

Executive Summary

In this issue's Forum section, *Joint Force Quarterly* examines several issues of contemporary prominence and theoretical concern for counterinsurgency (COIN) operations. Some of the author issues are conceptual and some are operational. Each one impacts the ongoing national security debate regarding America's ability to effectively conduct, much less succeed in, our present wars and in the kinds of conflict we anticipate in the future.

We begin this issue's Forum with an article from Stephen Melton of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Professor Melton takes exception to the broader notions of American military jointness and interagency coordination that have increasingly underwritten overseas U.S. military operations since World War II. He questions the wisdom of strategic-level planning for military operations now conducted within theater-level commands such as U.S. Central Command, calling for a return to pre-Goldwater-Nichols Act days when Service staffs and Joint Staff were the preeminent fashioners of campaign strategy and the

operational framework for field commander execution. Melton challenges, directly and indirectly, the recent chorus of policymaker voices championing nonmilitary, interagency leadership in expeditionary operations such as reconstruction, development, governance, and law enforcement. A skeptic of other government agencies in wartime activities, Melton lionizes U.S. military leadership in the successful reconstruction and development efforts in post-World War II Germany and Japan. Bucking the present Washington rhetoric in favor of both more military jointness and a broader interagency mandate and better capacity to lead in complex contingency operations, Melton argues that we would do better to take a step back in organization, doctrine, and policy if we wish to organize, plan, and operate in a manner best able to secure American "victory" in future conflicts.

Next, Sebastian Gorka and David Kilcullen weigh in on the debate between American COIN proponents and their most ardent critics. They find the parameters of ongoing debate to be narrow and confining, noting that the contemporary American practice of COIN in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq is but one of many historic approaches taken by established states to combat asymmetric threats and irregular military formations. Gorka and Kilcullen assert that the conspicuous American post-9/11 formulation of COIN traces to a construct framed by RAND in 1958, developed by American thinkers and practitioners during the turbulent period of the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and limited to serious study of no more than two dozen anticolonial insurgencies out of nearly 200 irregular warfare events documented in the 20th century, most of which were fought for reasons other than anticolonialism. In this context, they assess contemporary COIN to be but a subset of the far older and much richer vein of strategic thought and practice called counterinsurgency: the art of effectively

countering irregular foes. Their appeal? Beware the contemporary COIN formulation as the only, much less the correct, template for modern counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgent states must clearly establish the context of the conflict and define the characteristics of the irregular opponent. Only then can they choose the doctrine and apply the tactics most likely to prevail.

Then, prominent George Washington University sociologist Amitai Etzioni offers some thoughts on the complexities associated with contemporary counterinsurgency operations. Professor Etzioni reminds us that external party participants in COIN operations—such as the United States in Iraq and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization International Security Assistance Force (NATO-ISAF) in Afghanistan—face a host of cultural, religious, ethnic, and subnational challenges. These make objective realization of counterinsurgency goals challenging. The challenges exist within the country of conflict and from the interest group alignments found in the polity of the external participants. Assessing the "perspectives gulf" between these diverse sets of subnational actors to be underappreciated, Etzioni chronicles a host of important, yet seemingly innocuous, areas where divergent perspectives can decisively frustrate the most well-intentioned counterinsurgency aims. His Iraq- and Afghanistan-based examples should resonate with American strategists and practitioners, as they include samples of cognitive divergence in concepts including corruption, gender roles and rights, judicial fairness, and the role of religion. Etzioni's caution is one of prudence in aim, for third-party overambition in objectives can only doom to failure the inherently complex undertaking of counterinsurgency.

This Forum also presents two articles addressing a major challenge faced by the United States in its protracted counterinsurgency ventures in Iraq and Afghanistan: civil-

U.S. Air Force (John Barton)



Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team members conduct quality assessment of PRT-funded project near Jalalabad, Afghanistan



Members of Marine Female Engagement Team interact with Afghan women and children through an interpreter in Helmand Province, Afghanistan

ian contractors and approaches toward local contracting in conflict zones.

T.X. Hammes of the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) at the National Defense University presents conclusions from his recent INSS *Strategic Forum* on the topic of contractors in conflict zones. He chronicles the multifaceted implications—good and bad—presented by the phalanx of contractors working astride U.S. military forces in Afghanistan, Iraq, and states across the Near East and South Asia. Dr. Hammes confirms the indispensable role performed by contractors in support of American military operations since 9/11, including the manner in which their expansive presence has alleviated pressures for a wider American military mobilization to prosecute ongoing wars. But he also catalogues the plethora of issues arising from the roles performed and the relationships established by contractors in America's ongoing COIN efforts. These issues run the gamut from those of contractor accountability, to host-country perceptions of contractor behavior in relation to U.S. strategy and its legitimacy, to the potential for understatement of human and financial costs in American military planning for future contingency operations. Hammes's recommendations for new policies and procedures that maximize the value and minimize the risks from contractors in conflict zones might not sit well with those wedded to the present system. Yet they should resonate with the millions who have served as, or have directly worked with,

U.S. contractors in the expansive areas supporting Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Forum section concludes with U.S. Army Captain Jonathon Pan offering a personal review and a policy critique of U.S. and NATO local contracting efforts in Afghanistan. Informed by his experiences as an economic development officer for the Army's 5th Brigade/2^d Infantry Division Stryker Brigade Combat Team deployed near Kandahar in 2009–2010, Captain Pan paints a vivid picture of the adverse tactical effects from standard NATO contracting practices in that city and its surrounding area. Pan highlights the challenges from standard Western contracting practices and procedures applied to the unique, Spartan environment of southern Afghanistan. His vignettes stand as testimony to frustrations experienced by a legion of nongovernmental and governmental organizations attempting to do contract business in incredibly poor countries with few skilled workers, still fewer qualified companies, and a culture of local strongmen profiteering from outside financial investment. Captain Pan points out the desperate need for a coherent NATO contracting policy in Afghanistan, one clearly absent during his time there. For Pan, any viable policy should first recognize the inherent, and uncomfortable, tradeoff faced by local contracting agents between accomplishing time-sensitive contracted outcomes (brick and mortar as well as those to do with human services) with the often negative second- and third-level governance and economic effects from the contracting process

itself. Captain Pan's recommendations seem to be in line with the thinking of NATO–ISAF senior leaders, for they empowered a special contracting task force during the spring of 2010 to resolve growing concerns that Western contracting was exacerbating local Afghan corruption. It remains to be seen if that task force can get to the heart of the challenges chronicled—and fulfill the recommendations made—by Captain Pan.

In the Features section, *JFQ* offers four articles that speculate directly and indirectly about the possibilities and “what-ifs” that America and its allies might face in the event of some future military confrontation with China. U.S. national strategy remains focused on dialogue, engagement, and the prevention of such a clash. The May 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy calls for deeper cooperation with China, India, and Russia, naming them as three of the important emerging centers of influence in the 21st century. In its 2010 report to Congress on China, the Department of Defense highlighted that it continues to prioritize exchanges with the Chinese military to help build cooperative capacity, foster understanding, and develop common views on the international security environment and related security challenges. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates met with his Chinese counterpart, Liang Guanglie, on the side at an October 2010 Southeast Asian Defense Conference in Hanoi, Vietnam. There, the Secretary accepted Liang's invitation to visit China in 2011, thawing a chill in military-to-military relations that had dominated 2010 after the January announcement of additional U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan. At the same time, American defense policymakers and China experts remain broad-minded in thinking about and planning for unwelcomed outcomes. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review observes that “China has shared only limited information about the pace, scope, and ultimate aims of its military modernization programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its longterm intentions.” Our civilian and military Features authors write concerning these questions. *JFQ* readers might best consider their thoughts as insights into what the future may hold *if* American aims for a collaborative future with China go unrealized, *not* from a conclusion that such an outcome is desired or inevitable. **JFQ**

—T.F. Lynch III
Acting Editor