](#)

The difference is that most operations have been (in terms of SI theory) “direct-on-direct” in nature. In the beginning the SOF approach coupled with mass conventional firepower was very successful in its primary objective of rooting-out enemy forces. As far as SI theory is concerned, this was an effective application of strategy against a weak, asymmetrically-oriented actor—which at the time attempted to fight largely head-on. Yet there wasn’t any strategic advantage derived from the relative superiority gained from such kinetic operations once the Taliban shifted its strategy to indirect (guerrilla warfare), and the United States stuck to its direct—and more conventionally-based—playbook.[\[56\]](#) The economy of force has, therefore, been in favor of the Taliban; the calculus needs to change, not only to turn the tides in the southern and eastern regions of the country, but also to scale back the extensive and resource-intensive conventional force that is currently deployed.

Going Indirect-Indirect: “Influence without Authority”

A famous maxim in the region is that “we have the watch, but they have the time.”[\[57\]](#) As has been argued in various arenas throughout the duration of this conflict, the political will of the United States is finite, and as described by the current Afghanistan policy, there may only be 18 months to effectively implement General McChrystal’s (now General Petraeus’) plan. Clearly, the latter is not indicative of the former in the sense that the time remaining does not match with a COIN strategy that will take decades to come to full fruition. But the situation presents an opportunity to shift from a primarily conventional- based effort, to one that is centralized around a smaller footprint as depicted by Gant. Such a shift in strategy could—as suggested previously—offer a favorably disproportionate return on military investment, and will represent a similar force-on-force continuum.”[\[58\]](#)

Policy analyst David Rittgers explained that the “fundamental element to any long-term solution in Afghanistan falls upon the tribes”—the oldest and most enduring self-governing unit in that *country*.^[59] Otherwise, “if [the United States] takes away this basic building block of Afghanistan society, then any peace that *we* impose will be a temporary one at best [emphasis added].”^[60] And with a tenuous border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where dozens of ethnic groups, speaking dozens of languages, reside, the situation becomes more grave.

This very point has been eloquently reinforced by Gant throughout his paper, “One Tribe at a Time,” where he describes tribes as the most important military, political and cultural unit in the country, and are therefore hallmark to sustaining any level of stability in the current COIN campaign.^[61] Given what Major Gant describes as a “tactical employment of small, well-trained units that, when combined with a larger effort, will have positive strategic implications,” which extends beyond the common attributes found on a battlefield defined by a conventional presence. This type of model for Afghanistan is imperative as the fight steadily evolves toward the proposed deadline in eighteen months.^[62]

In his “Note to the Reader,” Gant explains that he drafted his paper prior to President Obama’s speech outlining the “way forward” in Afghanistan, establishing the 18-month deadline for U.S. combat forces to commence their withdrawal. With that said, there are clearly a plethora of issues that prevail on the ground in Afghanistan, but which for reasons of length and focus are not explicitly discussed in this article, but which are no less important and will exist beyond the December 2011 date.

Generally speaking, Afghanistan is a country with a history and orientation that is fundamentally different from any Westphalian-modeled nation-state. Importantly, if these issues, along with the core elements of statecraft, are not addressed, then any long-term regional or international relationships will be absent, as the engagement will not be sustained between other nation-state or international institutions. For now, though, Seth Jones presents an appropriate way forward when considering the political dynamic in his recent *Foreign Affairs* article, “It Takes the Villages.” He argues that “[t]he current top-down state-building and counterinsurgency efforts must take place alongside bottom-up programs, such as reaching out to legitimate local leaders to enlist them in providing security and services at the village and district levels.”^[63] However, there are some other very important considerations to keep in mind:

- Confronting the broader cross-border infiltration with Pakistan;
- A lack of a viable justice system and rule of law; broad political issues that range from the legitimacy of a centralized national government to rampant levels of corruption that plague politics throughout the system; and the prevalence of warlords and how to absorb or retract them into a functional system;
- The monumental opium problem that not only fuels the insurgency with vast monetary resources, but provides the local population with a dependable livelihood in an otherwise unpredictable society;

- And lastly, the larger issue of how to establish a relevant, coherent, functional and trusted Afghan National Army (ANA) and police force (ANP).

Gant prepares his analysis based off of his personal experience while serving with Operational Detachment Alpha 316 (ODA 316) working intimately with the Malik Noorafzhal's tribe (in the Pashtun belt). He summarizes the experience as follows:

We demonstrated month-in-and-month-out that a small effective fighting force could unite with an Afghan tribe, become trusted and respected brothers-in-arms with their leaders and families, and make a difference in the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. In doing so, we discovered what I believed to be the seed of enduring success in that country.”[64]

In fact, it would behoove the United States to embrace a plan that “will not only work,” according to Gant, “but will help to ease the need for ... larger numbers of U.S. soldiers being deployed to Afghanistan.”[65] The enemy may indeed have the time, “However, we can turn time into an ally if we engage and partner with the tribes and, most importantly, demonstrate our commitment to them” without an *expensive watch* that equates to extensive manpower and resources.[66] Gant boldly suggests that once “we gain the respect and trust of one tribe, in one area, there will be a domino effect [that will] spread throughout the region and beyond. One tribe will eventually become 25 or even 50 tribes.”[67]

In order to achieve such ends, Gant proposes the formal implementation of what he coins, Tribal Engagement Teams (TETs). These TETs would be largely autonomous, and allow broad flexibility in responding to fresh, actionable intelligence without having to filter through an extensive chain of command. These teams would not only serve as solutions at a local level, but “with an eye to integrate with regional and national government representatives” as well.[68] The basic tenet as described by Gant is that “[t]his plan requires a small group of men who can comprehend the extensive networks, influences and idiosyncrasies of the mission and the environment.”[69] Other reasons why TETs would be an appropriate SI theory approach via indirect are:

- TETs can effectively separate the insurgent from the population. This would not only disrupt Taliban movement and their ability to surge in certain areas, but challenge their sanctuary writ large.[70]
- A force with individuals who harness a “special gift for cross-cultural competency and building rapport,” as well as who “like to fight and spend countless months, even years living in harsh circumstances,” is necessary. Again, a trait outside of the proverbial conventional box.
- TETs can provide immediate and “real security” for the villages that they are engaged with—as they are “24/7 on-site.”[71]

- TETs can work in coordination with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in facilitating tactical civil action programs.[72]
- TETs can provide a very effective tactical PSYOPS campaign, where tribes can heavily counter Taliban propaganda.[73]
- TETs can provide a bridge between the tribe and all levels of government.

In this sense, SOF clearly offers what Adm. Olson, commander of the Special Operations Command (SOCOM), would describe as a “different flavor” from tactics, techniques and procedures through a more “refined doctrine.” He further notes that—and as is suggested by Gant’s proposal for TETs—that SOF “make a greater relative difference in small teams in remote places.”[74]

Why Tribes?

At the beginning of Colonel Harry Summers’ book, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, he cites a conversation between himself and his North Vietnamese counterpart, Colonel Tu, in Hanoi, April 1975: “You know you never defeated us on the battlefield,” said Summers. The North Vietnamese commander pondered his remark for a moment and replied, “That may be so, but it also irrelevant.”[75] For the United States, it may be that we hold ground in Afghanistan and are heavily involved in kinetic and non-kinetic operations throughout the country. But just as in Vietnam, that also becomes irrelevant when it comes to the political, economic and social intricacies around the tribal belt.

Tribal engagement is essential for avoiding the perils of Vietnam, by implementing the appropriate SI approach with an indirect strategy through the application of SOF.[76] This is the case for a variety of reasons. In particular, the Pashtun tribes, which represent the majority ethnic group, are important to engage for two primary reasons: “first, this group has dominated Afghan politics and society for hundreds of years ... and second, the Pashtun identity is important because the Afghan-Pakistani border divided ethnic Pashtuns almost in half.”[77] For these reasons alone, an active tribal engagement campaign will assist in pacifying many of the areas from the Taliban’s hold. But even in areas that are inhabited by other tribal groups, tribal engagement would prove effective.

The Taliban is certainly wasting no time, as they have adapted to the U.S. presence and its message of democracy and peace. Whether in sequence, or separate, from blatant intimidation campaigns, the Taliban have engaged in a staunch IO campaign that aligns their primary objectives with that of the broader Pashtun identity by reinventing themselves as a part of the Pashtun nationalist cause. They want to “liberate the country from foreign invaders.”[78] And as more U.S. troops enter the country, and validate the Taliban’s “occupier” narrative, the ability for the United States to regain its IO momentum becomes ever more challenging. The Taliban are winning on that front, and still continue to apply classical intimidation tactics like kidnappings, taxation and assassinations of mid-level and local government officials as well as anyone suspected of assisting coalition forces.

The United States must regain the initiative in the “war of ideas”—and a broad TET campaign, by partnering with the tribes, would be an appropriate response. After all, the Taliban have found the tribal approach quite helpful to their cause. As described by Seth Jones, the Taliban have more effectively reached out to the population by appointing “commanders who come from local sub-tribes or clans. They frequently reach out to tribes and other local communities that have been marginalized by those favored by the government.”^[79] Gant’s proposal thus provides a viable means for countering these efforts by the Taliban. Other key reasons that Gant provides for partnering TETs with tribes are as follows:

- Partnering with the tribes is directly related to protecting the population.
- In order to fully embrace a productive, population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, this must be an accepted stipulation: tribes are structurally conducive to providing protection to the population.
- This protection is not only committed to physical security and land rights, but it covets the virtues of honor—a core attribute in tribal society. As Gant explains, a tribe is a “natural” democracy.
- Though the issues of civil and human rights in the western sense cannot be parallel at any level, when it comes to Afghan *shuras* and *jirgas* (tribal councils), “every man’s voice has a chance to be heard;”^[80] and a tribal member “lives in a regional world where day-to-day military strength means the difference between survival and being overrun by other tribal elements whoever they might be.”^[81] Members of a TET would be most appropriate to engage in such meetings, and become integrated in the process.
- There is nominal, if any, concern about “country” as would be understood through a western lens,^[82] and “[t]he Pashtun tribes will fight any and all outsiders, and refuse to accept being ruled by a central government;”^[83]
- The psyche of a tribal warrior—around the world—holds value in “upholding codes of honor and avoiding shameful humiliation;” all want to gain honor for themselves, their lineage, clan and tribe;^[84] and a deep understanding of Pashtun tribal code, “Pashtunwali,” is essential “for the success of TETs and overall U.S. strategy in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and beyond.”^[85]
- As indicated by Thomas Barfield, president of the American Institute of Afghanistan Studies, the Pashtunwali is a code of honor and conduct that stresses “having solutions take place outside of the state.”^[86]

Given the proposed American timeline, as well as the fact that “most [successful] insurgencies have taken between 11 to 14 years to complete,” the TET program is a viable avenue of approach beyond the 18-month deadline.^[87] And since the average time to conduct a COIN campaign clearly falls outside of the current U.S. mandate, “the indigenous forces will eventually have to win the war on their own, and must develop the ability to do so.”^[88] If using the coveted “clear, hold and build strategy,” then conventional forces should be used to “clear” as many of these

areas as possible over the next 18 months (e.g., Helmand) in order to pave the way for SOF to follow-on to implement the latter two portions of the strategy. As described by Gant:

a small number of TETs—given enough time to train a Tribal Security Force (TSF) and the ability to call for U.S. air support and aerial re-supply and a U.S. Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in an emergency—could conduct the “hold and build” portion of this strategy with a very limited footprint. ... Training and building relationships with leaders of the tribe will be permanent fixes in large areas of rural Afghanistan. We will be able to stay there for the long-haul with very little support once the systems are in place and the TSPs (*Arbakai*) are well training and gained their trust [sic].

As it is, our SOF presence is increasing—perhaps preempting such a shift in strategy. A recent report stated that “[t]he Army expects its expanded Special Operations HQ in Mazer-e-Sharif to occupy 70,000 square meters ... [additionally] the U.S. military is on a building spree, spending hundreds of millions of dollars on wartime encampments. By one count, America and its allies now have 700 bases in Afghanistan.”^[89]

So with that said, how does this model as presented by Gant, fall into the matrix of prevailing, scholarly theoretical models of SOF as a strategic force? First, there is a cultural dynamic to consider. As mentioned before, a SOF is defined as a force that conducts “operations that conventional forces can not.”^[90] Therefore, as presented by Lamb and Tucker, two of the four key characteristics of a SOF are that, one, it has unorthodox approaches; and two, unconventional training and equipment. Luttwak also talked about the “basics” in *Son Tay*. To paraphrase, he signified that there is a high-value in “training together, working together and fighting together.”^[91] Lamb and Tucker’s two traits, as well as Edward Luttwak’s point about SOF having a special *esprit de corps* that allow a SOF unit to engender a natural sense of cohesion with an indigenous force—in this case, a tribe—makes SOF the best fit for such operations. Gant points this out, stating “a Special Forces ODA can understand an Afghan tribe because we ourselves are a tribe.”^[92]

The cultural continuity predisposed to SOF teams and tribes makes for a natural working relationship; cultural integration becomes second nature.^[93] They are effective force multiples for working with tribes—due to their economy-of-force mission that is not dependent on large scale logistics chains, and the natural ability of SOF to integrate well in the tribal culture. However, SOF are also able to apply an unconventional, SI-indirect response through what Arreguin-Toft describes as a defensive, guerilla strategy. Not only is a small, SOF detachment conducive to the warrior ethos exhibited in the tribal culture, but also their small size allows for what Gant calls an “acceptable level of integration.”^[94] In other words, a large conventional contingent of U.S. soldiers—even at the platoon level—would quickly alienate themselves based on SOPs (erecting mini-fire bases, walking around with armor and Kevlar, etc.)^[95] At the strategic level, a large footprint would translate into the perception of an “occupation,” and the material benefit of conventional forces would thus become irrelevant. Arreguin-Toft suggests

this concept via SI when an asymmetric environment favors the weak actor, when the stronger counterpart relies upon muscle and technology for a long duration. [96] Thus, a conventionally-oriented, indirect approach is not appropriate for the mission. In the end, however, it is not the TET that will secure the tribe, rather the “tribe will have to secure the tribe,” which will not tie the United States down to the country forever.[97]

Concluding Remarks

To borrow from a recent paper by Stephen Biddle, Fotini Christia and Alexander Thier published in *Foreign Affairs*, “As U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates observed in 2009, Afghanistan does not need to become “a Central Asian Valhalla.” Yet a Central Asian Somalia would presumably not suffice.” And in order to avert such an outcome, and not commit abundant resources toward an unrealistic “Valhalla,” a thoughtful shift in strategy is needed.[98] Just the same, aside from the economy of force and functionality of a “small footprint,” once American forces begin to disengage, there are some unintended consequences that must be considered in taking the tribal engagement approach proposed by Gant.

First is the potential entanglement in tribal, clan and sub-clan vendettas. Working with tribes, and potentially tribal warlords, can ensnare the United States into involving itself with deeply-divided historical disputes between these entities, which in return have no strategic value for the United States.[99] In effect, the United States would be doing the dirty work at the behest of these tribes on the dime of the U.S. tax payers, and more importantly, misapplying the most precious resource in America’s arsenal—its forces. Taking on such a venture on any vast scale—vast meaning embedding multiple SOF groups into tribal areas as TETs—could very well lead us down such slippery a slope.

Though there are many examples, Gant actually presents an anecdote in his writings which exemplifies the potential for becoming stewards to such devices, when describing his support for Noorafzal’s tribes in reconciling land disputes between the “highland” and “lowland” tribes:

He told me he had given the highlanders 10 days to comply with the request or he and his men would retake it by force. ... Could I afford to get involved in internal tribal warfare? What were the consequences if I did? With the Tribe? With the other tribes in the area? With my own chain of command. ... I made the decision to support him.[100]

Nevertheless, it was only after fighting and living so close to this tribe that Gant able to observe “the depth and power of the existing ... tribal system ... [and grasp] the absolute necessity of working with and bonding with the tribal leader—man-to-man, warrior-to-warrior.”[101] There is nothing new with either the dilemma of becoming too entrenched in the internal affairs in a particular society, nor garnering the success of working so closely with these groups. This can be seen from the U.S. Indian Wars both ante- and post-bellum to Lawrence of Arabia and thereafter.

Still, having a deep understanding of the local dynamic—the human terrain and ethnography—is central to a SOF commander’s (and individual soldier’s) effect on the area; both in terms of operational and strategic utility.^[102] And when it comes to Afghanistan in particular, “engaging the tribes and understanding tribalism at its core is the surest and ‘lightest-footprint’ opportunity we have to protect the tribes—the cultural and political foundation of Afghanistan—where they live, one tribe at a time.”^[103]

The current shift in command from General McChrystal to General Petraeus adds increased pressure on the policy that now is a year-out from the designated timeline. Since the prompt transition of command, there has been increased demand on clarity on the troop deadline, as well as the COIN policy writ large. Many in Congress and elsewhere are questioning whether the December 2011 deadline is really hyperbole, or a strict timeline on U.S. commitment. Regardless of the previous intent of the December 2011 deadline, the unfortunate situation that has led to the ousting of General McChrystal presents the Administration and General Petraeus a unique opportunity to clarify what the date means, and how forces may be utilized there afterward.

This is particularly significant as the status quo not only hinders U.S. flexibility in conducting effective tactical operations that exhibit lasting strategic effect, but openly displays to America’s foes that hinging their strategies on an asymmetric basis—whether on the low-end of the spectrum through guerrilla operations, or even cyber warfare and systems disruptions at the higher-end—is an effective model to follow when countering a stronger adversary. For the United States there is growing importance in having better fortitude to operate under such conditions, as those have, and will, become instrumental to current and future U.S. military operations. As described by Arreguin-Toft, “The likelihood of victory and defeat in asymmetric conflict depends on the interaction of the strategies weak and strong actors use.” So far, the weak have the winning strategy.

However, Arreguin-Toft’s analysis would suggest that an indirect approach applied by the strong actor via guerrilla warfare, or in this case tribal engagement through SOF, would present an ideal framework when conducting operations against the Taliban, which have been conducting a comprehensive insurgency since late 2001. Therefore, merging the networked ODA or “A-Team” concept as applied during the first push into Afghanistan through air and fires support (direct), with Major Jim Gant’s model of tribal engagement (indirect), enhances this ideal framework for Afghanistan and other potential conflicts in strongly ethnic based, and weakly governed areas along the coined “Arc of Instability”—hence, the strategic interaction becomes similar, and in essence symmetrical, with an irregular enemy.^[104]

The term “perilous slogs” appears in the title of an article authored by Rajiv Chandrasekaran on the eve of the Marjah operation, and describes the density of the ongoing kinetic operations.^[105] Coincidentally, Lucien Vanderbrouche titled his book *Perilous Options* when considering the application of SOF in U.S. foreign policy (many of the cases being direct in nature). With Gant’s model, the slogs of working, eating, sleeping and fighting with these tribes are not only pertinent to success, but are no less perilous than the day-to-day movement of their conventional

counterpart maneuvering across the countryside in Marjah and beyond.^[106] However, one harnesses broader and more sustaining strategic outcomes than the other.

But like any approach, there are flaws—as mentioned earlier, there are no silver bullets. Some of the most significant are logistics—which are no better for a SOF element; however, they still do not have as long of a coat-tail that a conventional unit would have. But supplying and reinforcing these teams will still constitute vast logistical hurdles. Another is having the ability to sustain the deployment of multiple Special Forces A-teams, as a part of the TET endeavor. Clearly, an increase in SOF would be needed—but simply stating such a need is different from recruiting, training, and equipping those (including advanced cultural and language skills) who would be considered qualified to become a special operator; there is thus only a finite amount of force. Moreover, dedicating the majority of those forces to one area of operation (AOR) will degrade the presence, missions and cultural and language skills unique to that particular group’s regional area.^[107]

In the end, the key to achieving strategic goals will be to adapt against a heavily ingrained organizational command structure that is not compatible with such shifts in strategy. Yet, security should not be diminished just to uphold bureaucratic formalities—those who will exploit those values and systems by asymmetric means are well aware of such inhibitions.

About the Author

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References

1. I consider this a working paper, and perhaps, the nascent development of a thesis of which I intend conduct further analysis through individual case studies of the Soviet-Afghan War, British presence in the 19th century, as well as the U.S. campaign from 2001-10 (respectively) through the lens of strategic interaction (SI) theory. The scope of this article solely focuses on how the literature supports such an approach in Afghanistan via Major Jim Gant’s Tribal Engagement Model. Further investigation through qualitative and quantitative analysis is required.
2. The author would like to make a special acknowledgement to the Center on Contemporary Conflict (CCC) at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) for supporting the publication of this article. The views in this paper are the author’s alone, and do not represent the position of the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, U.S. Navy or the U.S. Department of Defense.
3. David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2010), ix.

4. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, Interview, "Afghan Violence Ignites New Concerns About U.S. Military," *PBS News Hour*, June 15, 2010.

5. Ibid. The empty box references the government in a box that was associated with part of McChrystal's campaign in Helmand. Rajiv notes that this attempt has been grossly ineffective.

6. Andrew Bacevich, "Afghan Violence Ignites New Concerns About U.S. Military," *PBS News Hour*. June 15, 2010.

7. General David Petraeus, Testimony to the U.S. Armed Services Committee, June 16, 2010.

8. John Nagl. Interview, "Afghan Violence Ignites New Concerns About U.S. Military," *PBS News Hour*, June 15, 2010.

9. USAID, for example, is dwarfed in comparison to the US military's logistical breadth and capabilities: "In all, there are about 8,000 employees worldwide, including 1,200 Civil Service employees and 500 Foreign Service Officers based in Washington, 800 Foreign Service Officers deployed overseas, 5,000 local employees working in our overseas missions, plus about 500 others working under other hiring mechanisms." Though plans have been made to increase the size of USAID and other key agencies (like the Department of State), there is clearly a long way to go to meet mission critical needs. See website: The United States Agency for International Development. 20 May 2009. <http://www.usaid.gov/careers/applicant.html>. Also, it is important to note that most of the other civilian institutions involved in stabilizing Afghanistan fall under the command and control of Central Command (CENTCOM).

10. See James Risen, "U.S. Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, June 13, 2010.

11. Another area that will need to be addressed is that of contractors. Currently millions of dollars are being *spent* on defense contractors who sub and sub-sub contract, skimming from the top and leaving a fraction behind for projects; many of which are not fully developed or not meeting the needs of the particular village or province in question. In fact, in Afghanistan alone there are more than 107,000 contractors on the ground; more than double the amount of U.S. combat troops currently deployed. And if the current build-up of conventional forces continues, "the Congressional Research Service projects that 130,000-160,000 contractors will support the nearly 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan by August 2010 (Data retrieved from John Nagl and Richard Fontaine, "Contracting in Conflicts: The Path to Reform," June 2010, p. 23.). Obviously, the majority of these contractors play a pivotal role that would inhibit the current forces on the ground from conducting missions. But their applicability once the bulk of forces redeploy will be up for debate.

12. See Lamb and Tucker, *U.S. Special Operations Forces*. In this book they outline the role and mission of SOF through either direct – kinetically oriented commando raids, usually in

association with broader conventional operations; or indirect, such as foreign indigenous defense and conducting unconventional warfare.

13. David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2010), ix-x.

14. Arreguin-Toft. *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2005). Original chart can be found on page 3.

15. Ibid., 4

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., 4-5

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., 5

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 18.

22. Ibid.

23. B.H. Liddel-Hart quoted by Ivan Arreguin-Toft, 29-30

24. Ibid., 39.

25. Ibid., 28-32.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 24-31.

28. See Arreguin-Toft's case study of the Soviet Afghan War 1979-1989, pages 169-199. This will be one of the case studies I will analyze as a part of a broader thesis topic.

29. Ibid., 45

30. Urban, quoted by Arreguin-Toft.

31. Ibid., 193-195.

32. Both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have been conducted – more accurately commanded – by conventional forces since the onset of the formerly known as War on Terror. As a result, new

doctrine has been published (FM-3-24 among others), and new training techniques have been initiated in order to confront those challenges. However, this has raised many concerns that conventional forces are becoming too 'SOF-like' while SOF forces are becoming more commando and direct action focused. This is a major shift for SOF during the hay day of wars of liberation – where COIN was the predominating mission set during the 1960s and 1970s.

33. There is no doubt that GPF need to have competence in conducting operations in a COIN environment (knowledge of the human terrain, political institutions, etc), but from a monetary and regional-specific skills (via language and understanding micro-cultural nuances), SOF forces represent a far better tool.

34. "Rethinking Afghanistan," documentary, *Brave New Foundation*. Series launched in 2009.

35. John Nagl, Interview, "Obama's War," *Frontline*, October 13, 2009.

36. Barbara Starr, CNN Pentagon Correspondent, quoted in "Rethinking Afghanistan," Op. Cit.

37. Linda Bilmes, quoted in "Rethinking Afghanistan," Op. Cit.

38. See "Rethinking Afghanistan," Op. Cit. Another pivotal issue is the capacity and wherewithal of the Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP) and the central government. Not only is the internal combustion of tribal identities, and loyalties, that may cause the unraveling of the very forces that the United States is spending millions to train and equip, but the attrition rates of troops throughout the process, or even those that overtly switch sides after being trained and equipped with advanced (relatively speaking) body armor and weaponry present very serious implications with regard to the vitality and credibility of the force. Notwithstanding these various cultural issues prevailing in a country, however, the amount of capital it would take to sustain the number of forces projected to be needed in Afghanistan is staggering. In fact, it is impractical for the state to support the function of such a force. Much of the problem resides in the very low GDP rate and economic capacity of Afghanistan. With a rough total of GDP around 12 billion per year, and no serious infrastructure or natural resource (beyond illicit narcotics), one wonders how the Afghan state will be able to provide adequate services to the people, let alone sustain the ANA/ANP, which is growing to upwards of 500,000 troops. An interesting piece by Samuel Chan titled, "Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army" reports that "Despite \$822 million worth of donations from 46 coalition partners and another 194 million pending approval, the Afghan army nonetheless suffers from the absence of a self-sustaining operational budget." This is not even to mention how such "investments" have affected the staggering and bleak prognosis of the U.S. economy.

39. William Dalrymple, "The Ghosts of Gandamak," *The New York Times*, May 9, 2010.

40. Especially since Afghanistan has experienced centuries of foreign intervention from the times of Alexander the Great, to the British Empire in the 19th century, the Soviets in the 20th and the U.S. now at the eve of the 21st.

41. I would like to acknowledge Mr. Matt Dearing, Ph.D. candidate at the Naval Postgraduate School, for his assistance in editing this article, as well as helping frame this particular paragraph. Also Ms. Ginger Blanken and Mr. Barry Zellen were also of great assistance.

42. See Christopher Lamb's piece "Perspectives on Emerging SOF Roles and Missions," *Special Warfare*, July 1995, 3.

43. See Colin Gray, *Strategy and Special Operations*.

44. An important note to make is that no two units are alike. While some conventional units have proven ineffective, and at times very allergic to COIN operations, others have flourished. The same can be said for SOF ODAs and the leadership's ability to adapt and make good use of their time in a particular AO. The argument is for consistency across the board, as opposed to sporadic and inconsistent sparks of success.

45. See theory presented by James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Also, see recent *Your Army* article by Sean Naylor, "A-Team in Afghanistan." He notes the current difficulty this team is having in conducting an economy of force operation in southern Afghanistan. However, this mission is still ingrained in a broader conventional construct. "The team deployed to Shinkay district in southern Zabul province in January [was tasked to] secure Shinkay's population of 15-25k, which is split between 25 towns and villages, there were about 300 Afghan National Army troops and 82nd Airborne division company, each headquartered beside the A-team." This is not a pedigree SOF economy of force mission – especially in terms of Gant's model.

46. See Hy Rothstein, "Less is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States," *Third World Quarterly* 28, No. 2 (2007), 276. This is a great piece, which explains how each one of these cases were an effective economy of force operation conducted by SOF.

47. There is a plethora of literature to review with regard to the strategy of SOF. Some key experts who have compiled various publications comprising the bulk of this literature are: Colin Gray, James Kiras, Christopher Lamb, and David Tucker to name a few.

48. Max Boot, "Panel discussion: Afghanistan and the Specter of Vietnam," *Asia Society*, February 24, 2010, <http://www.asiasociety.org/video/policy-politics/afghanistan-and-specter-vietnam-complete>

49. See James D. Kiras, *Special Operations and Strategy* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

50. Matthew Rosenberg, "U.S. Special Operations Ordered Deadly Afghan Strike," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2010.

51. See William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

52. Ibid.

53. The Marines in the *Wall Street Journal* article provide a good example. More recent reports support this assertion, as the tentative Kandahar offensive will shift from "a robust military push..." to a "strategy that puts civilian reconstruction efforts first and relegates military action to a supportive role." This counters the very doctrine published in 2006 that states that security must be established before sustainable infrastructure can be built (the cornerstone of the infamous 'clear, hold and build'). Nevertheless, undertaking such an offensive strategy through the application of conventional forces does not mesh with finite levels of resources, time or the ability to sustain either kinetic or reconstruction operations. See Rod Nordland, "Afghanistan Strategy Shifts to Focus on Civilian Effort," *New York Times*, June 8, 2010.

54. Maj. Jim Gant, "Jim Major. One Tribe at a Time: A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan," *Nine Sisters Imports, Inc.* 2009, 48.

55. See James D. Kiras, Op. Cit.

56. See William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

57. Ibid.

58. Colin S. Gray, "Handfuls of heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed," *Parameters*, Spring 1999, 2.

59. David Rittgers, Interview, "The Strategy Behind the Marja Offensive," *National Public Radio (NPR)*, February 16, 2010. Also see Thomas Johnson and Chris Mason, "No Signs until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border," *International Security* 32, No. 4, 47. They note that "The largest group by far is made up of the Pashtun tribes that inhabit the center, but the region is also home to Baluchis, Ketrans, Nuristanis, Brahui, Munjis, Chitralis, Shinas, Gujaris, Hazaras, Kowars, Savis, Tajiks, Hindkos, Dameli, Kalamis, and Burushos, among others." Moreover, "the diversity of language and culture represents the extravagance of political and societal dynamics across a border that would span from New York to Santa Fe if it were in the United States."

60. Ibid.

61. Jim Gant, Op. Cit., 5.

62. Ibid., 10.

63. Seth Jones, "It Takes the Villages: Bringing Change from Below in Afghanistan," *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2010.

64. Jim Gant, Op. Cit., 14.

65. Ibid., 9.

66. Ibid., 31.

67. Ibid., 10.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid., 36.

70. Ibid., 28.

71. Ibid., 33.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. Admiral Eric Olson, "Panel Presentation: Future of the Force," CNAS Annual Conference. June 10, 2010.

75. Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnamese War* (New York: Presidio Press, 1982).

76. Further analysis of CAPs and Strategic Hamlets in Vietnam is warranted, especially since these were conducted in an economy of force method.

77. Arreguin-Toft, Op. Cit., 170.

78. See "Rethinking Afghanistan," Op. Cit.

79. Seth Jones, Op. Cit.

80. Ibid., 13.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., 24.

83. Ibid., 25.

84. Ronfeldt quoted by Gant, Op. Cit., 35.

85. Ibid., 25.

86. See: "Rethinking Afghanistan," Op. Cit.

88. Ibid.

89. Noah Shactman, "Army Plans \$100 Million Special Ops HQ in Afghanistan," *Danger Room*. June 3, 2010.

90. Colin Gray, "Handfuls of Heroes on Desperate Ventures: When do Special Operations Succeed," *Parameters*, Spring 1999, 2.

91. Edward N. Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Dimensions of Military Strategy*, ed. George E. Thibault (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1987), 336.

92. Ibid., 19. Major Gant presents an anecdote where he bonded with the tribal chief, Noorafzhal, during an operation. Describing the value of that interaction, he stated, "It was a remarkable moment that cannot be put into any metrics or computer program that defines "success" today. But it was..."

93. Ibid., 48. Gant describes cultural integration as the point where you can be yourself and your counterpart can be himself with no concern for cultural taboos or cultural missteps.

94. Ibid., 47.

95. Ibid.

96. Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge, UK/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

97. Ibid.

98. Stephen Biddle, et al., "Defining Success in Afghanistan: What Can the United States Accept?" *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2010.

99. See Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud* (London: Hurst & Co, 2009). He describes in great detail the nature and history of warlords in Afghan contemporary history, as well as how they play into the broader political and economic dynamic in the country.

100. James D. Kiras, Op. Cit., 18.

101. Ibid., 19.

102. As discussed in a course with Dr. Hy Rothstein, there is a facet of tactical utility that is also valid. In this case it is implicit to the nature of the fight.

103. Ibid., 30.

104. See the Directorate of National Intelligence (DNI), *Global Trends 2025* via extended analysis of the Arc of instability, as well as Joseph Miedal's Strong Actors, Weak States, which provides a very good background in this area.

105. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "The Marines move on Marja: A perilous slog against Afghanistan's Taliban," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/02/14/>.

106. See Lucien Vanderbrouche, *Perilous Options: Special Operations as an Instrument of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

107. For instance, 5th Special Forces Group's AOR is usually the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, while 7th Special Forces Group is Latin America. If all of these groups are expended in active AORs, they will lose their competencies, and missions in those areas (e.g. Foreign Indigenous Defense (FID) training missions) will suffer.