

Executive Summary

Afghan tribes always have and always will resist any type of foreign intervention in their affairs. This includes a central government located in Kabul, which to them is a million miles away from their problems, a million miles away from their security.¹

—Major Jim Gant
U.S. Army Special Forces

In this issue, *Joint Force Quarterly* delves into two realms of inquiry that are mutually dependent upon legitimacy for U.S. success. Presented up front is a wholly unplanned return to the topic of strategic communication precipitated by the large reader (and media) response to Admiral Mullen's essay in the October issue. When informed of the numerous letters and essays that *JFQ* had received, the Chairman consented to acknowledge these complementary essays in lieu of his January installment. Similarly, the October Forum's examination of strategists and strategy led to a cascade of submissions examining the strategic context of the 32-year Afghan civil war. Continuing joint professional military education via *JFQ* benefits immeasurably from the dialectical method of reader interaction. This journal, more than most, boasts a heavy percentage of articles from a readership of current practitioners in the field (literally). Should this issue provoke another unexpected bounty of manuscript submissions, the April edition shall continue to accommodate unplanned excursions in readership contributions.

On October 27, 2009, the Asia Foundation, with funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, released findings from its fifth public opinion poll in Afghanistan, which covered 6,406 adult Afghans in all 34 provinces. Seventy-one percent of the respondents were found to support the government's attempts to address the security situation through negotiation and reconciliation with armed antigovernment elements. According to the report:

The high level of support for this approach is likely to be influenced by the fact that a

majority of respondents (56%) say they have some level of sympathy with the motivations of armed opposition groups. Support for consultation with religious leaders in government decision-making and to resolve local problems continues to rise, with the highest levels of support in the East (82%), and South West (72%) of the country. There is little variation between ethnic groups, but there are significant regional differences. Around two-thirds of respondents have some level of sympathy with such groups in the South East and East, but this is true for less than half of respondents in the Central/Kabul and Central/Hazarajat regions.²

Against this backdrop, the Forum begins with a unique essay in which General Volney Warner explores the fundamental assumptions underlying military strategy in Afghanistan with an experienced foreign area officer presently serving there. Presented as an interview, the authors begin by disabusing readers of the notion that Afghanistan can be profitably regarded as a nation. They dispute the efficacy of employing population-centric counterinsurgency strategies to obtain U.S. military objectives in a civil war that has been waged for more than three decades. Emphasizing that Afghans want nothing so much as to be left alone, the authors advocate a strategy that promotes internal stability and a near-term redeployment of coalition forces without further alienating the Afghan people. Surveying the contextual elements of Pakistan's security concerns with India and the strategic sanctuary of its Federally Administered Tribal Areas, the authors review demographic data to reinforce their message that Afghanistan is a territory that contains people, not a nation-

state with an effective central government. The article concludes with a menu of strategic options tailored to the authors' estimate of the situation and admonishes the reader: "It is high time the American people were faced with the reality of what Afghanistan is not and what it will cost."

During the course of its fact-checking of the first article, U.S. Central Command suggested another perspective from the Forum's second author, Colonel Christopher Kolenda, USA. While COL Kolenda agrees with elements of General Warner's essay, he equates the attendant recommendations with a counterterrorism (CT) approach that, given the social, economic, and political context, is "dangerously misguided." He laments that until recently, our approach in Afghanistan focused primarily on directly targeting enemy leadership and building capacity from the top down, when we should have been investing in the root causes of the insurgency. The author argues that we must win "the decisive battles for the sentiments and perceptions of local communities." He goes on to assert that most Afghan insurgents operate not from Pakistan but within a finite distance of their villages and communities and that placing U.S. forces along the border would be futile, ceding population control to the insurgents. COL Kolenda's "concept for success" requires proper resourcing, effective governance, incorporation of traditional village and district shuras, public access to social services, an end to corruption, and local dispute resolution mechanisms. As COL Kolenda states, "This will not be easy. But difficult is not impossible."

In our third Forum entry, Dr. John Nagl outlines a military strategy for Afghanistan

that shares many of COL Kolenda's prescriptions while adding connections to grand strategy and policy. He begins with the classic strategy fundamental of connecting ends, ways, and means to obtain his definition of the U.S. policy objective: "Over the next 5 years, we want to create an Afghanistan from which al Qaeda has been displaced and from which it continues to suffer disruptive attacks." Beginning with the endstate, he surveys U.S. policy in Afghanistan over the last 8 years and addresses U.S. relations with Pakistan. He opines that "building a rudimentary state, even a flawed one that is able to provide a modicum of security and governance to its people, is the American exit strategy from Afghanistan." Acknowledging an insufficiency of coalition forces, he advocates "oil spot" security, where the most important population centers can experience national-to-local governmental reconciliation that will spread over time as Afghan forces are trained. Dr. Nagl argues for a renewed U.S. commitment to funding grassroots development and governance as trained troop levels increase. He concludes with the obvious resource question of "whether America has the stomach to do what is necessary to achieve its objectives."

The fourth essay, by Drs. Christopher Lamb and Martin Cinnamond, explores the friction between two military mission sets in Afghanistan, their combined effect upon unity of effort, and steps to resolve the dis-

sonance. The authors juxtapose CT special operations in Afghanistan and the extent to which they support or undermine the population-centric counterinsurgency effort (the "indirect approach") championed by General Stanley McChrystal. Citing a former senior U.S. military commander who observed that unity of effort is the most serious problem in Afghanistan today, the authors add that there is limited time for unity of effort to be restored and measurable progress to be demonstrated. The tension between the two missions is framed as a question of priorities: the importance of targeting individual enemies relative to the risk of incurring civilian casualties and damaging relationships with local communities; and the importance of working with Afghan authorities and forces relative to the risk that doing so will compromise efforts to target enemy leaders. Eliminating the tension between Operation *Enduring Freedom* forces targeting enemy leadership and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) pursuing stabilization and population security efforts is the single most important requirement for better unified effort. The second most important requirement is improved civil-military collaboration. Special operations forces kill/capture operations should continue, but only in support of counterinsurgency objectives. As the authors point out, "Progress in Afghanistan is not possible until the strategic objectives cur-

rently under debate are resolved and priority is assigned to either counterinsurgency or counterterrorism."

The Forum concludes with an article that traces unity of effort to a fundamental principle of war, unity of command. Navy Lieutenant Joshua Welle argues for a unified civilian-military structure with clear command and control systems aligned with the government of Afghanistan and ISAF. The author believes that the U.S. Armed Forces are not trained to enhance governance in conflict zones and to create long-term development strategies. Accordingly, civilian expertise in a counterinsurgency is critical to coalition success in "armed nationbuilding." Lieutenant Welle identifies three layers within the Afghan government and ISAF structures that define command and control: the national, provincial, and district levels. He observes that separate reporting and coordination mechanisms for national civilian and coalition military efforts are not working because the counterinsurgency can be won only by joint civilian-military efforts and "through the sweat, blood, and tears of the Afghan people, who dream of a country free from tyranny." The author concludes that integrating these resources into the ISAF structure under a single civilian-military command structure is the key to success.

The dilemmas and conundrums resident in these five essays encapsulate the larger issue confronting decisionmakers regarding Afghanistan and Pakistan. National security professionals shall debate the competing "ways" and "means" of military strategy in South Asia on an equal footing until the question of "ends" is better defined. Those ends and the resources required to attain them need to be placed within a wider strategic context and national strategy. The answer to this grand strategic question is at once simple and elusive. What better state of peace in South Asia can be delivered at a price that we and our partners are willing to pay? **JFQ**

—D.H. Gurney

NOTES

¹ Jim Gant, *One Tribe at a Time* (Los Angeles: Nine Sisters Imports, Inc., 2009), 8.

² The Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2009: A Survey of the Afghan People* (Kabul, Afghanistan: The Asia Foundation, 2009), 8, available at <<http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/Afghanistan2009.pdf>>.



U.S. Special Forces worked with local tribal leadership in village of Mangwel, Konar Province