

**A Kind Word and a Gun: Counterinsurgency in
Three Provinces on the Border of Afghanistan and
Pakistan**

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Summary

This thesis examines how the American counterinsurgency effort is developing in three provinces of northeastern Afghanistan: Kunar, Nangarhar and Nuristan. Also, it examines what features of the relationship between Pakistan and the United States that are affecting the counterinsurgency effort there. The focus is not only on internal issues within the provinces but also on whether and how external issues, mainly security issues originating from Pakistan's border areas, are compounding difficulties to the current counterinsurgency effort in these provinces.

Both the military as well as the civilian aspects of the counterinsurgency effort are subject to analysis. The analysis of the military aspects of the effort focuses primarily on problems related to civilian casualties and the location of firefights. The analysis of what can be considered the more civilian aspects focuses mainly on three issues: The engagement of the civilian population in reporting on so-called "improvised explosive devices" (IED), the use of insurgent courts vs. the use of government courts to solve local disputes, and the safety of Afghan government officials in the provinces.

Having to deal closely with culture is one of the features of counterinsurgency that differentiates it from other types of military campaigns. Among other things, the analyses of the cultural aspects show the importance of making the civilian population that supports the insurgents "see" that the government is a better alternative than the insurgents. In Afghanistan, the counterinsurgents' ability to produce visible and viable results, whether those are well-building programs or large governmental programs, is at the core of making the population that supports the insurgents "see" why the government should be supported. To be able to achieve this mission, the counterinsurgents, which in the case of Afghanistan are outsiders, must be aware of the "human terrain" that they operate within.

Finally, the thesis finds that there are a number of interrelated aspects of the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan that affect the counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan, both directly and indirectly. It seems clear that not only the military, but also the economic support from U.S. to Pakistan, is of indirect importance. There are strong indications that the economic problems facing Pakistan create the soil for recruiting youth to extremist groups. Recruitment to these groups will also have consequences for the operations in Afghanistan, in particular in the eastern provinces that border Pakistan, and where the insurgents operate on both sides. Pakistan's use of proxy groups, which also operate on both sides of the border, affects the counterinsurgency operations both directly and indirectly, because the U.S. considers the use of proxy groups as a sign of the Pakistani government's lack of ability or even will to exert political control in their own country. On the other hand, the effect of drone strikes in Pakistan, specifically in the eastern provinces, seems to be that the U.S. undermines its own credibility in the operations in Afghanistan.

In short, the instability in the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan seems to contribute to maintaining the political instability within Pakistan, which in turn makes the U.S. even more reluctant to give military and economic support to Pakistan. This somewhat vicious circle may very well increase the strength of the insurgent groups that have safe havens in Pakistan, and thus worsen the conditions for the counterinsurgency operations in eastern Afghanistan.

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To Heidi, thank you for your patience and support this year (as always)

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“I can tell you, there is nobody who actually understands Afghanistan in a comprehensive way, but the virtue of those who continue to work on it for a long time is that we can raise your confusion to a higher level.”

- Former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Ronald Neumann

CHAPTER 1

1 Introduction

In its tenth year, the war in Afghanistan seems to have become the symbol of the 9/11 attacks, and a glowing example of fast and effective low intensity warfare. At the same time, it appears to be a study in how not to conduct low intensity warfare. The war began, it seems, as the hallmark of a quick-in-quick-out type of unconventional war, with predominant use of airpower and Special Forces units to retaliate for the September 11 attacks and remove the Taliban from power. However, ten years later, it has become a quagmire for the United States and the international coalition. It started as retaliation, but turned out to become a complex counterinsurgency and stability operation. This thesis examines how the American counterinsurgency effort is developing in three provinces of northeastern Afghanistan: Kunar, Nangarhar and Nuristan. Also, it examines what features of the relationship between Pakistan and the United States that are affecting the counterinsurgency effort there. The focus is not only on internal issues within the provinces, but also on whether and how external issues, mainly security issues originating from Pakistan’s border areas, are compounding difficulties to the current counterinsurgency effort in these provinces.

The concept of counterinsurgency (COIN) has been defined in many ways. This thesis does not seek to reinvent the wheel and come up with a new definition of counterinsurgency. The main objective in this chapter is to examine some of the definitions already in place, and on this basis of establishing a framework for analyzing the COIN effort in the three provinces of northeastern Afghanistan.

1.1 Concepts and Theoretical Frameworks

1.1.1 *The Concept of Counterinsurgency*

The preliminary definition of COIN used in this thesis is a combination of a definition used in the COIN field manual created by United States Army and David Kilcullen's definition.¹ From this, one can define the U.S. counterinsurgency in Afghanistan as any steps the United States is taking to combat the insurgency in Afghanistan as a foreign expeditionary force there, assisting the Government of Afghanistan (GOA), the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and the Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. This is the starting point for examining other COIN definitions. However, it is necessary to examine in detail some of the several definitions of COIN that exist in order to concretize this preliminary definition, as well as to create additional pillars for the theoretical framework. This will also provide insight into how and why certain aspects of COIN differ from conventional operations, and why these aspects are important for the analysis of the three provinces. From the many definitions used to define COIN operations and their content, a selection of definitions have been chosen, partly from scholarly literature and partly from official documents created by the U.S. government. These have been selected because they describe the conditions within the area of operations very well, and they are useful in enabling an understanding the position of both policy makers and researchers.

In a report from February 2011 for the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Technology and Logistics, there is a collection of definitions from several entities within the U.S. military as well as NATO. These definitions are arguably a good starting point for the analysis of the COIN effort in Northeastern Afghanistan. Their core substance may be expressed like this: COIN is "the blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously contain insurgency and address its root causes. Unlike conventional warfare, nonmilitary means are often the most effective elements, with military forces playing an enabling role."² The emphasis on the difference from conventional warfare is important; priority one is not killing or capturing the insurgents, but separating them from the populous they hide within.

The type of warfare that counterinsurgency represents, makes it by default a difficult subject to define in a few sentences. Counterinsurgency operations require that the state

¹ United States, United States Army *The U.S Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* FM 3-24 2006: preface 1.1; David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* 2010

² United States, *Government Interagency COIN Guide* 2009: p.2

engaging in it has a military that is trained and geared toward that form of activity, in addition to incorporating a greater number of government functions. Cooperation between different parts of government is of key importance for success. However, by borrowing from definitions made by authors of research literature and official documents, it is possible to construct a useful definition for this thesis. First, the campaign in Afghanistan is what could be defined as an expeditionary counterinsurgency campaign, meaning that there is a foreign force that is fighting insurgents in the insurgents' homeland.³ This in itself provides the expeditionary force with a great number of difficulties compared to if it was fighting a domestic insurgency in the expeditionary force's country of origin. A "comprehensive or full-spectrum" counterinsurgency includes, but is not limited to: "...political, security, and economic tracks, with an underpinning information function (intelligence and "hearts and minds") that integrates all the elements of a campaign."⁴ Another description of what a counterinsurgency operation entails is presented in the United States Army Field Manual, which defines COIN as: "military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat an insurgency."⁵ In order to create an overall definition that covers all these kinds of actions, one could, for the purpose of this thesis, define counterinsurgency as any step the United States is taking to combat the insurgency in Afghanistan as a foreign expeditionary force assisting the government in Afghanistan.

1.1.2 Theoretical Perspectives and Parameters for the Empirical Analysis

On the basis of this overall definition, the main elements of the theoretical framework will be derived from the parameters that are used to measure progress in a COIN operation. Success may be difficult to measure, and research literature and government documents contain a number of parameters. Since this thesis seeks to examine the COIN effort in three provinces, and what features of the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan that may impact the COIN effort in these provinces, it is necessary to limit the number of parameters. The task force that provided the Under Secretary of Defense with recommendations on how COIN and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations should be conducted, has included in their report a set of metrics that could be used to examine an evolving

³ Kilcullen, David *Counterinsurgency* 2010: p. 79-80

⁴ Kilcullen, David *The Accidental Guerilla* 2009: p. 112

⁵ United States, United States Army *The U.S Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual* FM 3-24 2006: preface 1.1

counterinsurgency operation.⁶ For the purpose of this analysis, these metrics are too many, and in certain cases they require access to documents and intelligence that a student would not have access to; therefore, a selection of these metrics will be utilized to examine the counterinsurgency effort in each province. These metrics have been selected because they can, to a certain extent, be found in available reports and by following news stories. Some have also been chosen because ISAF freely distributes statistics. The following section will present the main metrics that are chosen for the purpose of this thesis, and will explain what aspects of the COIN operations they are meant to measure. As will be seen, the relation to and interaction with the local people is of crucial importance in order to make progress in a COIN campaign. Therefore, the most relevant types of metrics to map and measure the quality of the kind of events that are most important in this respect have been selected. In the next section we will present and discuss the sources and methods for using the chosen metrics in the analyses of the COIN effort in this thesis.

David Kilcullen originally devised the metrics. He divides them into four categories: “The population, the supported (host nation) government, the security forces (military and police), and the enemy.”⁷ Improvised Explosive Device (IED) reporting is one of the metrics in the population category. In the three provinces there is a clear and high level of insurgent violence. Because of the high level of violence in the provinces, IED reporting will be a relevant metric, specifically in the provinces Kunar and Nuristan which are provinces with a high level of insurgent activity. It will be useful to use IED reporting as one of the metrics for examining not only how the effort is evolving in these provinces, but also to allow for comparison with the province of Nangarhar, which has relatively fewer violent attacks.⁸

The local community’s use of local government versus Taliban courts is another indicator that can be used to examine progress in the region.⁹ There have been several studies that examine this phenomenon over the last ten years. In addition to adding value to the assessment of the evolution of COIN, the local population’s use of the court system will tell us something about how the local communities view their own security situation. We can assume that a higher level of government court use indicates that the population’s faith in the government’s ability to assert control in the region and maintain security is higher. It would

⁶ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p. 75

⁷ Ibid. p.75 (Report COIN & ISR)

⁸Jaffe, Gregg *Six U.S Soldiers killed in Afghanistan operation near Pakistan border* Washington Post April 1 2011

⁹ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p 76

stand to reason that a higher Taliban court use would be equivalent of less or weaning trust toward the government and its abilities. Because of this, court use seems to be a metric that is relevant in all three provinces.

Public perception of government institutions will therefore be one of the core metrics that will be used in the analysis of the provinces. This can also be measured through assessing the level of security for government officials. Whether they have been in the provinces that they administer and how they are received, are indicators that may say something about the general perception toward the government. If the person who is administering the province and his aides are able to travel freely to the province without attempts on their life or IED attacks, one can consider the government's ability to work in that region better than in other more hostile ones.¹⁰ An example of the importance of visiting government officials can be seen in Faryab province in northern Afghanistan. Coalition forces go to a Pashtun (Afghan ethnicity) village to attend a Shura¹¹ with the provincial power brokers. The meeting progresses badly specifically because of the provincial officials' unwillingness to come to the Shura. This creates mistrust, because it has been illustrated to the villagers in the area that the regional government does not seem to bother with their problems, and do not come out to meet with them to discuss how to improve the situation.¹² If provincial officials will not come to visit a village that is being secured by close to a hundred armed coalition forces, it is not likely that they would make trips into areas where insurgents have established clear footholds. As the insurgency develops, it would be highly likely that the areas suffering greater insurgent activity would become increasingly isolated from government initiatives, because official contact is constricted.

In conjunction with the use of official or Taliban courts, which perform the actual public safety function, it is of importance to the analyses how well the COIN effort in any given province is going.¹³ Because the insurgent groups have been efficient in establishing courts, it would be helpful to examine whether or not the population in an area is aware of the government, and to what extent they accept it. An example that illustrates the relevance of this metric is a text found in the Sagin Valley in 2009. The booklet by Mullah Omar very specifically states how one should treat violations of the laws in the regions that the Taliban

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 77 (Report COIN & ISR)

¹¹ Shura is a meeting between the elders of a village or province in which they discuss important issues, among them politics and relations to coalition forces and insurgents

¹² NRK *The Afghani Nightmare* 2011 (49min 33sek)

¹³ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p 80

or Mujahedin control. The text states that “[I]f local people come to the Mujahidin with their personal problems, the leader of the group has no right to get involved. Only the provincial and district authorities will consider the issues. They will try to have tribal leaders solve the problem. If this is not possible, they have to take the issue to the provincial court.”¹⁴ This illustrates the importance of making sure the population of a district or village has faith that the government in Kabul is not impotent, and that it really does have an interest in the outlying regions. Also, the level of corruption in a region directly affects issues of trust in the local government. The more officials from the GOA that use their position for their own benefit, the more hold the Taliban and insurgents will gain over a region. It may not be an immediate effect, but over the long term this would be an important indicator for the evolution of the COIN effort in that region.¹⁵

Every time a combat engagement happens in Afghanistan, it is not only the soldiers and insurgents who are involved. The people of that area are also watching and judging the firefight; it could be local media, national media or international media. As soon as the firefight ends, it might be possible to watch it as a replay from a news camera or have locals explain with commentary. This underlines another important metric; the location of a firefight.¹⁶ It is of importance whether or not the people in the village see coalition and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces as an aggressor toward their village. If the coalition forces are in the village and have been securing it, it is likely that the insurgents will be viewed as the aggressor. They will be considered the cause of any collateral damage that occurs. This is not to say that the coalition forces are completely “absolved” from any necessary or unnecessary damage. However, one can say that “they” (the insurgents) started it. The relative location of security forces therefore becomes precarious when engaging the insurgents. The location of the point of firefight then becomes a metric that can be useful.¹⁷

How security forces conduct their missions is critical in understanding the use of this metric. For example, if the security forces stay in the field over an extended period of time, this could indicate that they feel secure about their ability to join the local population in the region where they are operating. This shows the population in the region that the security forces are able to withstand insurgent attacks, and that they are confident enough not to

¹⁴ Omar, Mullah, *Afghanistan Islamic Emirate: Rules and Regulations for Mujahidin* 2009: p. 9

¹⁵ Kilcullen, David *Measuring Progress in Afghanistan* 2009: p. 11

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 14 (*Measuring Progress in Afghanistan*)

¹⁷ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p 82

withdraw back to their compounds at night.¹⁸ In the context of staying in the field for extended periods of time, nighttime operations are important. However, this could be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it would make sense to undertake raids at night because of the aggressive stance it shows. This would give the security forces the ability to confiscate weapons or to capture insurgents in villages when they sleep. On the other hand, by doing so they could also make the local population who are affected by these operations less cooperative, because the security forces operations are directly affecting them in a negative way.¹⁹

Another metric closely related to the location of firefights has to do with civilian casualties. It is of utmost importance that operations from the security forces' standpoint are close to the population, but without conducting operations that cause significant civilian casualties. By being close to the population, the security forces seek to be seen as the providers of local safety, and not as a threat to it. This covers how the forces conduct themselves when they are on patrol; are they dismounted or not, are they operating in small units alongside ANA or ANP or both, to what extent do they use airpower and artillery, and are they always repeating the same patrol patterns.²⁰ Patrol patterns means simply that a different route is chosen by a unit on each patrol, so as to not establish a repetitive pattern. All of these issues that relate to the security forces from an analytical perspective are dealt with as related indicators in the analysis of each of the three provinces and the COIN effort.

In addition to the aforementioned metrics, there is one metric that is not used in this thesis directly in relation to analyzing the COIN effort, but primarily when examining the relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. This metric is mentioned in both Kilcullen's work and in the task force report, and has to do with enemy indicators. The reason for using this as a parameter for the analysis of this relationship is that many of the insurgents infiltrate Afghanistan from the areas that border Pakistan. The insurgents are using areas in the FATA and NWFP as "safe" havens from which they can regroup, rearm and replenish casualties.²¹ It is because of this ability to exfiltrate into Pakistan that this indicator is important for both parts of the analysis. High technology use like satellite phones and high power scopes, gives indications that the insurgents are better trained, and that they are full time fighters; not local

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 83 (COIN & ISR)

¹⁹ Kilcullen, David *Measuring Progress in Afghanistan* 2009: p. 14

²⁰ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p. 82-84

²¹ Council on Foreign Relations *U.S Strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan* 2010: p. 45-47

guerilla fighters that have been called upon.²² Also if these columns of fighters are working with specialists or foreign advisors, this could be an indication that they are based in Pakistan rather than Afghanistan, which is an aspect of how relations between the U.S. and Pakistan may be affecting Afghanistan's stability.

To sum up: The parameters for examining the COIN effort in the three provinces are a combination of improvised explosive device (IED) reporting, GOA officials' safety in the regions, and the use of legal systems meaning insurgent courts or relying on the government to solve disputes. These could be considered the civilian aspect of the effort. For the military aspect, a combination of two metrics is used to understand the how the effort is evolving. That is the location of firefights or enemy engagements and what kinds of civilian casualties are experienced. In addition, the ability to conduct operations over longer periods of time, and what kind of operations have been conducted, is a parameter of relevance to both the civilian and military aspects of the COIN effort. All of these metrics together are used in the analyses of the various kinds of situations, and in trying to understand how the effort has evolved. Even though they are intertwined, the use of the metrics most relevant to analyze the military and the civilian aspects of COIN are respectively presented in two separate sections (in chapter 2).

The aforementioned parameters represent in sum a perspective that is relevant to analyzing the most important aspects of the very complex character of COIN operations. In addition to this, there is a more general perspective that has to do with culture, which represents some key aspects of COIN. This perspective has been termed the "population-centric" COIN, and some exemplification is necessary to present an understanding of the importance of the "population-centric" COIN efforts. The insurgents are using the local population to hide, and by being able to hide among the population, the insurgents make it exceedingly difficult for the counterinsurgents to effectively combat the insurgents without causing a significant amount of collateral damage. This could be civilian casualties, destruction of property, or other disruptive reactions.²³ David Kilcullen emphasizes that precise and careful action must be taken when combating the insurgents. The key to this is strict adherence to laws and rules of engagement, as to not alienate the population one seeks to cooperate with, and the imperative to protect them from harm:²⁴ "The reason for this is

²² United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p. 86

²³ Kilcullen, David *Counterinsurgency* 2010 p. 7

²⁴ Kilcullen, David *Counterinsurgency* 2010 p. 7

simple, and it derives from two very distinct features of insurgent movements: That they rely on local populations, and while the guerillas are fluid, populations are fixed.”²⁵ This insight is the cornerstone of any counterinsurgency effort. It rests upon the ability of the counterinsurgents to be able to achieve an environment where they are in control, and where the population in that specific area supports, at least to a certain extent, the counterinsurgents’ efforts to effectively establish control. One cannot expect every citizen in the area to support the efforts, but one needs a significant amount of the population to see the counterinsurgency as a viable option for creating a stable security environment, and not as a threat to the security of the population. Control in this case must be seen as control over an area where the counterinsurgency provides security, not only for the counterinsurgents but for the population in that area as well. This means denying the insurgents easy access to the area through the counterinsurgents staying and holding it for a prolonged period of time.

As has been noted, these aspects of counterinsurgency are designated as “population-centric,” and this focus on the “human terrain” is of key importance to the realization of the COIN strategy.²⁶ COIN requires a deeper understanding of the people, power structures, and culture that exists in the region where operations are taking place. Using John A. Nagl’s expression regarding how it is important to not implement a “sledgehammer approach” to COIN is instructive.²⁷ It is important to use the right tool for the job, and for COIN purposes, it would be counterproductive to use the sledgehammer approach when the insurgents are hiding within the population and are not in a position to be neutralized surgically, thereby creating a situation where the effort would suffer because of the use of a wrong approach. *Field Manual 3-24.2 Tactics in COIN* (FMI 3-24.2) states seven key “rules of conduct” regarding the population-centric aspects of the COIN strategy: “1. Establish civil security 2. Establish civil control 3. Support Host Nation (HN) security forces 4. Support governance 5. Restore essential services 6. Support to economic and infrastructure development 7. Conduct information engagement.”²⁸ As we see from these seven points, it is imperative not only that the counterinsurgents adhere to national and international law, but also that the HN security forces must be trained and mentored in a way that allows for the building of trust between the local populations and the nation’s government. This aspect is of particular importance,

²⁵ Kilcullen, David *Counterinsurgency* 2010 p. 7

²⁶ United States, *Government Interagency COIN Guide* 2009: p. 14

²⁷ Nagl, John A. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* 2005: p. 30

²⁸ United States Army, *Field Manual 3-24.2 Tactics in COIN* 2009 preface, United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p. 21

because the timeline for the expeditionary force is shorter than the insurgents. The insurgents have time on their side; once security has been established and control has been given to the HN's security forces, they may remain dormant or inactive in the area in anticipation of the withdrawal of the large foreign force.

An example of this was the withdrawal of troops from the Kamdich district in Nuristan. After the U.S. forces left, the Taliban moved in and secured a hold over the district, and they began appointing Taliban officials for the region.²⁹ This illustrates the need for not only a close cooperation between expeditionary forces and the HN forces, but also that the threat of losing their hard won control, once the coalition or U.S. forces leaves an area, is a very real one that must continually be assessed when talking of withdrawing from a region. Points three and four of the FMI 3-24.2 are, as we can see from this example, key to a continuous COIN effort once the majority of foreign security forces leave an area. This may be one of the most important aspects of COIN, because the counterinsurgent is advised in all guides and manuals that a COIN operation can be expected to be protracted and slow in progress.³⁰ It would therefore seem that by default a COIN operation is nearly impossible to complete without a tremendous effort on behalf of the expeditionary force conducting it. This is not necessarily the case, but the effort requires an approach that involves a significant part of both the expeditionary government and the HN's government to be successful.³¹

Finally, the term "security issue" in this thesis will refer to an existing situation within the area of operations (AO) that poses a significant threat directly or indirectly to American personnel or their Afghani counterparts, as well as to the civilian populations in the provinces in question. This definition contains a contextual aspect, which allows for analysis of the threat without being confined by a narrow scope definition.

Considering all the aforementioned cultural issues that are relevant because of the population-centric aspects of COIN, it might be said that the cultural issues that the counterinsurgents face in Afghanistan are arguably as multifaceted as the definition of counterinsurgency itself. Therefore, the more specific meaning of the importance of an understanding of Afghan culture to the COIN operations will be elaborated by the examples that presents the various kinds of situations where the forces are confronted these issues.

A part of the integral analyses of the COIN operations in Eastern Afghanistan that this

²⁹ The Long War Journal, Roggio, Bill *Taliban Govern Openly in Nuristan* 12 November 2009

³⁰ United States, Department of Defense, *Interagency Report on Counterinsurgency (COIN) Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Operations* 2011: p. 21

³¹ Wipfli, Ralph and Metz, Steven, *COIN of the Realm: U.S. Counterinsurgency Strategy* 2008 p. 4

thesis also has to answer is the question of why the relationship the U.S. has with Pakistan is significant to the analysis of COIN in three provinces of Afghanistan. To answer this question, more components have to be considered. Firstly, a significant part of fighters in Afghanistan originate from bases or madrassas in Pakistan. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas and North Western Frontier Province are unstable areas, not only for the U.S. and Afghanistan but also for Pakistan itself, because it is not able to enforce law; the areas are decentralized from much of the government's reach.³² The United States is continually conducting "covert" drone strikes inside Pakistan. The most notorious terrorist leader of the 21st century was killed inside its borders. Pakistan is a nuclear power with a weak government that is inextricably linked to the military elite.³³ How Pakistani officials treat the stability in their regions that border Afghanistan appears to have an effect on the COIN effort and the transition effort in these provinces. It would seem that if relations between the U.S. and Pakistan were reasonably good, this would lead to a much firmer response on the part of the Pakistani government in securing the border areas and retaining some resemblance of stability. This is not something that the Pakistani government would do for the sole purpose of continuing good relations with the U.S., but also in order to show the world that they are not a weak state. Achieving stability is therefore an objective that is in U.S. interest, and that should be in Pakistan's interest as well.³⁴ Pakistan's reactions to U.S. operations within Pakistan is thus another indicator that will help explain how the relations between these states influence Afghanistan's stability, as well as Pakistani stability.

Though it would be difficult to establish with certainty a cause and effect that immediately illustrates a link between what happens in these areas and the stability in Afghanistan. The objective of this thesis is limited to examining factors that could indicate trends from which one can make a fair assumption. If there is a surge of fighting in FATA, there could also possibly be a detectable influx of fighters in the provinces of eastern Afghanistan. How difficult it is to cross the border into Afghanistan from Pakistan is an indicator of how successful the Pakistani government is in their strategy to maintain stability in the tribal areas. Also if the U.S. is successful in its strategy for Afghanistan, then that should indicate a drop in incidents involving foreign fighters and full time fighters from across the border. The more local fighters there are, the more it indicates a high degree of

³² Reidel, Bruce *Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of Global Jihad* 2011: p. 82, 92-93

³³ Gartenstein-Ross, Daveed and May, Clifford D. et. al *The Afghanistan-Pakistan Theater: Militant Islam, Security & Stability* 2010: p. 30

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 15-16

support, in which case the COIN effort may have failed, and the transition to Afghan responsibility might be premature. Understanding the evolution of the effort, who the enemy is, and how culture is important, will aid in understanding whether this is an issue that is affected by the ambivalent relationship between the United States and Pakistan involving foreign fighters and full time fighters. Chapter four is devoted to an analysis of these issues.

The conceptual apparatus presented above makes up the theoretical framework for the analysis of the counterinsurgency's successes and failures in the three provinces. The use of different examples will give the necessary depth and width to analyze how the counterinsurgency efforts in these provinces are evolving, and to what extent and in what way the efforts are affected by their proximity to Pakistan's border areas. The use of a comparative approach to examine certain aspects of the conflicts in the areas of operation, by comparing the development in the two provinces Kunar and Nuristan to the development in Nangarhar, allows the analysis to be more specific because of the possibilities of comparing similarities and differences. This appears to be most useful when dealing with the tribal areas in Pakistan and their effect on the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. Comparing how the Pakistani military is conducting their counterinsurgency effort in the FATA as well as the NWFP, will illustrate how some aspects of it must be dealt with differently in Afghanistan than in Pakistan, and how Pakistan may be directly or indirectly affecting the effort in Afghanistan.

1.2 Sources and Methods

The fluidity of the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan in correlation with the U.S. effort causes a particular source problem. Because the actions taken by the counterinsurgents and the reactions of the insurgency to these actions evolve as rapidly as they do, changes are made within a smaller timeframe compared to a conventional conflict. The rapid changes made regarding recommendations and actions therefore mean that special care has to be taken to ensure that dates on primary material are carefully considered before being used in other contexts with newer information. A course of action or recommendation could have been important regarding a specific village or insurgent network, but because of the high speed flow of information from Afghanistan, certain aspects of analysis and success can be monitored almost daily. This is not to say that older documents are not beneficial, but in this

case it is important to analyze the sources without comparing materials that are more than six or seven years old with documents that are recent. This is because one paper could have been written before a specific event that altered the situation, making the previous paper not as valid as it possibly was.

The primary sources that are used consist of government papers that address the conflict directly, or that have direct impact on the actions in the country. These sources will be White Papers, National Intelligence Estimates and remarks made by the presidents of the different countries. With regard to these primary sources, it will be of great importance to use sources that are not exclusively American or written by pro-American scholars from the countries in question. The use of Pakistani and Afghan primary sources is imperative to enable a more nuanced understanding of subjects dealing with the conflict in Afghanistan and the tribal areas that border it. It will also serve to allow for a, however limited, comparison with American policy makers' views on the subject.

One could argue that through using research material that for the most part originates from American and coalition sources, the analysis of the counterinsurgency effort in Nuristan, Nangarhar, and Kunar could become one sided, as the Government of Afghanistan and the provincial governments are underrepresented in this analysis. There are several reasons for this asymmetry in the source material; the main reason is the lack of digitalized material on their government websites. This makes it difficult for the purpose of this thesis to obtain these documents. Second, the Pakistani government has few open source databases on their own activities in the border areas that can be analyzed. Therefore it is more difficult to assess their response through primary sources, and this must be done in the context of their interaction with the U.S. government through American official documents and scholarly writing. Specifically the Inter-Services Intelligence (Pakistani intelligence service) has a very limited website with no searchable database similar to the one the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has on their website. However, scholars and American personnel who have written reports and books on the subject of counterinsurgency give a certain insight into how the effort has been perceived by the population in the areas of operation, as well as the government officials in the region through interviews with tribal elders and officials.

News reports and articles will also serve as a necessary and important source of material; interviews made by agencies that belong to the host nation may provide a view that would be unavailable through western media sources. Reports made in the field will also be used; specifically the revised *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* that was issued in 2007 will

serve as an important lens through which to examine actual implementations in the field compared to the theoretical framework that the field manual provides. The newsletters *COIN: Common Sense* and *Freedom Watch*, which are produced by Regional Command East, will be used as an important primary source, as it is written by soldiers who are participating in the counterinsurgency effort in East-Afghanistan. There have been several issues of this newsletter, which specifically deals with the counterinsurgency effort in the areas of operation. Using these newsletters as a basis for comparison with official documents and reports regarding the effort will enhance the analysis as it provides the “top-down” view on counterinsurgency, as well as a “bottom-up” point of view from the soldiers on the ground conducting the counterinsurgency effort. To examine the differences between these is imperative to the analysis of the counterinsurgency effort, because the strategic planning is significantly broader in its scope and covers a longer time span than the tactical planning and execution. This difference can provide insight into how the theory and ideas on the strategic level may not be compatible with the situation on the ground, and to help understand how the tactical environment is evolving.³⁵

Secondary sources will consist of reports, analyses, scholarly essays, and books that review the subject of counterinsurgency within Afghanistan, Pakistan and America. A large number of these authors are personnel who have been involved in the military operations in the provinces in question, and/or who are scholars native to countries that have been on the ground in Afghanistan or have conducted counterinsurgency operations in other theaters. Important to the analysis of the counterinsurgency effort will be the works of David Kilcullen and John A. Nagl, whom are both considered the foremost scholars on counterinsurgency. Kilcullen was one of the chief advisors to General Petraeus and his counterinsurgency effort in Iraq. Nagl was one of the editors of the new field manual. He has conducted counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, and has written extensively about this topic along with Kilcullen.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter one serves to establish the framework for analysis and what restrictions the subject requires. The subject of counterinsurgency is controversial and causes divided opinions

³⁵ Tactical environment means the operations conducted with smaller timeframes within the provinces i.e. the local counterinsurgency effort in a province or one specific action.

among scholars. The works of a selection of authors who could be considered authorities will illustrate this when compared to military views on the subject. These in turn will vary from those of policy makers. It is therefore important in chapter one to present explicitly the framework that will be adopted in this thesis.

Some basic knowledge of how the counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan has evolved over a timeline of almost ten years is important for the understanding of current events. Chapter two starts out with a short review the most important events in this regard. This serves as a backdrop for a presentation of the new COIN strategy and its most important elements. Against this background, the main objective of this chapter is to undertake an empirically based analysis of the implementation of this strategy, focusing on the COIN efforts in the provinces Kunar, Nuristan and Nangarhar as they have evolved since 2009. The analyses make use of the conceptual framework that is established in chapter one in an attempt to assess how the military as well as the civilian aspects of the COIN efforts seem to have evolved in these provinces. From the vast empirical material, the kind of events and incidents selected are the ones most relevant in relation to the metrics applied for the analysis; civilian casualties and location of fire, IED reporting and incidents, use of nongovernmental agencies such as shadow courts, and the safety of officials. In addition, the chapter also analyzes actions and other events that may have created environments that incur friction on the counterinsurgency effort, and on the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan.³⁶

Understanding the culture of the intricate tribal communities in Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan is an important part of the analysis of counterinsurgency in these regions. The cultural aspects that are most important to deal with in the COIN efforts are presented and analyzed in chapter three. It would appear that in a substantial part of the literature, the buzzwords when it comes to counterinsurgency are cultural understanding and local knowledge. It would seem that this aspect of COIN is one that suffers from underdevelopment. The effect of this undeveloped aspect of the counterinsurgency creates the foundation for chapter four, in connection with aspects discussed in the previous two chapters. Kilcullen's term "accidental guerilla" is important for the discussion on how cultural ties dictate actions and reactions in these areas.³⁷ This cultural understanding will serve as the lens through which the actions of both Pakistan and the U.S. are viewed. It is also necessary to understand how the people who live in the affected areas where these two countries seek to

³⁶ This term was coined by Karl Von Clausewitz in *On War* (1832)

³⁷ Kilcullen, David *The Accidental Guerilla* 2009: 10-15

establish control, see and react to the forces that are on the ground.

Chapter four is devoted to analyses of those aspects of the U.S.–Pakistani relations that seem to have most impact on the COIN efforts in Afghanistan. One main focus is the apparent tensions between Pakistan’s domestic policy and foreign policy, which in turn create tensions in the relationship between U.S. and Pakistan. The second main focus is about Pakistan’s reactions to the conflict in Afghanistan and the actions it is taking in the FATA and NWFP, including the use of proxy forces. Pakistan’s reactions to the conflict in Afghanistan and the actions it is taking in the FATA and NWFP will be the main focus in Chapter three. Pakistan’s effort to combat the radicalization and development of Taliban and fundamentalist fighters in the tribal areas will be reviewed in order to achieve a clearer understanding of the domestic issues within this area of Pakistan. That area seems to have become a central security issue for the counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan. An analysis of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) will be part of this chapter because of its instrumental role in creating the schools (madrassas) that are aiding the recruitment and training of insurgent fighters that go on to affect the counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan. This analysis of the Pakistani “part” of the problem will allow for further analysis of the interconnectedness between the Pakistani border areas and the American counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan. Thirdly, the U.S. drone attacks in Pakistan and the reactions to them are analyzed in relation to the COIN efforts.

In chapter five some main points from the preceding analyses are recapitulated, and a certain synthesis of the partial analyses and conclusions regarding the various components and aspects of the COIN effort is presented. Also, the question of to what extent the relationship between Pakistan and America is critically affecting the counterinsurgency effort in the three provinces, is reconsidered on the basis of the preceding analyses. The complex political relationship between the United States and Pakistan that is played out through cooperation as well as direct defiance, are the key components in this reconsideration. On the basis of the attempt to synthesize some of the complex patterns and dynamics between the various aspects of the overall situation in this region today, this concluding chapter also briefly discusses the planned withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and how this will impact the security environment in the country. A critical look at the relations between military, cultural, and political issues that represent future as well as current issues, will allow for the final and concluding comment on in what ways the external issues with Pakistan and America are affecting the military and civilian efforts in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER TWO

2 Counterinsurgency in Eastern Afghanistan

The campaign in Afghanistan has been long, and it is no less complex today than it was six years ago. It has been front page news and has gone from that position to barely receiving a byline. It was overshadowed by the invasion and war in Iraq, and lessons learned about COIN in Iraq gave way to a change of strategy in Afghanistan. General McChrystal and General Petraeus assumed command in Afghanistan after successfully conducting counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Iraq; they were also instrumental in developing current U.S doctrine on the subject, as well as being major contributors to the FMI 3.24. The timeline that will be examined in this chapter is from the beginning of 2009 up to today, though a rather quick examination of previous years is necessary to understand the developments in 2009. The chapter starts with a rather quick examination of the three previous years, as a necessary background to the presentation of the new COIN strategy that was launched in 2009. On this basis the chapter is devoted to an analysis of how the implementation of the COIN strategy has evolved in three eastern provinces of Afghanistan, by using the parameters and metrics presented in chapter one as the analytical tools for assessing the COIN effort. The main part of the chapter is devoted to analyzing the efforts in Kunar and Nuristan. The effort in these two provinces is analyzed under common headings, since the two provinces, as will be seen, have much in common regarding the conditions for undertaking the COIN effort. The analysis of the efforts in the third province, Nangarhar, has its main focus partly on what are the important differences from the experiences made in Kunar and Nuristan, and on the most important aspects of the COIN effort which are peculiar to Nangarhar.

2.1 The Backdrop for the New Strategy

In 2006, the Bush administration was more focused on the upcoming surge in Iraq than events in Afghanistan. The insurgency was not the only problem facing Afghanistan, and it seems that though some military resources were being directed to deal with the security issues there, the main focus was on the ongoing war in Iraq. Troop levels illustrate that difference; as of 2006 there were 20,400 American troops on the ground in Afghanistan. In comparison there

were 141,100 in Iraq.³⁸ The troop levels in Iraq were almost seven times that of the levels in Afghanistan. This illustrates the backseat that the campaign in Afghanistan had taken. That year, responsibility for security in Afghanistan was assumed entirely by NATO Joint Command, and that helped divert attention to the conflict because of renewed responsibility by the international coalition.³⁹ When NATO assumed command over the security in the country, the insurgency began to intensify. This signaled that a change in strategy was needed to be able to effectively deal with the insurgency.

The Bush administration, which was not as focused on Afghanistan as on the conflict in Iraq, seemed to treat the conflict there as a counterterrorism operation rather than what it had developed into, a stability and counterinsurgency operation.⁴⁰ In one of his speeches in early 2006, Bush presents the doctrine that if any government harbors terrorists in their country, then they themselves are no better.⁴¹ It would seem that through this speech he laid out what he saw as the new type of war against a new global threat, namely terrorism. He acknowledged that winning the peace in Iraq would be difficult, but said that in the Afghanistan conflict, the U.S. was making headway, and that Afghanistan was on its way to become a fledgling democracy.⁴² This could indicate that the administration viewed the fight as being fought well enough with the “enemy centric” (“enemy centric” refers to a main focus on removing the enemy by force) approach to Afghanistan, seeing it as an “easier” fight than Iraq was, and that its importance in the global war on terror was not as important as it had been after the September 11 attacks. The Iraq war overshadowed the campaign in Afghanistan, but Bush was aware in 2006 that the key to success in Afghanistan laid with achieving a stable government. With that in mind however, the resources were needed elsewhere, i.e. Iraq, and Afghanistan was still on the bench in terms of policy focus.

In the later part of 2005 it seemed that Afghanistan was on its way to achieve this goal. Karzai’s government was in place and there had been parliament elections for the first time in over three decades.⁴³ However, 2006 marked a point in the campaign where there were doubts about whether or not hard fought victories were crumbling; that the stabilization effort was going in the wrong direction. It also signified the return of a stronger Afghan insurgency

³⁸ Belasco, Amy *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues* July 2 2009: p. 14

³⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization *NATO in Afghanistan: Security and Development* <http://nato.usmission.gov/afghanistan.html> (accessed 04-25-2012)

⁴⁰ United States, President Bush, George W. *State of the Union Address* January 28 2008

⁴¹ United States, President Bush, George W. *The War on Terror: At Home and Abroad* 01-23-2006

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ BBC, *Afghanistan profile* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12024253> (accessed 04-24-2012)

led by what appeared to be a coalition of Afghan Taliban and other militant groups. The insurgency that had evolved was far more organized than the U.S. had expected.⁴⁴ This is not to say that there had been peace or even calm before 2006, but that year became a high water mark for the resurgence of a concerted and motivated insurgency that had been gaining strength rather than declining, and that was moving from pockets of resistance toward more organized attacks.

2.2 The New Strategy

The new type of warfare that was gradually emerging had different requirements than what the American army was structured for. The military was structured toward nation against nation wars, where conventional armies met on what could be described as a “normal” battlefield. Additionally, the American military machine was overstretched and could not cope with two counterinsurgency campaigns at the same time.⁴⁵ Thus, it would take the almost complete withdrawal of forces from Iraq and a new President before a clear change in the strategy and a renewed focus on Afghanistan was apparent. President Obama as he assumed office in 2009 made it clear that it was time for a change in the strategy the U.S. had for Afghanistan. At the time the war had gone on for eight years and it would seem that the early success of ousting the Taliban regime was fading and that the liberators were beginning to resemble something that the Afghani population recognized from decades earlier, invaders, the Russian invasion and the subsequent civil war after it. The U.S. effort in Afghanistan was becoming, what could be described as, a double edged sword. On the one hand U.S. and coalition forces were being viewed more and more as invaders, on the other Afghans not only faced these invaders but also when the coalition forces left an area, the insurgents would come back and coerce help from the same people and most likely punish those who had cooperated. Against this background Obama declared that one of his first priorities was to get several reviews that would assess the needs of the military effort in Afghanistan and make recommendations on what was needed.⁴⁶ The recognition that there was a definite need for change is illustrated by the following quotation:

“The situation is increasingly perilous. It has been more than seven years since the Taliban

⁴⁴ United States, Department of State *Afghanistan: Post-War Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy* January 11 2007: p. 2

⁴⁵ Sean R. Liedmann *Don't Break the Bank With COIN* 2011: p. 3-4

⁴⁶ Jeff Zeleny *Troops in Afghanistan Needs Help, Obama Says* July 14 2008 The New York Times

was removed from power, yet war rages on, and insurgents control parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Attacks against our troops, our NATO allies, and the Afghan government have risen steadily. Most painfully, 2008 was the deadliest year of the war for American forces.”⁴⁷

This analysis sets the tone for the Obama administration’s approach. President Obama publicly acknowledges that America was not achieving success Bush claimed in his 2006 speech. Further he also emphasizes that he has already sent more than 17,000 additional troops to reinforce the COIN effort in Southern and Eastern Afghanistan.⁴⁸ Because of the new approach the administration saw it as necessary to get “fresh blood” in, General Stanley McChrystal was chosen for the job.⁴⁹ A key component for the strategy that would develop in 2009 for progress in Afghanistan was in great part based on the newly appointed ISAF Commander’s assessment. During a period of two months General McChrystal assessed the situation in Afghanistan. The report that followed this assessment was delivered to Defense Secretary Robert Gates in late August of 2009. The core parts of this exhaustive review of parameters and requirements for a successful campaign in Afghanistan contained three core issues that McChrystal outlined as the key to reversing the situation in Afghanistan.

First, the report establishes that there is no possibility of success in Afghanistan without the support of the Afghan people. By late 2008 it had been the bloodiest year on record in Afghanistan, it does not require a stretch of the imagination that public confidence in the U.S led effort was dwindling.⁵⁰ McChrystal said that the key lay with the ability of the military effort in Afghanistan to recognize that there was a need for well conducted COIN operations. The importance of operations in plural could not be overstated. McChrystal recognized that there was more than one insurgency and that there were in fact three regional insurgencies that needed to be combated at the same time.⁵¹ Security was an aspect that the report emphasizes strongly. At risk populations, meaning those that have close proximity to the insurgents, have to be protected from all threats; not just limited to insurgent activities, but also maybe even more importantly from corrupt officials in the government and regaining faith in the ISAF mission through carefully conducted operations that do not put them in danger. Though he argued that there was more than one insurgency, particular focus was put

⁴⁷ United States, Whitehouse, *Remarks made by the President on New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan* March 27 2009

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ann Scott Tyson, Gen. David McKiernan Ousted as Top U.S Commander in Afghanistan in *The Washington Post* May 12 2009

⁵⁰ Jason Burke, NATO Figures Show Surge in Afghanistan Violence in *The Guardian* 31 January 2009

⁵¹ Stanley McChrystal et. al. *Commander’s Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009 p. 1-1, 1-2

on the fact that though operations and actions may be separated by distance everything is connected and must be treated in that way. One change may affect a large number of areas simultaneously which must be taken into account when creating this new strategy.⁵² This was one of the great difficulties with the new strategy for this campaign. Each of the regions that McChrystal defines must be treated with a separate and specific approach. However, failing to have an overarching strategy that encompasses the issues that are national would be counterproductive.

Second, there had to be a significant change in U.S and ISAF strategy for the conflict. The way the conflict was thought of had to be changed in order to achieve progress. McChrystal presented one of the main reasons for this need for a change in mentality this way: “The conflict in Afghanistan is often described as a war of ideas and perceptions: this is true and demands important consideration. However, perceptions are generally derived from actions and real conditions.”⁵³ The perceptions that McChrystal had in mind were those of the people of Afghanistan. He underlined that focus had to be on the primary objective, which is the trust of the Afghani people. He also emphasized that there are four other kinds of actors that make up the multifaceted picture that is Afghanistan. These four are: the Government of Afghanistan (GOA), ISAF, the insurgents and “external” actors.⁵⁴ All of these actors within the area of operations have to be taken into account, and through a change of strategy within the entire U.S effort they have to be at the center of the development of a new strategy. The external threats come for the most part from Pakistan and work would have to be done to enable the Pakistani government to conduct its own COIN campaign in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) better. The dilemma that McChrystal acknowledges is that success without Pakistan does not seem possible however, Afghanistan needs more attention and therefore the balance of resources and how they are employed is of vital importance.⁵⁵ This issue illustrates one of the difficulties facing the campaign and its inherent complexities. On the one hand development of a sustained counterinsurgency on the part of the Pakistani government has to be created through assistance from the U.S. On the other hand, without any significant progress in Afghanistan, the effort will be countered by the militant groups in the border areas of the two countries. Without such progress in Afghanistan, the insurgency can simply lay dormant until

⁵² Ibid. p. 2-3

⁵³ Ibid. p. 2-3, 2-4

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 2-3, 2-4

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 2-5

the international community runs out of political and public will to continue.

Third, time is a vital cornerstone for the insurgency and for the U.S led effort. The insurgents have basically all the time in the world to conduct their operations. This is a key component of their strategy in remote areas.⁵⁶ If individuals are threatened with the fact that the international coalition will not be around to protect them indefinitely and that the insurgents will prevail, then working with the foreign forces makes little sense for these individuals. When they do, the people who have supported the “enemy” in the eyes of the insurgents will later suffer, or in fact be killed. This has been a tactic that has worked well in remote areas where the U.S. forces have not been able to stay in control for extended periods of time.⁵⁷ Time is not only important because of its relation to the expeditionary COIN; setting down an end date is an absolute necessity for political survival. The problem with doing so is that setting that time frame allows the insurgent to devise strategies to counter and rebuild knowing what the expected timeframe for, in this case, U.S. operations.

The plan that President Obama put forward at the beginning of 2009 was in great part based on the review that McChrystal had made, several other reviews and a previous report created by Bruce Reidel a former CIA operative.⁵⁸ He as well as McChrystal recommended an extensive and broad COIN campaign in Afghanistan to reverse the violence and enable stability in the country. In his speech at West Point on December 1, 2009, President Obama put forward the new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he emphasized in particular two things. He had after deliberations, and against his vice President’s view, agreed to strengthen and commit to a counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. Vice-President Biden had recommended that Obama move away from the “population-centric” COIN approach in favor of a much more hardened counterterrorism approach that focused on neutralizing enemy leadership and key personnel.⁵⁹ Biden wanted to focus on killing and capturing key Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership figures, and focusing on transition to Afghan control rather than prolonging the campaign further than necessary. He also wanted to have a better and clearer strategy for dealing with Pakistan, seeing that the insurgency seemed to be located there in the border areas between the countries rather mostly in Afghanistan itself.⁶⁰ This would come to bear in Obama’s strategy though not exactly as Biden would have

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 2-5

⁵⁷ David Kilcullen *Counterinsurgency* 2010: p. 46

⁵⁸ PBS, *Afghan Expert Reidel Weighs Obama’s Strategic Options* October 16 2009
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec09/afghanistan3_10-16.html (accessed 05-18-2012)

⁵⁹ Peter Baker, Biden No Longer a Lone Voice on Afghanistan in *The New York Times* 14 October 2009

⁶⁰ Bob Woodward, *Obama’s Wars* 2010: p. 161-162

wanted. It would continue to become a reinforced COIN operation, a perceived defensive stance rather than the offensive one Biden sought.

Second, Pakistan's place in the strategy was to become more pronounced than before it was recognized that the negative trends were linked to Pakistan and that it was necessary to review the approach toward the country. "In the past," Obama said, "we too often defined our relationship with Pakistan narrowly. Those days are over. Moving forward, we are committed to a partnership with Pakistan that is built on a foundation of mutual interest, mutual respect, and mutual trust."⁶¹ This is the first indication that the COIN operations in Afghanistan would become directly linked to efforts in and with Pakistan. It would become a focus of more than just logistics and an occasional drone strike. In many cases the Pakistani government had reluctantly agreed to these strikes. However, in practice Pakistani reactions have ranged from outrage to silent thanks depending on the target and the subsequent reaction by population and media.⁶² This can be directly related to approaches in COIN and to the metrics listed above: location and the protection of civilians from collateral damage are essential, especially when the drone strikes that the U.S has conducted have been in the tribal areas that are on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Peace and stability in the region would be structured on this renewed relationship with Pakistan.

One of the core points in the approach that President Obama put forward was that the entire U.S. government and its agencies had to conduct COIN operations alongside each other. There would not be significant progress without this type of cooperation. This is the "whole of government" approach, which means that the efforts in Afghanistan cannot be won without a concerted effort by both the military and civilian government not only on the part of the U.S but within the coalition and especially within Afghanistan itself.⁶³ The plan for the effort in Afghanistan that President Obama initiated was to increase the total number of soldiers by 30,000, and conduct a concerted and offensive counterinsurgency while maintaining cooperation between the GOA and making sure that Pakistan was being dealt with responsibly and with a different stance than what the U.S. government done up to that point. Key to this strategy was to treat Pakistan and Afghanistan as one interconnected issue

⁶¹ Whitehouse, *Remarks made by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* December 1 2009

⁶² BBC, *Obama Defends Drone strikes in Pakistan* January 31 2012 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-16804247> (accessed 05-01-2012)

⁶³ United States, *Government Interagency COIN Guide* 2009: p. 41-42

rather than as separate issues only slightly linked together by proximity.⁶⁴ This was the starting point for the “renewed” effort in Afghanistan.

2.3 Analysis of the Counterinsurgency Efforts in Kunar and Nuristan

The provinces of Kunar and Nuristan are located in the East Afghanistan and border the tribal areas in Pakistan like most of Regional Command East (RC-East). These are considered some of the most dangerous areas in Afghanistan and they are some of the most contested areas in the country. These are areas where al-Qaeda (AQ) is known to operate, which is unusual in most Afghan provinces after the start of Operation Enduring Freedom started in 2001.⁶⁵ AQ influence in Afghanistan appears to have been decreased.⁶⁶ Other groups that operate in this province are Gulbuddin Hekmatayar’s Hezb-e-Islami (HiG) and the Haqqani network (HQN). The two latter are most likely more important than al-Qaeda in terms of COIN analysis because of their numbers and the fact that both HiG and HQN are political groups. They are motivated by politics and political gain and that involves more than combating American interests. These gains are connected to the areas they operate in.⁶⁷ Al-Qaeda is a loosely connected global terrorist network which operates differently in connection with the conflict in Afghanistan. Both HiG and HQN also have a clear hierarchical structure unlike their terrorist counterpart. All these groups operate alongside the Afghan Taliban and even though their ultimate goal may be different the unifying factor is U.S and coalition presence in Afghanistan and their struggle against the government of Afghanistan.⁶⁸

The examination of how the COIN effort is going in these two provinces is presented as one common analysis, because they have some similarities regarding the challenges they represent for the COIN effort. They have three main similarities in this respect. First, both provinces have been one of the main infiltration areas for insurgents from Pakistan’s tribal

⁶⁴ White House, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* 01-12-2009

⁶⁵ Institute for the Study of War, *Province Overview: Regional Command East*
<http://www.understandingwar.org/region/regional-command-east#Kunar> (accessed 05-21-2012)

⁶⁶ John Rollins, *Al Qaeda and Affiliates* January 25 2011: p. 8-9

⁶⁷ The New York Times, *Structure of A Terrorist Network* September 24 2011
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/09/24/world/structure-of-a-terrorist-network.html> (accessed 05-28-2012), Jane’s Information Group, *Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism* February 1 2012
[http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Hizb-i-Islami--Gulbuddin-HIG-Afghanistan.html](http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/ Hizb-i-Islami--Gulbuddin-HIG-Afghanistan.html) (accessed 05-28-2012)

⁶⁸ Department of Defense, *DOD News Briefing with Maj. Gen. Campbell via teleconference from Afghanistan* May 10 2011 <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4821> (accessed 05-21-2012)

areas. Second, because of the high level of insurgent activity, hypothetically it should be easier to measure progress because of the difficult operational environment they provide. Second, the low level of development of infrastructure in both provinces means that forces operating in the area have to have a distinct “hands on” approach, meaning boots on the ground. The area requires in many cases that the troops who are conducting counterinsurgency have to travel by foot, which means a closer proximity to populations in the areas of operation. This becomes significantly more important as U.S forces patrol areas closer to the Pakistani border and insurgents can exfiltrate back to the tribal areas of Pakistan with impunity. Third, both provinces have a high level of insurgent activity, which provide a difficult operational environment for the COIN effort. The different types of difficulties are of much the same kind, as will be seen from the analyses in the following sections, using different metrics to assess the main aspects of the COIN effort.

2.3.1 Civilian Casualties and the Location of Fire

Proximity to local villagers creates a situation where perception is of utmost importance especially in an area that is has high activity by insurgent groups. Civilian casualties and location of fire fights are the first two metrics that will be used to examine the COIN effort in Kunar and Nuristan. To examine this, reports made by the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) will be useful, starting at the end of 2009, and onwards to February 2012. This will give a demonstration of how these metrics can be used to measure whether the strategy for “population centric” COIN is working as it was intended when the new strategy for Afghanistan was established in late 2009.

The annual report from 2009 indicates that around 10% of all civilian deaths have occurred in Eastern Afghanistan. That may not seem like much compared to the South if one considers the sparsely populated areas where a lot of the fighting has occurred.⁶⁹ The report states that 2009 has been the worst year on record for the civilian population in Afghanistan and the burden and devastation that the conflict is causing is in no way declining. All the reports from 2009 to early 2012 make for discouraging reading. There is a steady increase in civilian casualties, each year setting a new high for civilian casualties. However, the reasons for the increase in civilian casualties are composed and therefore require closer analysis.

The troop increase of almost fifty percent in the entire country could be an attributing factor to loss of civilian life. More troops on the ground cause the insurgents to adapt their

⁶⁹ United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* January 2010: p. 5, 34

strategy to counter that increase. This may therefore be part of the explanation of the rise in civilian casualties. The problem is that this would most likely only explain the casualties during the employment of the extra troops. However, this does not seem likely since troop levels have been the same or lower now than in 2009-2010.⁷⁰ The Obama administration withdrew 10,000 troops by late 2011, and therefore the increase in troop levels cannot alone explain the increase in civilian loss of life. The greatest loss of civilian life is attributed to insurgent forces, the UNAMA reports do not differentiate between the different groups of insurgents or criminal networks. The U.S. and coalition forces operating alone or in conjunction with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have a substantially lower rate of civilian casualties, because they do not target the population like the insurgent in many cases do. However, their presence puts the local villagers at risk and it is because of the “population centric” COIN approach that it is necessary to be amongst the villagers. In the latest report there is also an indication that the loss of life has increased in Eastern Afghanistan more than in any other region compared to earlier figures.⁷¹ This illustrates that the figures in these reports are indeed useful for the analysis of the COIN effort in these two provinces.

Indirect fire is one of the key issues in these reports when it comes to civilian casualties. Indirect fire means either ground based artillery or airstrikes from any type of aircraft. They are a reoccurring theme in each of the reports, especially in the eastern provinces where air strikes cause 61% of all civilian casualties in the areas where there has been repeated engagements between ISAF forces and insurgents.⁷² The reports focus on the most deadly incidents but in terms of the COIN doctrine and in the case of these two provinces it is not necessarily the number of killed which creates the biggest impact on how the effort is evolving. Both Kunar and Nuristan are significantly more sparsely populated than other regions. Out of the total population of Afghanistan of over 30 million people, 530,000 live in these two provinces combined.⁷³ A civilian loss of life in these areas may impact the COIN effort in a profound way because they are remote and far from the centralized government in Kabul. A death may incite more skepticism in these areas because they are in

⁷⁰ Belasco, Amy *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues* July 2 2009: p. 14

⁷¹ United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* February 2012: p. 17-18

⁷² United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* January 2010: p. 23

⁷³ Central Intelligence Agency, World Fact Book, *Afghanistan* May 8 2012 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html> (accessed 05-21-2012) and Institute for the Study of War, *Regional Command East Overview* <http://www.understandingwar.org/region/regional-command-east#Nuristan> (accessed 05-21-2012)

an area where the insurgent groups have had their strongholds in the East. It is seemingly much easier for the insurgent to “prove” to the local population fed up by fighting that the insurgent group is the answer rather than a remote government in Kabul that relies on foreigners to maintain security. This problem is illustrated by an incident that killed several civilians on March 1 2011: “The incident occurred following insurgent rocket attacks on [Forward Operating Base] Blessing,” the statement said. “Coalition forces returned fire at the assessed point of origin with indirect and aerial fire. Regrettably, there appears to have been an error in the hand-off between identifying the location of the insurgents and the attack helicopters that carried out subsequent operations.”⁷⁴ The Taliban in the area wrote in a statement about the incident. The Taliban focuses not on the response during a firefight but says that it was a malicious attack on the future generations of Afghanistan, and not a firefight between two sides of a conflict.⁷⁵ This could be blown off as propaganda but one has to consider the impact a statement like this has on the population that experienced it. A death in a region that is sparsely populated affects the entire community and has a greater impact on the society as a whole. The other side of that may be that the civilians of the region see the insurgent group as the party responsible for the incident since it was their rocket attack that initiated the response. The perception of the local villagers is a key aspect for the effort. If they do not feel safer having patrols of U.S. forces in the area and would rather prefer what the situation was like before then that impacts the U.S COIN effort in a severely negative way.

The location of a firefight seems to be intertwined with civilian casualties, and plays a part of the perceived security that the counterinsurgent forces are trying to provide. Again the COIN forces are confronted with a double edged sword. On the one hand they have to be there in order to actually conduct COIN operations but according to UNAMA reports there is inherent risk with establishing either military bases, forward operating bases and combat outposts in conjunction with populated areas. It is possible to analyze this difficult situation by examining some incidents that has caused civilian casualties. Tribal leaders in Kunar claimed that 50 civilians had been killed through fighting between insurgent and coalition forces.⁷⁶ The engagements have happened both when the U.S. forces have been conducting

⁷⁴ United States, Department of Defense, *Gates, Karzai Discuss Civilian Casualties, Drawdown* 03-07-2011 <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=63059> (accessed 05-24-2012)

⁷⁵ Rabi-ul-Awwal The Unjust Media, Mujahideen Of Islamic Emirate Of Afghanistan Tuesday March 1 2011 <http://theunjustmedia.com/Afghanistan/Mujahideen%20operations/Ma11/01-03-11.htm> (accessed 05-21-2012)

⁷⁶ Associated Press, *Karzai Tries to Calm Fears After Recent Violence* 02-24-2011 http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2011-02-24-afghan-karzai_N.htm (accessed 05-29-2012)

operations as well as by attacks on their bases. The problem here is that not only are the insurgent groups targeting the U.S. forces but in doing so they may also inadvertently attack the civilians that live in the surrounding area. Specifically insurgent rockets and mortar attacks on U.S. bases cause the most harm to civilians as they often are located inside or close to civilian populations.⁷⁷ UNAMA reports suggest that instead of providing security for the people around these bases, the bases become threats in themselves because they are prime targets for insurgent forces. In particular there is the emphasis on the appropriate use of force from the counterinsurgent as a response to an attack. There is a concern in two reports that responses from coalition forces do not match the strength of the insurgent attack.⁷⁸ This relates to the expression used by John A. Nagl, one has to measure the response to not use a “sledgehammer approach,” but rather respond more restrained than one might have done in a conventional combat situation.

*“Conflict-related instability also affects civilian communities by disrupting or blocking services such as health, education and humanitarian and development assistance. As conflict intensifies, the government and its foreign supporters must enhance activities to meet the needs of conflict-affected communities.”*⁷⁹

This underlines that though a significantly higher portion of civilian casualties are the result of insurgent attacks, the impact that foreign military presence has on the civilian community in the area is crucial for the COIN effort. Minimizing the civilian casualties cannot be tied only to U.S. forces’ collateral damage. It should also be tied to what kind of threat would face a population if a base is put up in close proximity to civilian populations. Not only does it affect the *de facto* threat of being killed, but the instability that comes with the arrival of more foreign forces may adversely affect the area. With the increase of troops the counterinsurgency effort can experience friction because the population is fearful of intensified fighting. This seems to be a core part of the challenges to the COIN effort in Kunar and Nuristan. Because of the sparse population, lack of roads and basic infrastructure the proximity to civilian populations need to be closer. One has to consider the effect of foreign presence and level of insurgent attacks that the community may experience.

For these reasons communication is a key aspect when dealing with civilian casualties.

⁷⁷ United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan *Annual Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* January 2010: p. 19

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 19, United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan *Mid Year Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict* August 2010: p. 14-15

⁷⁹ CNN, *Report: Afghan Civilian Deaths Up, Most Attributed to Insurgents* July 2012 CNN Wire Staff http://articles.cnn.com/2010-07-12/world/afghanistan.civilians.report_1_afghanistan-rights-monitor-afghan-civilian-deaths-civilian-casualties/2?_s=PM:WORLD (accessed 05-29-2012)

The communication in Afghanistan is to a great extent based on word of mouth and radio; therefore it is important for coalition forces to be aware of this while conducting operations in the field.⁸⁰ Particular importance is put on the need to be first with information. It is an imperative to beat the insurgent's media capabilities as it is often not as developed as the U.S forces' ability to conduct information operations, so that the "correct" truth is the one that spreads through the communities. When conducting COIN operations it is necessary obtain the populations support otherwise it is impossible to root out the insurgents. Because of this the truth about an incident where there have been civilian casualties and the counterinsurgent has been involved, has to be presented and communicated in a way that can counter other media outlets perception of that situation.⁸¹ This does not mean feeding the population with propaganda; rather the presentation has to both match what happened and to stand up against other claims, specifically those made by insurgent "media" or other outlets that seek to disrupt public confidence.

2.3.2 IED Reporting and Incidents

Improvised explosive devices (IED) account for the majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and the reporting and incidents based on the use of this tactic is an important metric for assessing the COIN effort evolution in Kunar and Nuristan. The ability to report IED's and willingness to assist U.S. forces in disarming and removing these bombs illustrates that the local population feels safe enough to work against the insurgents. It also illustrates the level of trust the civilian population has in the ISAF force's ability to keep them safe after the devices have been removed. More specifically, they trust that the counterinsurgent forces are able to secure the area so insurgent cannot return later and punish the people who have cooperated with the U.S forces. Because of the significant amount of civilian casualties that IED's produce throughout Afghanistan, reporting also indicates whether the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are able to control areas where they have been given command. Insurgents target Afghans in the security forces as they see them as traitors to the cause and the country. They often refer to the security forces personnel as "puppets."⁸² Therefore the ability to conduct their own security operations and combating the spread of IED's is an aspect of the counterinsurgency that indicates that the local population has faith in the

⁸⁰International Security and Assistance Force, *COIN: Common Sense*, , Volume 1 Issue 7 2011: p. 7-8

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 7-8

⁸² Zabihullah Mujahid, *3 Puppets Killed in Logar* Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan May 30 2012 http://www.shahamat-english.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=18471:3-puppets-killed-in-logar&catid=1:news&Itemid=2 (accessed 05-29-2012)

Government of Afghanistan and, perhaps more importantly that they have faith that local Afghan security forces are not corrupt and supportive of the insurgents.

Examining the monthly trends that ISAF have published from September 2011 to May 2012 gives an updated image on how the different aspects listed above comes into play when analyzing the COIN effort. The reports show that Regional Command East (RC-East) has the most enemy initiated attacks, that means the insurgents initiates the engagement, firing first or detonating IED's directed at the U.S and ANSF forces.⁸³ From late 2011 there is an increase in overall attacks in Afghanistan and about 39 percent of all the violence in Afghanistan occurs in RC-East, with a significant amount in Kunar and Nuristan.⁸⁴ It would appear from the statistics that because of the extremely harsh winter experienced in 2011 the level of insurgent activity has been lower than in previous years and this may explain the decrease in attacks. In terms of IED reporting the interest is in generally low, it would appear, especially in contested areas where the risk of retaliatory attacks from insurgents outweighs the local populations' inclination to report an IED. This is regardless of the fact that the highest number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan and in RC-East is attributed to insurgent's mines and indiscriminate use of IED's.⁸⁵ It would seem that in terms of collaboration on work against the use of improvised explosive devices there is much that needs to be done. The statistics that ISAF has released on their website indicate a stagnation of progress throughout this period. Against this background, if the COIN strategy was working as intended one should expect to see an increase in reporting since the use of IEDs presents one of the most significant threats to the civilian population.

A report from the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) shows that the overall turn in rate, meaning the number of IED's that civilians report are stable and low. In total for the whole of 2009 and 2010 there were 365 IEDs that had been turned in by the local population.⁸⁶ These are numbers for the whole country of Afghanistan and they indicate a fairly low turn in rate. However, the numbers from the ISAF Monthly trends which are updated monthly indicate a larger number, and it is possible to assert that numbers that the CSIS report indicates does not take into account what the ISAF reports do. In what seems to be a rising trend, the number of IED's found and cleared has increased after the CSIS report

⁸³ International Security and Assistance Force *Monthly Trends* September 2011 to May 2012 <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html> (accessed 05-29-2012)

⁸⁴ International Security and Assistance Force *Monthly Trends* September 29, October 15, November 28 and December 21 2011: p. 5 (each document) <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html> (accessed 05-29-2012)

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 6 (each document)

⁸⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, *IED Metrics for Afghanistan* November 11 2011: p. 3

put forward its findings. The report on monthly progress from ISAF shows that a large percentage of IED's have been discovered and disposed of, this includes the ones that are turned in. One could argue that the report made by CSIS does not take into account that civilians may have reported an IED and in so doing assisted the coalition forces in removing it. In the report on IED's it would seem that it counts the number of instances where the civilian population itself has physically brought in IED's. The reason for this interpretation is the discrepancy between the numbers that are shown in the IED report compared to that of the *Monthly Trends* released by the coalition forces. It seems unlikely that the number should increase almost fifty percent from mid-2010 to mid-2012.⁸⁷ This is unlikely because the report from CSIS indicates a stable level of turn in over a period of three years and if that was the case it does not seem likely that a breakthrough would happen in the course of a few months.⁸⁸

Also, the level of turn in, in Kunar would appear to be higher than in Nuristan. Kunar has a significantly higher threat level than Nuristan. The number of casualties in Kunar is four times higher than in any of the other provinces. That indicates that the insurgent effort is more focused in Kunar than in Nuristan. This could be the reason why one can see a higher number of reporting in this area rather than in Nuristan. However, it is worth mentioning that the focus by U.S troops has been on Kunar rather than Nuristan and this may explain the lower level of reporting in that province. A higher number of U.S forces would create a higher level of IED incidents, which all of the reports indicate.⁸⁹

To consider the evolution of COIN with respect to IED reporting in Nuristan and Kunar the development seems to have reached what could be described as a ceiling. It is probably neither as bleak as the CSIS report would indicate and nor positive as the ISAF reports. With regard to the operational updates that ISAF posts on their websites it is seemingly mostly positive and from that it is possible to make to qualified guesses as to how the COIN effort is going. The number of incidents has in terms of events and casualties been high. This can be seen both from the UNAMA reports on civilian casualties as well as from the ISAF reports on the monthly trends in each regional command. The level of IED reporting based on the local population's willingness to assist is not necessarily low when examined along with other factors. The trust between the counterinsurgents in the area as well as the

⁸⁷ International Security and Assistance Force *Monthly Trends* September 29, October 15, November 28 and December 21 2011: p. 5 (each document) <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html> (accessed 05-29-2012)

⁸⁸ Anthony H. Cordesman *IED Metrics for Afghanistan* November 11 2011: p. 3

⁸⁹ Icasualties, *Fatalities by Province* 2011 <http://icasualties.org/OEF/ByProvince.aspx> (accessed 06-01-2012)

trust in local security forces impacts the level of reporting. This is an issue that makes this metric difficult to narrow and give an exact number to examine. Rather it is far more useful to see the level of “turn in” that the CSIS report contains in light of the ISAF reports, which seem to be more positive than it would appear at first glance. IED reporting is connected to a larger set of factors, and among those the communication with the local people is of great importance.

More specifically, to counter IED’s and specifically the placing of these explosives, a key aspect is to maintain the ability to communicate efficiently with the local population. A large number of the articles in *COIN: Common Sense* focus on how to communicate with the people in the provinces in a way that provides a two way street of information. If the local population provides information the U.S forces must be able through dialog and action to show that they are capable of removing threats from the area. This is particularly important with regard to IED’s which seems to have some positive trends, as more than 50% of them are neutralized, compared to 45% in 2011 which according to both ISAF and CSIS show a negative trend from 2008.⁹⁰ In all the statistics on IED attacks the fluctuation of a few percent up and down does not indicate that the insurgents’ ability to use IED’s as their primary weapon is diminishing, but rather it seems to have stagnated and has stopped at a unacceptably high level throughout the beginning of the Obama administrations new strategy and till today. This could indicate that the COIN effort in terms of the neutralization of IED’s and cooperating with the local population in this regard is not going as well as one could expect even with an increased number of forces conducting operations.

2.3.3 Use of Nongovernmental Agencies and Officials’ Safety

In rural areas in Afghanistan like Kunar and Nuristan the presence of the government of Afghanistan is limited and the safety of their officials varies from district to district within the province. The insurgent groups are not one group, called the Taliban. There is a multitude of different groups who operate in these provinces. These groups range from actual Taliban to insurgent groups from Pakistan to criminal groups. The multifaceted insurgent or enemy terrain makes it difficult for the government of Afghanistan to track what event can be connected to whom.⁹¹ Within this maze of who is who the Afghan people are placed firmly in

⁹⁰ International Security and Assistance Force, *COIN: Common Sense*, , Volume 1 Issue 1 2010: p. 1-2, 4-5, International Security and Assistance Force *Monthly Trends* September 29, October 15, November 28 and December 21 2011: p. 5 (each document) <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/news/monthly-trends.html> (accessed 06-01-2012)

⁹¹ The New York Times *In Eastern Afghanistan, at War With the Taliban’s Shadowy Rule* February 6 2011: p. 2

the middle. This is a core issue for the COIN effort, and to the people in Afghanistan specifically those who live in rural areas like Kunar and Nuristan. The biggest complaint forwarded to the coalition is lack of trust in the government of Afghanistan. This is because of two reasons which are equally important. First, many rural villagers either in Nuristan or in Kunar have not been in actual contact with their official governors or other government official in a significant amount of time.⁹² Second, the level of corruption that is more or less rampant in large parts of the Government of Afghanistan's system, specifically the legal system, makes the average rural Afghan villager wary of a government that produces few results and is virtually nonexistent in remote provinces.⁹³ The problem for the counterinsurgency effort is the lack of government courts and the populations who refrain from using the courts created by the Afghan government. Several different sources, from newspapers, government papers to reports from the field all indicate that the population in remote provinces tends to prefer Taliban courts and their mobile services rather than turning to a government of Afghanistan official.

Interviews with local populations also support these indications.⁹⁴ Some villagers point to the fact that their experience of Taliban courts is far better than with the government, which says a lot about their faith in the government. There is a significant difference in the negative aspects of the two co-existing legal systems. The Taliban courts have become appear to be a fair system, or it is considered fairer than the government system. However, their main selling point toward the population is the speed and availability that they provide. The side that the Taliban would like to hide is the violent side to their shadow government. Remote provinces where the coalition forces have less influence show signs that as soon as the foreign troops leave the Taliban come out of their hiding place and resume their activities. The effectiveness of the shadow government is to a large extent based on their ability to monopolize the use of violence in many provinces.⁹⁵ This monopolization of the use of violence not only delegitimizes the centralized government in Kabul, but also supports the claims made by insurgents that once the coalition troops leave there will be no government to speak of and the Taliban will continue to govern the provinces. This counts especially in those provinces which border the FATA and NWFP where the government has had a low level of

⁹² Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* April 2010: p. 23

⁹³ Antonio Giustozzi, *Hearts, Minds and The Barrel of a Gun* March 2012: p. 73, 78; Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* April 2010: p. 124-125

⁹⁴ Tom A. Peter *Leery of Courts, Afghans Seek Taliban Justice* in USA Today March 7 2012

⁹⁵ Antonio Giustozzi, *Hearts, Minds and The Barrel of a Gun* March 2012: p. 71

influence throughout history. They appear to provide a far swifter and harsher punishment of crimes than the government of Afghanistan. They also use coercion to force people to use the shadow courts system, something which the government in Kabul have little understanding of because of the large foreign force presence. If the choice is between taking your case up with the local Taliban commander or judge and being killed or severely beaten for interacting with the U.S. forces then the choice seems somewhat obvious.⁹⁶

In an assessment made by the U.S government there are several charts that illustrate what kind of relationship that the population of a given Afghan province has towards the government and the insurgents. In both Kunar and Nuristan, a majority of areas are at least in part sympathetic to the insurgents. Some areas are almost completely in support of the insurgency rather than the government in Kabul, and a majority is on the fence.⁹⁷ The problem for the centralized judiciary is in certain respects similar to that of the problem with civilian casualties, because the areas are so remote and far from the government that transaction time is high. This would not have been a problem if there was a consensus that the government in Kabul is legitimate, but when it is constantly being faced with charges of corruption this creates another layer of mistrust between the local populations and the government institutions. The Taliban courts in these areas are in many respects not a better option in terms of democratic values but according to villagers in these provinces, results are more important than ideas: “If he was honest, I would accept a Sikh from India as my governor.”⁹⁸

Quotations like this indicate that the concrete results matter more than the general politics whether it is local, tribal or provincial. It appears that people want the court to work, but they see the corruption and inefficiency of the Government of Afghanistan as the largest hurdle to overcome. This is most likely the reason why the shadow government of the Taliban is achieving a foothold that seems to, in rural provinces, to become stronger. An aspect of this may also be that people are beginning to hedge their bets. This means that most are aware of the time limit set on the major military operations and because of this the Taliban and other insurgent groups are able to coerce population in these provinces that they are the only viable alternative. The government of Afghanistan is seen as being in quite a dependent relationship with the U.S. and therefore has not been able to secure the country. Many think the

⁹⁶ Stefanie Nijssen *The Taliban's Shadow Government in Afghanistan* September 2011: p. 4

⁹⁷ Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* April 2010: p. 35-37

⁹⁸ Griff Witte, *Taliban Shadow Officials Offer Concrete Alternative* December 8 2009: p. 3

government is most likely going to become more corrupt in the coming years as the international security forces leave the responsibility to their Afghan counterparts. Thus, the Afghan government does not enjoy much confidence from the populations in the provinces. Specifically, the Afghan National Army in terms of perceptions on corruption.⁹⁹

The safety of the Government of Afghanistan official's impacts heavily the ability of the government to move within a province. The term official does not mean only high ranking government officials but also others representing the government such as ANA and ANP personnel. There has been a decline in their safety and it has been made clear that it does not matter how high ranking one has when it comes to the insurgent threat to official's safety. The assassinations of Karzai's brother and the averted attack on Kunar's governor in mid-2011 are indicators that this perception is valid.¹⁰⁰ According to recent numbers published by the Brookings Institution there are per month on average five or more assassinations registered in most provinces, in some areas the level is higher.¹⁰¹ The safety situation is also affected by unreported incidents of insurgent attacks on civilians who have cooperated with the ISAF forces. The inability for government officials to visit the provinces which they have assumed responsibility for feeds into the lack of trust in the government as a whole. Unwillingness to put themselves at risk makes this problem worse. According to local officials in Nuristan, the governor of the province was most often in Kabul or Jalalabad rather than being in the province that he was supposed to govern. The local official complained that when he was in the province he would not venture outside of the secure provincial governors compound.¹⁰² When McChrystal issued his Commander's Summary, he specifically stated the importance of aiding the Government of Afghanistan in increasing the level of confidence in the government among Afghans.¹⁰³ This example of a governor who is barely present and who refuses to leave his compound illustrate that not only has the security environment been impeded but also that the will of those who govern is weakened by the threat that the insurgents pose. It has been a core part of the U.S strategy to build the government of Afghanistan by having a

⁹⁹ Helge Lurås, *Build-up of Afghan Security Forces Ill Advised*, Norwegian Peace Building Centre 2010: 3-4, 5,6

¹⁰⁰ Press TV, *Afghan Governor Escapes Terror Attempt* March 17 2011 <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/170456.html> (accessed 06-10-2012); Joshua Partlow and Kevin Sieff *Ahmed Wali Karzai, Half Brother of Afghan President, Killed By Trusted Confidant* July 12 2011 Washington Post http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/karzais-brother-killed-by-guard-in-kandahar-home/2011/07/12/gIQAgI3FAI_story.html (accessed 06-10-2012)

¹⁰¹ Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon *Afghanistan Index* May 16 2012: p. 10

¹⁰² [Fabrizio Foschini](http://www.fabriziofoschini.com) *Nuristan in Fall* November 11 2011 Afghanistan Analysts Network <http://aan-afghanistan.com/index.asp?id=2148> (accessed 06-10-2012)

¹⁰³ Stanley McChrystal et. al. *Commander's Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009 p. 1-1, 2-5

credible centralized government in Kabul which can responsibly govern provinces with local governors. These examples of court use and official safety show that the progress of COIN in these two provinces seem to be progressing in a one step forward two steps back fashion.

2.4 Analysis of the Counterinsurgency Efforts in Nangarhar

The province of Nangarhar differs from the other two provinces as it contains a vast level of natural resources, has a major urban hub, Jalalabad, and is considered a vital province economically in Afghanistan because of its trade link with Pakistan through the trade route that connects Peshawar with Kabul. The city of Jalalabad also has an airport increasing its strategic significance in the region.¹⁰⁴ Compared to both Nuristan and Kunar this province has a lower number of attacks initiated by the enemy. It also has a lower number of IED attacks; however this seems to be changing indicating a negative trend in the province.¹⁰⁵ The escalating violence also in Nangarhar can be attributed to the increase in foreign troops and an increase in their operations. This has created targeting areas which have been not been targeted earlier. Another difference between Nangarhar and the other two provinces is that Nangarhar appears to have been more secure in the years before the implementation of the new strategy. There is no univocal way to interpret this difference with regard to the COIN effort. It might signify a positive trend for the COIN operations forcing the insurgents to attack with a greater strength and with a different strategy than the insurgents had to deal with earlier, before the increased level of resistance by U.S. forces. The increase in troops seems to have caused a greater level of success in removing the insurgents from the population base which the insurgents need to be effective.

A general problem in all these three provinces is the proximity to Pakistan's tribal areas, which serve as a sanctuary for a large number of fighters, not only insurgents but also terrorist organizations. A report published in *Military Review* paints a picture of IED attacks having become an increasing trend in Nangarhar during the last few years compared to 2006-2008.¹⁰⁶ These attacks were possibly caused by the increase of troops in the region from 2011. The levels of troops are dropping now that the withdrawal has been set for 2014, but IED

¹⁰⁴ Michelle Parker, Programming Development Funds to Support a Counterinsurgency in *Case Studies for National Security Transformation* no. 10 2007: p. 4

¹⁰⁵ Robert Kemp, Counterinsurgency in Nangarhar Province, Eastern Afghanistan in *Military Review* November-December 2010: p. 34

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 35-36

attacks remain fairly constant. This is where the problem of interpretation arises. If the increased insurgent activity in the area is caused by the insurgent's awareness of the impending hand over of responsibility to the Afghan security forces, this may be a show of force on the part of the insurgents. It may be interpreted as an attempt to underline the strength they still have. April 20xy by insurgent forces in several provinces supports this interpretation.¹⁰⁷ If this is the case it could indicate that instead of reaping the success of earlier progress, Nangarhar may see a decline in security just as Kunar and Nuristan have seen following the withdrawal of U.S. forces.

Civilian reporting of IED's in Nangarhar has been low compared to the number found by the ISAF forces. The level of operations against the insurgents who plant or create IEDs, however, seems to have been stable at least if one looks at the rate of seizures made by coalition and Afghan security forces in May and June of this year in Nangarhar.¹⁰⁸ This could indicate that the population in the province is interested and most of all willing to aid in the apprehension of individuals that pose a threat to their community. This is important to establishing security and therefore this could be interpreted as a sign of will to support the COIN effort even though general the security may have become worse.

In both Kunar and Nuristan there seems to be a mood of discouragement that is more strongly felt than what appears to be the case in Nangarhar. This may be because the counterinsurgency effort is more focused in Nangarhar than it seems to be in the other two provinces. The reason for this may be twofold. First, Nangarhar has by any measure a much higher level of developed infrastructure, especially around Jalalabad and the surrounding areas compared to the two other provinces.¹⁰⁹ Second, because it houses one of Afghanistan's important agricultural regions, Nangarhar has more "potential" for development than provinces like Kunar and Nuristan. This is not to say that it is not important to establish infrastructure in the more rural areas that are a significantly less developed. The point is the agricultural area's importance to the region in terms of possible production of value for the region as a whole, and this could be a stepping stone towards achieving progress that could spread.

The further development of infrastructure in Nangarhar has been one of the core parts

¹⁰⁷ Bilial Sarwary *Afghan Leader Karzai Blames Attack on NATO "Failure"* 16 April 2012

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17727036> (accessed 06-24-2012)

¹⁰⁸ NATO, International Security and Assistance Force, *ISAF Joint Command Operational Update*; June 29, June 18, May 29, May 15, May 14 and May 1 2012

¹⁰⁹ Robert Kemp Counterinsurgency in Nangarhar Province, Eastern Afghanistan in *Military Review* November-December 2010: p. 36, 37

of the COIN effort there, and it appears to have been working better in this province than in the other two. Two separate reports describe agricultural efforts and road building projects that have been very successful. Nangarhar Inc., a program that was creating sustainable “quick-impact” projects in the province, was aimed at strengthening economic growth and enabling export of the vast agricultural resources to other areas.¹¹⁰ “Quick-impact” means projects that have a fairly short time line in terms of construction or implementation but with outcomes that make a difference in the region they are enacted. These projects may range from well building to road improvement.¹¹¹ Though road construction could arguably be considered long term because of a longer timeline its effects in Nangarhar have illustrated the effectiveness of rebuilding infrastructure and quick impact projects. This was demonstrated by the Nangarhar Inc. program. The projects created opportunities for the local population and provided an avenue of work and income that had not been possible before.¹¹² The focus that this program has had on interagency work and its ability to combine American forces with their Afghan counterparts in a successful manner seemed to be a core part of the project. Such ability of foreign troops to partner with Afghan counterparts is important because of the mentoring aspect as well as local ownership towards projects. This was a significant aspect of the success of Nangarhar Inc., which did not only consist of quick impact projects but also counternarcotics operations and job creation outside of the agricultural sector.¹¹³

In partnering with Afghan counterparts, whether they are military or civilian officials, the U.S army has emphasized the importance of maintaining a level of cooperation which does not emasculate their counterparts, making sure that what is taught does not come off as a parent teaching a child. Instead they focus on planning and execution of projects that are led by Afghans. The ability to let Afghans lead and to trust that through cooperation they are able to execute the intended plan has a twofold benefit for the relationship with the COIN effort and the local population.¹¹⁴ It demonstrates that the U.S forces are able to provide the assistance needed to complete projects and it demonstrates their ability and understanding of working with their Afghan counterpart. Perhaps most importantly, the Afghan partners show the local population that the government can perform its duties towards the people. Showing progress in terms of both planning and execution demonstrates viable results to the people. It

¹¹⁰ Major David K. Spencer *Afghanistan's Nangarhar Incorporated-A model for Interagency Success* January 21 2011: p. 2-3

¹¹¹ Kai Eide *A Strategy for Transition to Afghan Leadership* March 6 2010: p. 7

¹¹² *Ibid.* p. 2

¹¹³ Robert Kemp *Counterinsurgency in Nangarhar Province, Eastern Afghanistan* in *Military Review* November-December 2010: p. 40

¹¹⁴ International Security and Assistance Force, *COIN: Common Sense*, , Volume 1 Issue 2 2010: p. 5-6

seems that problems in this respect have been one of the major issues not only in Nangarhar but also in Kunar and Nuristan. Though projects have been started and indeed followed through in the two other provinces they seem to be hampered mostly by lack of ability to continue progression once it has passed its starting stages: “Based on experience, it is not enough to do all of this hard work in the beginning, the PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) also must follow up as the project develops.”¹¹⁵ This has been a more difficult issue in Kunar and Nuristan because of lack of access to certain areas, specifically the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is also a problem that the level of enemy contacts has been higher in these provinces than in Nangarhar, as seen in the reports published by ISAF on the attacks in the region. Michelle Parker, who wrote *Case Studies for National Security Transformation*, argues that the very process towards creating a “product” is as important as the projects outcome. She emphasizes that this approach includes the Government of Afghanistan in the project from its starting phase, which is key to training the officials for the time when the foreign troops leave. Another key aspect of this is the unwillingness of local populations to not harbor the insurgents who try to weaken the government.¹¹⁶

As part of creating a secure environment a program for creating a peace center which focuses on reintegration of insurgent fighters and former Taliban was launched. In terms of security the effect of this type of center might be the ability to provide an out for people who are tired or unwilling to fight. Providing these individuals with another option helps create trust between fighters and the Afghan government. It shows them that the government is serious about trying to create a more stable and secure Afghanistan. The program has been delayed because insurgents murdered the head of the program, illustrating that isolated operations can have devastating effects on ongoing process.¹¹⁷

The reintegration effort is hoped to spread to Nuristan and Kunar as well, underlining the importance of Nangarhar in a regional setting. However, the paradox is that even if it goes well in Nangarhar there is no indication at this point that this is spreading to the other two provinces in question. Partly this may be because the main focus in the other two provinces is to rebuild what little infrastructure exists as well as maintaining a minimum of safety for the civilian population. This is arguably one of the biggest differences between Nangarhar and

¹¹⁵ Michelle Parker, Programming Development Funds to Support a Counterinsurgency in *Case Studies for National Security Transformation* no. 10 2007: p. 17

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 21

¹¹⁷ Jeff, Nagan M. *Nangarhar joins Afghanistan Reintegration Efforts*, International Security and Assistance Force 2011 <http://www.isaf.nato.int/article/focus/nangarhar-joins-afghanistan-reintegration-efforts.html> (accessed 06-29-2012)

Kunar and Nuristan. The ability to conduct missions, plan and execute rebuilding efforts as well as enabling Afghan officials to assume leading roles on projects seems possible in Nangarhar because of the existing conditions that had developed before the Obama administration's new strategy.

When it comes to the shadow government, Nangarhar has the same problem that has been observed earlier in the other two provinces. It does, however, have a slight twist. While the insurgents have established a *de facto* shadow government in the rural parts of all three provinces exists because there is little alternative, the more urbanized and developed areas in Nangarhar seems to be more affected by malign influences rather than direct control.¹¹⁸ Malign influences mean any subversive actions, direct or indirect, that affect the COIN effort. In the case of Nangarhar the use of nongovernmental agents seems to exist side by side with the Government of Afghanistan. It does not necessarily mean that the use is always destructive. The people are accustomed to settling disputes with what could be considered a "local ad-hoc" council that resolves disputes and conflicts particular to the area or the persons involved.¹¹⁹ This means that in order to achieve a successful use of turning to the official judicial system it seems that there is needed a change in the mindset of the civilian population, which is to say the least a monumental task. It might therefore be that the most logical way to forward the progression of COIN in Nangarhar is to incorporate the local traditional customs alongside the official judiciary. This may not be viable immediately but there is a need to combat corruption which is prevalent in every province of Afghanistan. This is a major issue for the civilian populations trust in the government's ability to actually sustain a centralized government in Kabul.

Shadow courts operate in Nangarhar in a fashion similar to that of the other provinces but with more of a backseat it would appear. The insurgents seek to subvert the government of Afghanistan by affecting the decisions made in local "ad-hoc" dispute resolution processes. Even though they are not as open about it in Nangarhar as they may be in Kunar and Nuristan it is still an influence that needs to be reversed. A general problem is corruption with officials. That is still one of the major concerns with having whole projects being left over to Afghan leadership. It can very quickly turn into a "what benefits me benefits you" type of relationship with power brokers in that specific area. Jadedness towards that situation is one of the main issues facing the COIN effort as a whole because it so severely affects the faith

¹¹⁸ International Security and Assistance Force, *COIN: Common Sense*, , Volume 1 Issue 3 2010: p. 2, 10

¹¹⁹ Deborah J. Smith *Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Nangarhar Province* December 2009: 10-12

the civilian population has towards the Government in Kabul.¹²⁰ Combating the lack of belief in change through working with the government is no less important in Nangarhar than it is in the other two provinces. The main difference is that the development of infrastructure in Nangarhar seems to be far stronger and security is better. That the security situation is better does not equate to peaceful. A search in Google on “Nangarhar” and “attacks” yields several results, which show that the last few months there have been several major attacks made by the insurgents, all causing a significant amount of civilian casualties.¹²¹ These casualties, though not created by ISAF, forces hamper the effort because of the uncertainty that they create. If one is not safe in areas that have a heavy foreign force presence, then arguing with villagers in more remote rural areas that it is safe to cooperate with the government is a tough sell.

Nevertheless, the development in Nangarhar very clearly demonstrates the general point that the insurgents have a weakness in their inability to create infrastructure, the Taliban or any other insurgent group has very little capability to create more jobs or execute projects that enhances the living conditions of the civilian population. Arguably this is the strongest card the U.S. and Afghan forces have on their side. This is important because the insurgent cannot win an all-out battle with the coalition troops but it can once the foreign forces leave combat on more equal terms with the ANSF because ANSF lack the military power and prowess of American military forces. The insurgents are therefore reliant on undermining the Government in Afghanistan before they have been able to successfully complete projects, since such projects make the civilian population less inclined to support the insurgency.

To sum up: as seen from the analyses presented in this chapter, none of the metrics applied to measure the various aspects of the COIN operations provide univocal indications on to what extent the implementation of the COIN strategy so far may be regarded a success or not. This goes both for what, in chapter one, is referred to as the military aspects and the civilian aspects of COIN. The main metrics for assessing the military aspects have been related to the various kinds of civilian casualties and the location of firefights or enemy engagements. In principle the impact of civilian casualties should be the most easy, or least difficult, to

¹²⁰ International Security and Assistance Force, *COIN: Common Sense*, , Volume 1 Issue 3 2010: p. 2-3

¹²¹ Google search string for attacks in Nangarhar clearly show the level of violence:

<https://www.google.no/search?sugexp=chrome,mod=19&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8&q=attacks+in+nangarhar>

measure of these two metrics, since it can be measured by numbers. Regardless of the fact that there also are some difficulties in providing and analyzing the numbers, it seems to be an established fact that the total number of civilian casualties have been slightly increasing during the years of the implementation of the COIN strategy. A somewhat more contested fact is that the number of civilian casualties caused by insurgents is higher than the number caused by the ISAF forces and the Afghan government forces.

However, as we have seen, the consequence of this is not a question of simple numbers. The local population's interpretation and understanding of what transpired and what was the real cause in each case event where civilian casualties are experienced, are also very important. The perception of the local population regarding the causes in each case is of crucial importance for whether to trust the insurgents that operating in an area or to trust the representatives for the Afghan government or the ISAF forces that are operating in the same area.

This is also why the location of firefights represents one of the crucial aspects of the COIN effort. Both these kinds of events are on the one hand events that takes place within a bigger picture, and on the other hand they are composed of elements and incidents that in themselves are not easy to interpret what were the real causes for what has happened. Therefore, to establish/have a relation to the local people that makes it possible to communicate with them in each particular case is therefore an integral part of the COIN effort and overall strategy. The preceding analysis shows that to what extent the COIN effort have made progress in this part of its strategy, is not really possible to say. What is possible to say on the basis of the analysis, is that any progress in this field is very vulnerable. It may at any time be followed by a new setback, due to a new event or incident, whether caused by the event as such or by the way it is interpreted and perceived by the local population.

The application of parameters for examining what could be considered the more civilian aspects of the COIN effort, IED reporting, Afghan government officials' safety in the provinces and the use of insurgents courts vs. the use of government courts to solve local disputes, neither did provide any univocal picture. Except for the various methods for mapping the numbers of IED reporting, all these metrics are to be measured by rather qualitative methods, and the overall judgment has to be made on the basis of systematic thinking about a number of cases rather than systematic registration of all cases. As we have seen from the preceding analysis, a systematic review of reports from all three fields of activities signs of both setbacks and progress. The supposed importance of these fields of

activities for the realization of the COIN strategy may be said to have been confirmed by the experiences made, but the level of success is more difficult to determine. If a general conclusion were to be drawn it might be that in all these three fields the results obtained seem to be lower than what was expected, but it has to be left an open question whether the expectations may have been too high.

When compared to the analyses of Kunar and Nuristan, the analysis of the COIN effort in Nangarhar may shed light on the question whether the expectations to the results from the COIN effort have been set too high,. Some of the differences between Nangarhar and the two other provinces, such as the lower number of attacks by the enemy and the lower number of IED attacks in Nangarhar, appear not to be consequences of the COIN effort but of the different economic and social conditions that were there from the beginning. Nangarhar has both better economic conditions for development and a better infrastructure that may enhance further development.

These conditions obviously are also good preconditions for realizing those aspects of the COIN effort that consist of engaging in development projects in the province, such as further improvement of the infrastructure. The result from these kinds of projects in Nangarhar have demonstrated that a weak point for the insurgents in the long run is their lack of ability and resources to create and improve the infrastructure in the areas they operate. The ISAF forces and Afghan forces therefore have a “competitive advantage,” regarding the possibilities to create trust and support from the population in the provinces they operate. In other words, the experiences from building infrastructure in Nangarhar have demonstrated that this is a very important part of the COIN strategy. On the other hand, this also begs the question whether the conditions in Kunar and Nuristan for realizing this crucial aspect of COIN have been present at all.

CHAPTER 3

3 Cultural Understanding and Its Importance for COIN Operations

Culture is a word that carries a lot of different meanings, and in today's military operations, it appears to have become more important than one would have thought. The counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan has to take culture into account, and whether or not the military conducting the operations see culture as an important aspect. To be able to conduct COIN operations in Afghanistan, foreign forces have to know how they should react to the people who live there, what they can do, what they should not do. "Human terrain" is an important concept within the COIN doctrine that emphasizes the importance of understanding the culture where the COIN operations are being conducted.¹²² One could argue that in Afghanistan there are several levels and layers of culture, each one specific to certain aspects of the society there. It could be anything from political culture to a specific set of social codes that only exist in one village. With that in mind, there is little wonder that the task of conducting counterinsurgency in a country like Afghanistan is a difficult task. The commander's assessment created at the beginning of the Obama administration's first "refocus" on Afghanistan is a testament to the importance of being aware of the operational environment.¹²³ General McChrystal, then commander for operations in Afghanistan, outlines in this document the importance of understanding the problems related to facing the Afghan people and emphasizes the importance that a campaign has to take this into account.¹²⁴

For the purpose of argument, it is necessary to divide the different layers in Afghan society in some respect because they appear to be more diverse than one would find in Western cultures. The top layer is the country itself, regardless of national unity. It is the landmass that the people in the area of operations reside in. The second layer is the provinces, which in this case, are Nuristan, Kunar, and Nangarhar. The third layer is the cities and villages within the provinces. The fourth is the ethnic and tribal ties within these villages and cities. The fourth level is arguably one with the most diverse and important aspects and is the most challenging to COIN operations. If the COIN operations fail on the most basic level, meaning inside the villages and cities, the operations that seek to create stability would likely not spread further. That level is arguably the most important because it is the foundation for

¹²² United States, United States Army *The U.S Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual FM 3-24* 2006: section: 3-16

¹²³ International Security and Assistance Force, Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009: 1-1, 1-2

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 1-1, 1-2, 1-15, 1-16, 2-2, 2-3

confidence among the population. Therefore, the knowledge of culture is not only important for the people and the counterinsurgent, but it is important to the whole operation because of the need to be very local and national at the same time.

Cultural goals are usually divided into strategic and tactical.¹²⁵ The strategic level has more to do with history and how certain events or actions are perceived. This could be on the national level, as well as on a smaller level like a district. The tactical cultural understanding means the knowledge necessary to conduct operations in any given area of operations. That is, the understanding needed on the part of the counterinsurgent to responsibly assess and deal with the local conditions that make up the “human terrain” that foreign troops face on the ground.¹²⁶ Those challenges could be simple disputes inside a village or dealing with reparations for collateral damages caused by bombings. Against this background, this chapter will discuss the three main ways in which cultural understanding is of great importance when conducting COIN operations. These are: First, the effort to reintegrate and reconcile fighters that have opposed the sitting government and the security forces; Second, the relationship between the Western conception of democracy and Afghan political culture, especially the tension between central and local government; Third, the last part of the cultural analysis will concentrate on religion, as well as the importance and possible effects of misinterpreting the importance of religion on the interplay between Pakistan’s tribal agencies and the three provinces. The issues that face U.S.’ efforts and Pakistan relations to the three provinces, in terms of culture, will also be a part of that analysis.

3.1 Reintegration and the Need for Cultural Understanding

The reintegration of insurgent fighters is an issue that is possibly more important today than it may have been when the insurgency got its new wind around 2006. The reason for this is that the date for withdrawal has been set, and this has given the insurgents a timeline of when most major combat troops will be pulled out of the country. Though the Obama administration has used the word “responsible draw down,” it would seem that it is driven more by lack of public and political will than an acceptable security situation in Afghanistan. With that in mind, the need to be able to conduct successful reintegration of insurgent fighters, whether they are ad hoc fighters or seriously ideologically driven, insurgents are

¹²⁵ Sheila Miyoshi Jager *On the Uses of Cultural Knowledge* November 2007: p. 8-9

¹²⁶ Sheila Miyoshi Jager *On the Uses of Cultural Knowledge* November 2007: p. 9-12

paramount.¹²⁷ Without successful reintegration of fighters and population that have been active in supporting insurgents, there seems to be little possible hope for a reasonably stable security environment when the main foreign force leaves Afghanistan.

After the defeat of the Russian forces in the late 1980s, the lack of reintegration of fighters is a reminder of the importance of having a strategy for how to deal with that particular issue. Though the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had a more definite end point than what can be expected with the 2014 withdrawal, the issue is no less critical now than it was at the time of the Russian withdrawal. “Most Afghan insurgents are fighting near their communities and only a minority is ideologically driven; most fight because of grievances, often local in origin.”¹²⁸ This quote illustrates the importance of understanding local grievances, and to be able to assist in the reintegration process, the foreign security forces have to be able to aid the insurgents willing to be reintegrated in the process. In this process, local mentoring and understanding of local customs, whether they are with a local “Jirga” (Jirga is an Afghan assembly of village elders, religious scholars, and local officials who have come together to resolve grievances) or with government officials in a government facility, are important because it represents an Afghan solution to an Afghan problem.¹²⁹

The Afghan Peace, Reconciliation, and Reintegration Program (APRP) has been created to make the process of reintegration an Afghan project.¹³⁰ The program seeks to reintegrate the insurgent fighters that wish to rejoin their communities in a way that is responsible and beneficial to both parties, the fighter and the community that he wishes to rejoin. The APRP is a nationally organized program with affiliate offices in different regions.¹³¹ It is an Afghan program, because of the people who lead it have a relatively good understanding of local issues and have established access to the local communities. Thus, the program addresses both strategic goals with reintegration nationally and locally in regions and/or villages. The tactical aspect is applied in each village or city based on their specific needs. In doing that, the program applies local solutions to local problems, rather than being centrally controlled from headquarters in Kabul by people who may have little experience with the specific regions. However, with regard to local conditions, it is important that the foreign forces are able to mentor the people who are actually key figures in that environment. If foreign forces disregard the importance of understanding the local power structures, that

¹²⁷ David Kilcullen *The Accidental Guerilla* 2010: p. 84

¹²⁸ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 2

¹²⁹ Ali Wardak *Jirga – A Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan* 2003: p. 3-5

¹³⁰ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 3

¹³¹ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 5-6

would in turn, defeat the purpose of mentoring. If the “wrong” people were helped, it would send a message of incompetence to the population on the part of security forces and also illustrate that the security forces have little to no cultural knowledge about the people they are trying to help.

The idea of honor and retribution is an important part of the Pashtu culture. Those ideas fall under what is known as “Pashtunwali,” the Pashtu code of conduct.¹³² Kunar and Nangarhar provinces are close to 90 percent Pashtun.¹³³ Nuristan, on the other hand, is composed of Nuristanis, which belong to a different ethnic group than the Pashtuns. This group resides only in Nuristan and the northern part of Kunar.¹³⁴ They have several separate languages and have been known to be antipathetic, both to the Taliban and U.S. forces.¹³⁵ It would seem that this ethnic group sees itself as more independent than the Pashtu who appear to be more positive towards centralized government. This also could, however, be because the Pashtun ethnic group is, in fact, represented in the government, which the Nuristanis are not.¹³⁶ Nuristanis have also had a history of being on the outside of the Afghan state.¹³⁷ The Nuristanis have been alienated for a long time and, as a result, it is likely that they are more skeptical to the stability effort. The fact that the province of Nuristan has been left on the sidelines in the COIN effort is likely to solidify the reservations this group has towards the Government of Afghanistan.¹³⁸ Most of the materials on reintegration and reconciliation for the tactical level are written with Pashtun culture in mind. The Nuristani culture will therefore be commented on only where it differs from Pashtun culture.

The concept of retribution is important in Pashtunwali. If a wrong has been committed, the guidelines for retribution (“badal”) must be followed to allow that act to be rectified or punished.¹³⁹ It is not difficult to see that this may pose a significant issue to the process of reintegration, and especially if insurgents have hurt the community severely or hurt power structures that are still in control of the area alongside government officials. It could also be that the insurgents belong to a different tribe than the ruling tribe in any given area,

¹³² Palwasha Kakar *Tribal Law of Pashtunwali and Women’s Legislative Authority* 2010: p. 2-3

¹³³ Institute for the Study of War *Regional Command East* <http://www.understandingwar.org/region/regional-command-east> (accessed 08-29-2012)

¹³⁴ EveryCulture Website *Nuristanis* <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Nuristanis.html> (accessed 08-01-2012)

¹³⁵ United States, United States Marine Corp, Marine Corp Intelligence Activity *Nuristanis in Afghanistan* 2002: p. 1, 3-4

¹³⁶ Kenneth Katzman *Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance* June 5 2012: p. 2-5

¹³⁷ United States, Marine Corp Intelligence Activity *Nuristanis in Afghanistan* 2002: p. 8

¹³⁸ CJ Radin *US Returns to Afghanistan’s ‘Lost Province’ for a While* June 14 2012 Long War Journal Website

¹³⁹ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 3-4

and that they are therefore subjected to a harsher “badal” than what the person otherwise would have received.

The news magazines *COIN: Common Sense* and *Freedom Watch* both discuss and emphasize the importance of letting Afghans take lead in the effort, especially the importance of having local leaders oversee as much of the process as possible to allow for a good integration process back into the community.¹⁴⁰ For COIN operations, this would appear to be a win-win situation if handled correctly. First, one of the main objectives within the COIN doctrine is to separate the insurgent from the population that he is using to hide within.¹⁴¹ Reintegrating fighters into their communities removes them not only from the insurgent group, but can also be a part of getting other insurgents to return to normalcy. Fighters who remove themselves from the insurgent groups can also possibly provide information about the support networks, which is the lifeline of any insurgent group. Second, the Taliban and other insurgent groups make use of local fighters. The insurgent groups usually uses a core of “hardcore ideologically driven” fighters who serve as their “flying column” or expeditionary force sent out to fight coalition forces.¹⁴² This means that they usually return to their sanctuaries, which in most cases, are over the border into Pakistan. The proximity of these provinces to the border means that it is imperative to have an efficient system for reintegration so that the fighters willing to be reintegrated are able to feel safe even when the “flying columns” return.

These two aspects are at the core, both of the reintegration policies and for the COIN effort. Having Afghan leaders responsible for the effort removes the foreign forces from the “leadership” position as such and allows Afghan solutions be provided for Afghan problems. This is in line, both with the wishes of the government of Afghanistan and with plans for a responsible withdrawal in 2014.¹⁴³ In terms of the COIN effort, it allows for a separation of local fighters who are reconcilable versus fighters who are irreconcilable and who need to be neutralized.

However, there are other cultural aspects that are important to this process that cannot be underestimated. “Badal,” as stated earlier, is an important part of Pashtun culture. If ISAF forces do not have a basic understanding of the importance of the customs, both specific and

¹⁴⁰ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 5-6, *Freedom Watch* Vol. 8, No. 4 2012: p. 11

¹⁴¹ United States, United States Army *The U.S Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*: p. 1.11-1.12

¹⁴² David Kilcullen *The Accidental Guerilla* 2010: p. 84-85

¹⁴³ United States, White House, *Remarks Made by the President at ISAF Meeting on Afghanistan* May 21 2012

important to the culture in which they are operating, they could end up being counterproductive. An example may be that the fighters have lost family members as civilian casualties. This, as discussed earlier, is one of the most detrimental aspects of combat operations within a COIN campaign. In this case, the fighter has to get “badal” so that his honor is not impacted because he was not able to avenge their death.

The pamphlet *COIN: Common Sense*, written by ISAF for forces conducting COIN, describes a good example of another aspect of dealing with reintegration, which is linked to Afghan perception of the reintegration effort.

*“A mid-level Taliban commander who commands 40 insurgents was thinking about reintegrating. He approached a trusted community elder for advice. This community elder had a good relationship with ISAF, so he suggested that together they go see the nearby ISAF FOB (Forward Operating Base) to get more information on how to enroll in the program. When they got to the FOB, ISAF forces identified the Taliban commander as someone on the targeting list, and immediately detained the commander, and later transferred him to a detention center”.*¹⁴⁴

This illustrates the importance for troops on the ground to be a conscious part of the effort. The focus on sustainable solutions is the article’s focus and it emphasizes an important aspect of the ongoing COIN effort. Though the Taliban commander was on the target list, the troops might have proceeded differently due to the village leaders’ standing. This can be a particularly important issue in the provinces that share a border with Pakistan. Because they are more sparsely populated than other provinces, the importance of well-thought-out conducted operations cannot be underestimated. Destroying the relationship, as in the example above, with both the fighters under the commander and with the local village elder would seem counterproductive and could possibly create more insurgents. Understanding culture is the heart of this issue, because the tribal system is at the core of the communities in the area of operations; therefore, having troops adhere to a slightly more flexible doctrine with utilitarian undercurrents, is important to the effort of reducing fighters’ willingness to reintegrate and continue to create sustainable solutions. It should not, however, be used as a “get out-of-jail -free card,” but discretion for the greater good would appear to be the appropriate approach.

Honor is another important aspect of the culture of the Pashtuns and Nuristanis in Afghanistan. It is important to ensure that fighters who wish to reintegrate into their communities have their honor intact when they do reintegrate. Yet, ISAF forces using words like “surrender” make negotiations difficult. Also, if the fighters are perceived to have lost

¹⁴⁴ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011: p. 8

face when contacting ISAF forces about reintegration, it could be difficult for the soldiers to receive them without difficulty. This difficulty lies with the inherent fact that combat and seeking out “irreconcilable” insurgents cause losses for the ISAF forces. This is not to say that soldiers lack professionalism in their work, but rather arguing that anger towards fighters who have lost a comrade or fellow soldier is no less painful for ISAF personnel than it is for Afghans. Therefore, one could argue that the idea of retribution on the part of ISAF forces may be a contributing factor when it comes to reintegrating willing insurgents. The need to assert certain dominance over a “vanquished” foe may be present and could possibly be an overwhelming feeling when ISAF personnel are faced with a former enemy. That would also explain the unyielding emphasis that newsletters put on this difficult issue.¹⁴⁵ In several of the *COIN: Common Sense* magazines, the need for respect towards both reintegrated fighters and unfriendly villagers is an aspect that is important for changing attitudes.

The main goal of the COIN campaign in Afghanistan is to quell the insurgency that threatens the sitting government. To be able to leave the country responsibly, the ISAF forces have to be able to hand over responsibility for a significant part of their mission to the Afghan government, the Afghan people, and the Afghan security forces. Understanding the culture and having sufficient knowledge of the people living in a region, province, or village is important when it comes to decisions on a tactical level. Successfully working together across very different cultural lines is a difficult aspect of partnering in COIN. What may have worked in one region may fail in another, not necessarily because needs are that different but because the partnering between ISAF and Afghan forces is not progressing the way it should. Misunderstanding aspects of culture in Afghanistan can lead to mistakes that may be difficult to recover from. Banking, for example, is virtually non-existent outside of major urban hubs. There is a heavy dependence on cash and paying cash for services or goods.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, if Afghan security forces leave without permission, it may be likely that they are returning to their village to give money to their families. For a Western soldier, this cannot only be seen as very backwards, but it also breaks with the discipline that soldiers are supposed to have. One does not leave without the correct permissions from the officer in charge. This, however, seems to be more acceptable in Afghanistan because of the lack of banking systems and the vast distances that may have to be travelled to reach villages.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* January 2011

¹⁴⁶ Samuel Chan, *Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army in Military Review* January February 2009: p. 33

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 33 (*Sentinels of Afghan Democracy: The Afghan National Army*)

These are problems that face the members of the Afghan security forces and are hard to comprehend, and possibly deal with, on the ground level for ISAF forces. Because levels of desertion, or leave without permission, make it difficult to maintain unit cohesion for mentoring forces that are ultimately in charge of the process of creating a new Afghan army, frustration could be an issue for ISAF.¹⁴⁸

The ability to conduct operations with partnering units, regardless of desertion rates and administrative difficulties, lies with the individual soldier that is part of the COIN campaign. The argument can be made that because cultural understanding on the most basic tactical level is important in COIN, it makes the individual soldier or operator much more “important” than in conventional warfare. Dominique Savel, a French alpine trooper, wrote in an issue of *COIN: Common Sense*: “Everyone in partnered units must personally invest in the effort to ensure success...Technology eases communication connectivity, but it cannot replace the basic necessity of communication: human interaction...Afghans are accustomed to face-to-face communication.”¹⁴⁹ Those three aspects, addressed by Savel, indicate that the campaign in areas like Kunar and Nuristan is more dependent on this interaction than one might expect in Nangarhar. In Kunar and Nuristan there is little in the way of communication except for word of mouth, and with this comes the emphasis on efficient ways of communicating, and possibly more importantly, what message is communicated throughout the province or village. Having an open dialogue, as the article describes, is key, not only when operations are going fairly smooth, but also when something has gone wrong.¹⁵⁰ The U.S. forces’ ability to deal with a situation in a manner that constructively restores confidence among the community, while not stepping on any “cultural” toes, is crucial to the strategy of partnering with the Afghan security forces in a way to establish their presence in a region as a viable alternative to ISAF forces. The care to not step on “cultural” toes has to be taken in a way not to disregard advice from the security forces regarding a problem. A combination of allowing village elders and the Afghan security forces to take the lead while being mentored will allow for less dependence on the international forces.¹⁵¹

The assessment that can be made from this analysis on aspects of culture and reintegration is that some projects are useful within the country where the effort is being conducted. In this case the reintegration program. It should efficiently deal with, and be aware

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 31-32

¹⁴⁹ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* September 2011: p. 7-8

¹⁵⁰ International Security and Assistance Force *COIN: Common Sense* April 2010: p. 1-2

¹⁵¹ Ibid. p. 11

of, the aspects that are important to the people the counterinsurgents are trying reintegrate. At all levels, it is important that soldiers show the ability to make decisions based on a limited degree on their discretion, which was evident with the Taliban commander. It is of significant importance to understand that the culture the counterinsurgent comes from may differ in many ways to that of the population that the insurgent hides within. Though this may seem obvious, it has been shown to be a difficult aspect that needs consideration, both on the tactical and strategic level. That is, considerations have to be taken with the audience that the effort is aimed at. Expecting that a project will work the same way in two different regions, or even villages, may cause problems because it is not adapted to local circumstances.

3.2 Western Forms of Democracy and Afghan Culture

The country of Afghanistan has been at a state of war for more than three decades. When the Obama administration reviewed the U.S. policy towards the mission in Afghanistan, the administration decided that in order to have a successful withdrawal of troops and make sure that the country would not again become a safe haven for terrorists, stability had to be ensured.¹⁵² Nevertheless, that is far easier said than implemented. It seems that the idea of a centralized government in Afghanistan is not as bad an idea as it could first appear, based as it is on the regional structures and lack of infrastructure. Instead of accepting the current common perception that the country is more or less ungovernable because of regional autonomy and lack of a credible government for thirty years, one should, according to Thomas Barfield, examine the country's history more thoroughly.¹⁵³ Barfield argues against the perception that presupposes an inherent opposition towards centralized government in Afghan culture. The historical reality is that Afghanistan has more facets than many decision-makers in Europe and in the United States recognize.¹⁵⁴ He argues that many decision-makers in coalition countries have been colored by the idea that Afghans will oppose any foreign involvement in their national affairs: "The most basic reason was that Afghanistan had always been more complex than the simple picture painted by the press. Nor was Afghanistan in 2001 the same place with the same attitudes that it had been two hundred, one hundred, or even

¹⁵² White House, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* 01-12-2009; White House, *Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan* 06-22-2011

¹⁵³ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* 2012: p. 272-273

¹⁵⁴

twenty-five years ago.”¹⁵⁵ This could arguably be at the core of the problem with creating a new centralized government in Afghanistan. How the foreign forces follow and adhere to this perception of Afghanistan’s history appears to differ from what the situation is today as compared to when the mission started. This is not to say that all aspects of the cultural understanding of how the Afghan political culture has evolved, and been affected, by events over the last decades are wrong. However, the situation in Afghanistan is now different from what it was in early 2006 when the insurgency started to gain new momentum. With regard to Nuristan, Kunar, and Nangarhar, Barfield’s book makes it clear that there is a definite gap between the ISAF perception on democracy and how Afghans perceive democratic governance.

Afghanistan has not always been the place it is today, where the standard of living is one of the lowest in the world. It has had periods of peace and prosperity. Barfield argues that the issue with enabling a viable government and sustainable security situation has become particularly difficult because the ISAF forces are applying a style of democracy that is not necessarily in tune with the traditions and culture of the country itself. The difficulties that are experienced with reintegrating insurgents and partnering issues at the local level appear slightly different on the national level. Persuading people to trust that Karzai’s government actually will work once most of the foreign forces leave is, to some extent, a question of trust in democratic forms of government. However, creating a democracy in a country that has two generations who know little else than conflict needs to be handled in a different manner than creating a centralized government in Kabul that disperses the State’s resources based on a medieval structure of personal favors to remain in power.¹⁵⁶ In provinces like Kunar and Nuristan that have historically been more isolated than Nangarhar, which contains the key urban hub in the east, the understanding of a functioning government is less. In the isolated provinces, there has been little contact with the government in Kabul. The branches of the government do not stretch far enough for the provinces like Kunar and Nuristan to see stable and continuous positive progress. This is compounded with the population’s poverty, where most of Afghanistan’s people exist as subsistence farmers and have resolved local disputes in a traditional way for centuries. It would seem, that for many villagers there is little need for a centralized government that in their eyes, exists only on paper. However, if politics would materialize in practical improvements, their view on politics might change.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 274-275 (Barfield)

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 303 (Barfield)

One can argue that the people in these regions, regardless of how poorly developed the regions may be, do not simply want to live at an existential minimum. If asked, it is likely that they would want to see improvements in their living conditions. More importantly, it is likely that, regardless of political regimes, they want to see a more peaceful situation, which has been observed through successful projects like road construction and building of wells.¹⁵⁷ Most people in Afghanistan want to see their country become a better place. This may sound very obvious but a quote from Barfield's book sheds light on the ambiguity of this argument: "Regions [in Afghanistan, TKP] wanted a direct choice in how they were to be governed at a local level. The international community saw assertions of such regional autonomy as signs of disorder that needed to be curbed."¹⁵⁸ In counterinsurgency, when it comes to partnering, the emphasis has to be on learning how the other party conducts themselves, and then apply how one conducts oneself into the equation and acting, so to speak, on the result of the merger of these two aspects. Therefore, understanding the local culture is more than simply knowing how to behave in "social" settings on the battlefield. Integrating the understanding into actual policy and achieving results on strategic goals seems harder on the strategic/national level than achieving it in tactical situations at the local level.

The divide between urban and rural areas in Afghanistan, especially when it comes to cultural understanding in COIN operations, could arguably be considered two worlds. As a thought experiment, one can imagine a person who has been living in a remote location with little formal education, compared to a person in Kabul who may have had twelve years education, possibly even in universities outside of the country. The values that these people adhere to are probably vastly different from each other. What a person in Kabul sees as a political necessity based on his/her understanding of international relations today is most likely completely different from what the farmer in a remote village sees as important. The farmer's immediate concerns are likely not to be connected to international relations, but rather relations within the areas that surround the village. For the farmer his main interest may be his immediate security. For the person in Kabul or Jalalabad, his/her interests may go further and contain more facets than that of the farmer, who lives more isolated. The problem with conducting COIN operations in areas of eastern Afghanistan is that both these kinds of problems have to be addressed simultaneously and with more or less the same approach. To add to the complexity, the counterinsurgents must take into account their own culture and

¹⁵⁷ David Kilcullen *The Accidental Guerilla* 2010: p. 108-109

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 303

their values that come into play when dealing with Afghans and COIN operations.

The problem with using the urban/rural divide is that it can tend to be an oversimplification, used to explain a complex situation in a complex country. This is not to say that it has no bearing at all. Rather, the divide is an issue that needs to be taken into account, but it should be used as a guide instead of an idea that reigns true in all parts of Afghanistan.¹⁵⁹ In Kunar and Nuristan, which are less developed than Nangarhar, it is likely to find a more conservative approach to community politics. Nangarhar may also be more “modern” in terms of policies and the implementation of aid programs than what one would expect in mountain villages in Kunar and Nuristan. This would not be an oversimplification. Though one can argue that the urban/rural divide is an oversimplification of the situation in Afghanistan, it still is an issue that needs consideration when conducting COIN operations. The three provinces discussed in this chapter showcase that the argument for the rural/urban divide holds some validity because the differences between the provinces are more pronounced. This is especially true because both Kunar and Nuristan are remote and poorly developed compared to Nangarhar. The two remote locations are also a factor as Nangarhar is closer to Kabul and the central government.

3.3 The Importance of Religion and Tribal Dynamics in Afghanistan

The concept, “center of gravity,” is described in the Army/Marine Counterinsurgency field manual as: “The source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, center of gravity is meant to designate what gives the insurgency its driving forces. It could also mean what the civilian population’s main driving force may be, i.e. what the most important aspect of their daily lives are. Even though Obama did not use the specific words “center of gravity” in his speeches, it is nonetheless a fact that the American COIN effort is focused on the establishment of a functioning government as the main priority, in addition to providing security for the population. In the *Commander’s Initial Assessment* (2009) and in several of President Obama’s speeches regarding the Afghan civilian populations, the “center of gravity,” though not specifically spelled out, appears as a

¹⁵⁹ Thomas Ruttig *Afghanistan’s Not-so-Hermetic Urban-Rural Divide* 26 May 2011 Afghanistan Analyst Network

¹⁶⁰ United States, United States Army *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*: p. 249

combination of a functioning government and security.¹⁶¹

Eva Shinagel has asked whether the American COIN effort may have missed the mark with regard to the population's center of gravity.¹⁶² Shinagel presents the idea that though the issues that the COIN efforts have focused on are important, the religious aspect of the "human terrain" in Afghanistan has been bypassed because of lack of understanding.¹⁶³ She holds that the counterinsurgents do not adequately understand the importance that religion plays in Afghanistan. The reason, as she describes it, is the fact that the Afghans, particularly the rural populations, are skeptical because they interpret the American effort as having religious undertones.¹⁶⁴ When this statement is seen in conjunction with the numbers on literacy and education, particularly in eastern Afghanistan, the possibility for the emergence of problems is understandable. The Jihadist websites have a tendency to focus on the belief that the fight in Afghanistan is not only a fight for the people of Afghanistan, but it is a fight for Islam itself. It is described as a "Jihad" against the "heathen occupiers" in Afghanistan. This calls for fighters to stand and fight for Islam in an effort to oust the Americans from Afghanistan, not because they are seen as foreign invaders, but because they are "enemies" of Islam.¹⁶⁵ If this is indeed the case it creates a significantly more difficult "terrain" for the counterinsurgents, especially because the effort in eastern Afghanistan has predominantly been used to reinforce the central Government.

This effort has been used to convince the civilian population of the government's legitimacy, rather than being focused on removing misconceptions about the "actual" intentions of the United States and its army. This creates an environment where the fundamental understanding of the "human terrain" is in question because the effort is, to a degree, based on the notion that there is a basic understanding of why the foreign forces are in Afghanistan. However, this appears to differ because a great number of Afghans see the intervention as a fight for moral values, rather than for material benefit.¹⁶⁶

Aspects of the Pashtun culture have been examined above, but it is important to analyze an aspect of this culture that seems to become more important in the context of religion. As seen earlier, tribal ties span the Afghan and Pakistani border. There are strong

¹⁶¹ United States, United States Army *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*: p. 2.1; White House, *Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan* 06-22-2011

¹⁶² Eva Shinagel *Hearts and Minds: Islam and Afghanistan's Moral Center of Gravity* 2012

¹⁶³ Eva Shinagel *Hearts and Minds: Islam and Afghanistan's Moral Center of Gravity* 2012: p. 1-2

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 4-5

¹⁶⁵ Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, Voice of Jihad, *Nangarhar University, Invincible Fortress for Revolutionary Muslim Youth* April 15 2012

¹⁶⁶ Eva Shinagel *Hearts and Minds: Islam and Afghanistan's Moral Center of Gravity* 2012: p. 4

community ties across the border, and it would seem likely that these connections also come into the domain of religion.¹⁶⁷ If that is the case, then the COIN efforts in Afghanistan would also face with safe havens in Pakistan, a multifaceted environment where tribal ties, whether ad-hoc or enduring, come into play with religious ideas that the insurgents use to their benefit for propaganda purposes. Based on what Eva Shinagel writes on the “moral center of gravity,” it is likely that the COIN effort faces obstacles of a complex and intertwined nature: In Afghanistan the counterinsurgent has to convince the population that the government they are supporting is strong and most likely will continue to exist after a drawdown. On the other hand, they have to show the people who live outside of the area of operations, that the U.S. is not waging war on Islam. That is far harder to do, for example, with Pashtuns living across the border in Pakistan because what they perceive is likely to be the negative effects of the COIN operations. They do not benefit from rebuilding projects in the same way as people inside the area of operations, but they are exposed to insurgent propaganda nonetheless, specifically because the safe havens insurgent “flying columns” use, are the border areas. Finally, an especially important aspect of the culture environment in the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan, is this: What the counterinsurgents perceived to be the reason for the insurgency may turn out to be a completely different issue than what was expected at the start of the COIN campaign. “Coalition Force efforts to shore up legitimacy of the government, through supply of essential services and local security, have neglected to fully understand the basis of the critical public perceptions that remain.”¹⁶⁸ This illustrates that, though a campaign may be going well and one sees measurable progress, other core issues such as religious belief across borders may be affecting the situation in a way that is far less easy to detect.

To sum up, the most important “local” aspect of COIN, both for the insurgents and the counterinsurgents, is the population of the area that is contested. For the insurgents it represents a population that they need to be able to hide among and subvert government and security force’s activities. The counterinsurgents need the population to be cooperative because of the insurgents’ dependence on the population base as its hiding place and base of support. Kilcullen in *Counterinsurgency* (2010) describes the networks that support the insurgents as the ones that the counterinsurgents needs to “persuade” to follow the

¹⁶⁷ Tribal Analysis Center *Pashtun Tribal Dynamics* October 2009: p. 14

¹⁶⁸ Eva Shinagel *Hearts and Minds: Islam and Afghanistan’s Moral Center of Gravity* 2012: p. 1

government. This means making the civilian population that supports the insurgents “see” that the government is a better alternative than the insurgents.¹⁶⁹ In Afghanistan, the counterinsurgents’ ability to produce visible and viable results, whether those are well-building programs or large governmental programs, is at the core of making the population that supports the insurgents “see” why the government should be supported. To be able to achieve this mission the counterinsurgents, which in the case of Afghanistan is an outsider, must be aware of the “human terrain” that they are working within. This means that a significant pressure is put not only on high command to understand the cultural workings of the country they are operating in. It also requires platoon leaders and individual soldiers to be significantly more aware of the culture of people they are trying to protect, including the basic cultural aspects of politics and religion.¹⁷⁰ Being able to do this will, in a best-case scenario, enable the counterinsurgents to have reasonable dialogue with the power brokers of the area, as well as gain local support on their side who that have the most intimate knowledge of the area because they are locals and can navigate with more ease the difficult cultural environment. The need for local support, not only for the “cause” in general, but for individual areas, is necessary because one solution that works in one village may not work in another village the same way. Therefore, being able to apply local solutions to villages and areas based on an understanding of that particular province or region is one of the keys to success.

¹⁶⁹ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* 2010: p. 7-8

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid* p. 224

Chapter 4

4 U.S.-Pakistani Relations and the Effect on Operations in Afghanistan

Pakistan and the United States have had what could only be described as a rocky relationship. It has gone from mutual support and working together during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to the brinkmanship that now seems prevalent in their relationship. This chapter seeks to explore how this relationship affects the COIN operations and efforts of obtaining stability in Afghanistan. The Obama administration addressed this issue early, stating that there was no possible way to deal with Afghanistan without dealing “responsibly” with Pakistan.¹⁷¹ The facets of this relationship, which are of particular importance regarding its effect on the operations in Afghanistan, specifically in the three provinces discussed earlier, could arguably be boiled down to three main issues which are elaborated in this chapter.

First, according to scholars, American foreign policy has always been concerned about Pakistan, but never actually implemented a defined strategy for dealing with Pakistan responsibly like President Obama set out to do at the start of his presidency.¹⁷² The elaboration of this issue covers how the strategy, or lack thereof, affects Pakistan today, specifically focusing on how the country’s lack of ability to master its own domestic issues flows over into its foreign policy in a way that has continually caused trouble for the U.S.-Pakistani relationship.

Second, Pakistan has played host to a significant number of militant networks and extremist movements. The tribal agencies that border Afghanistan now serve as sanctuaries for the Afghan Taliban, Pakistani Taliban, Haqqani Network (HQN), Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) and factions or chapters of Al-Qaeda.¹⁷³ This does not include the myriad of militant tribal factions that also inhabit these areas. The issue with this is Pakistan’s use of proxy forces for its foreign policy strategies not only against the government in Afghanistan and the American troops in the country but in general with special regard to its strategy towards India.¹⁷⁴ Pakistan’s foreign policy has always been connected to the use of proxy forces and that is one of the key aspects of how the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is affecting the operations in Afghanistan.

¹⁷¹ White House, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* 01-12-2009

¹⁷² Noor Ul-Haq *Contours of U.S. 'AfPak' Strategy* December 6 2009: p. 94

¹⁷³ Brian Fishman *Battle For Pakistan: Militancy and Conflict Across the FATA and NWFP* April 2010: p. 2-4, 11-12

¹⁷⁴ Ahmed Rashid *Pakistan on the Brink* 2012: p. 46-49

Third, are the U.S. drone strikes in the tribal agencies of Pakistan and their profound effect on U.S.-Pakistani relations. As will be shown, the effect has been for the most part negative for Pakistan. The word “negative” refers both to the Pakistani army’s way of communicating with the Pakistani public, stirring anti-American feelings in many cases, and to the U.S. secrecy around the operations, which has been received badly by most of Pakistan’s governing elite and the general population.

4.1 Pakistan’s Domestic and Foreign Policy

President Obama set out early in his presidency to handle relations with Pakistan better than the previous administration had done.¹⁷⁵ He promised a more comprehensive and complete strategy, which would include Pakistan as an important ally in the region and for the coming transition of responsibility in Afghanistan to Afghani forces.¹⁷⁶ Part of this approach was a three billion dollar support package given to Pakistan to help build infrastructure and military capacity.¹⁷⁷ The agreement on a substantial aid package from 2009 and onwards seems to have helped very little. The problem with American foreign policy in this regard is that the stated objective is to eliminate Al-Qaeda’s safe havens and terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan’s tribal areas. This objective has been driven home in most speeches Obama has held, when discussing progress in Afghanistan. To reach this objective would require involvement to a significant degree with Pakistan rather than Afghanistan. A large number of highly trained fighters and insurgents are using the tribal areas as a staging ground, and their numbers do not seem to be diminishing. The likely low level of Al-Qaeda operatives compared to the significant amount of insurgents who are connected with other militant groups like the HQN, Afghan Taliban, and HiG indicates that these groups present a bigger threat to stability than Al-Qaeda. This is not to say that there are not Al-Qaeda affiliates in Afghanistan, but rather they have moved into the tribal agencies of Pakistan from where they launch and plan attacks. This is the background for the increasing number of drone strikes the U.S. has initiated and is part of the somewhat troublesome relationship with U.S. policy on the matter of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Al-Qaeda.

¹⁷⁵ Noor Ul-Haq *Contours of U.S ‘AfPak’ Strategy* December 6 2009: p. 14

¹⁷⁶ White House, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* 01-12-2009, White House, *Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan* 06-22-2011

¹⁷⁷ White House, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan* 01-12-2009

These matters are presented in speeches and in the media as much the same; however, policy reviews and official papers show the differentiations more clearly, and as the March review on progress for both countries from 2011 showed, there is still a long way to go.¹⁷⁸ The objective and the strategy seem to be based on two seemingly different ideas. The stated objective is to eliminate the terrorist threat that Al-Qaeda poses to U.S. interests and security. The problem with the objective is that there are large and difficult sub-objectives that make up the one primary objective. These sub-objectives are tantamount to nation building, not only in Afghanistan but also to a certain degree in Pakistan, which means juggling two sets of very difficult domestic issues that intertwine with Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan. The effect that this has on regional power structures is important, especially considering Pakistan's focus on India as the biggest threat to its security.

Afghanistan wants to maintain its own sovereignty and independence, as much as possible and not become a puppet state for any of the regional powers that surround it, or too much Western influence. This is an issue that is difficult for the Afghan government to resolve, as it is completely dependent on support for its growing security forces, as well as aid needed to build infrastructure and create a viable economy. Karzai's government wants Afghanistan to become a kind of nation it does not appear at all ready to become. Elections accused of being flawed by fraud and widespread corruption have, as we have seen, created serious mistrust in much of the population's perception of this government.¹⁷⁹ An added difficulty is the large sums of money that is sent to both of these countries in aid, much of which seems to disappear in Pakistan and Afghanistan's institutionalized corruption. Corruption combined with violence, especially in rural areas but also significantly in cities in Pakistan such as Karachi, a major trading port, hampers the chance of seeing progress "quickly."¹⁸⁰ The triangle that is created by the division regarding policy, political and security related issues that the U.S., Pakistan and Afghanistan relationships create are affecting operations in Afghanistan because the ideal objective seems far from the actual realities.

The Pakistani government has, since its inception in 1947, been wrought and strained between its military and the civil government. It has shown little progress towards becoming more stable, and US' political will to support is lessening after each engagement that fails.

¹⁷⁸ United States, White House, *Report on Afghanistan and Pakistan* March 2011: p. 3, 6

¹⁷⁹ United States, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to United States Congress* April 30 2012: p. 9-10

¹⁸⁰ Ahmed Rashid *Pakistan on the Brink* 2012: p. 168-169

The operation that killed Osama Bin Laden is possibly the most compelling evidence of the dwindling political confidence to support Pakistan. Any further aid the U.S. sends appears only possible by setting severe restrictions on how the aid is spent and possibly more importantly the “end user” of this aid.¹⁸¹ This is a key part of the problem that faces Pakistan in its dealings with the U.S. as it has little to show for the money that has been spent, be it military operations that hamper militancy in areas where the Pakistani government has little control or the country’s inability to institute reform to prevent the country from destabilizing.

Pakistan has for a long time had a struggling economy and these financial problems are not likely to be resolved within a short time. There is a high percentage of unemployment, especially among youths, which is a serious problem. One of the biggest issues related to poverty and unemployment is the resulting susceptibility towards extremism. A large number of disgruntled youths could possibly be one of Pakistan’s more pressing domestic problems. Youths in Pakistan face a less than smooth transfer from schooling to employment, which impacts the amount of time they spend unemployed. Many end up doing low paying jobs like unpaid work in family businesses and “casual wage” labor.¹⁸² This type of work does not offer much in terms of social advancement, though in many rural parts in Pakistan, that may be the accepted norm. Youths could be at risk if the society does not provide a counterweight to the Taliban’s and other groups “mercenary” money. This type of job may just consist of firing a rocket at a convoy to harass either coalition forces or Pakistani security personnel and has the appearance of being quick cash. Villagers in Afghanistan have been paid \$15-55 for these types of operations.¹⁸³

When faith in a type of stable government disappears, there are several avenues that could end in extremism. One aspect could simply be the drive to earn money, as stated above, even if that means becoming a fighter for a cause that they themselves may not believe in fully. Reintegration efforts in Afghanistan have shown that there are a significant number of fighters who simply fight because there are few other options – to either coercion by insurgents forcing them to fight or choosing to fight because the money earned by fighting is much higher than if they earned a living in subsistence agriculture. Agriculture is the main income for many both in Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹⁸⁴ David Kilcullen demonstrated this with his case study of Kunar province, which showed that there are few hardcore extremist

¹⁸¹ Bill Trott *US to hold back \$800 million in aid to Pakistan* July 9 2011, Reuters

¹⁸² Xiaohui Hue *Challenges for Youth Employment in Pakistan: Are They Youth Specific?* January 2011: p. 2

¹⁸³ Antonio Giustozzi *Koran Kalashnikov and Laptop* 2007: p. 41-42

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p. 22 (Xiaohui Hue, World Bank Report)

full-time fighters compared to those whom he describes as “accidental guerillas.”¹⁸⁵ That is, people who are called upon when needed, and who do not make up a consistent threat of a large singular force like the more experienced fulltime fighters. The worse the economy and level of control Pakistan can assert in fragile areas, the more people seem to follow ideas of radical Islamic beliefs. It is likely that their ability to counter radicalization and insurgency becomes worse in combination with lessening support from the U.S.

Extremist ideologies within military and civil government in Pakistan along with religious leaders that focus on jihad could be a very dangerous cocktail for both domestic security and foreign security in Pakistan. Anti-American sentiment coupled with poor and uneducated youth that are lead by religious extremists’ thinking poses a significant threat to operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s place as a veritable market for insurgent fighters has made the country a supplier of suicide bombers and bomb-makers that are employed in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁶ Pakistan’s leadership, whether it is military or civilian faces severe domestic threats such as the Pakistani Taliban, which is set on overthrowing the state and creating a country that strictly adheres to medieval conceptions of Islam, is becoming more brash in its attacks in Pakistan.¹⁸⁷ This gives Pakistan three main domestic insurgency issues which all require an approach that the government is not able or willing to conduct: One, the insurgency in Baluchistan is becoming more and more violent and shows no signs of being reduced regardless of efforts by the Pakistani Army and the intelligence services to quell it.¹⁸⁸ Human rights abuse has been widely reported and, which in terms of COIN from a Pakistani perspective is making the situation worse. Two, the Pakistani Taliban conducts terrorist actions against Pakistani targets with increased intensity and makes it difficult for the Pakistani government to deal with them with the urgency that it seems this issue needs. The last thing the government needs is to lose key trading cities like Karachi to the group.¹⁸⁹

Third, the sanctuaries that the tribal areas provide the insurgents are valuable as safe havens and training grounds for a wide range of extremist groups. These groups seem to use the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan as veritable proving grounds for their people and for preparations of other coming operations. There seems to be a dangerous mix of young new militant fighters and older experienced fighters who may even have fought against the

¹⁸⁵ David Kilcullen *The Accidental Guerilla* 2009: p. 48-49, 82

¹⁸⁶ Ahmed Rashid *Pakistan on the Brink* 2012: 150-151, 156

¹⁸⁷ Ahmed Rashid The U.S. Pakistan Relationship in the Year Ahead January 18 2012 in *CTC Sentinel*

¹⁸⁸ International Institute for Strategic Studies Bad Times in Baluchistan in *Strategic Comments* Volume 17 2011: p. 2-3

¹⁸⁹ Ahmed Rashid *Pakistan on the Brink* 2012: p. 168-170

Soviets. This hypothesis is presented by Rohan Gunaratna and Kuram Iqbal in *Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero* (2012). Fighters from the Soviet era come in contact with new recruits and the insurgents are increasingly being able to learn from older fighters' experience. These fighters do not necessarily see any difference between the Soviet invasion and U.S. involvement after 9/11. These teachings are imprinted on the new cadre of fighters, which are likely the new fighters with the idea that the "new" Jihad is against the American aggressors in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁰ If this is more prevalent than expected, especially in the tribal agencies and across the border into Afghanistan then the U.S. forces there may be facing a problem that is not so easy to fix. If fighters traveling across the border believe that they are fighting a Jihad, this time against Americans, it may have an effect on the younger elements. This means that for children and youths who grow up in these regions where there is little except subsistence agriculture, the offer to go to Jihad against Americans in Afghanistan could prove to be an enticing prospect. It could be both because of training in radical madrassas and a need for something other than farming with the family that attracts younger fighters. Also their parents or other family members may have fought before them and there could be an expectation of going to fight the heathens in Afghanistan like their elders did.

Pakistan's lack of ability to deal with these domestic problems comes to light also in its foreign policy, specifically when it comes to dealing with the U.S. and India. Both these countries are tied to what the military establishment wants to portray as their main "enemies." A significant number of scholars argue that the Pakistani government is far too concerned with external enemies than its own domestic ones. Whether or not this is completely accurate, Pakistan has experienced some incidents that have made the current regime seem a great deal less trustworthy in the eyes of the U.S. and other international actors. The operation to capture Bin Laden may have been the most significant of these incidents, at least for the U.S. For Pakistani military officials, it was not important outwardly that the most wanted terrorist in the world had been living almost next to their prestigious military academy. The main reason for uproar was U.S. infringement of Pakistani sovereignty.¹⁹¹ For Pakistan domestically, the attack on the Mehran Naval Station made its military seem more incompetent as a small number of suicide fighters caused massive amounts of collateral damage.¹⁹² The most significant fallout from the Naval Station was the suspicion that a service member had aided the suicide attackers, damaging the military's standing with the public because of its inability

¹⁹⁰ Rohan Gunaratna and Kuram Iqbal in *Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero* 2012: p. 11-16

¹⁹¹ Alan K. Kronstadt *Pakistan - U.S. Relations* May 24 2012: 8-10

¹⁹² Alan K. Kronstadt *Pakistan - U.S. Relations* May 24 2012: p. 7, 10

to root out “bad seeds” effectively.¹⁹³ The lack of control and apparent incompetence impacts Pakistan’s standing in the international community. Pakistan is being watched meticulously because of the country’s long-standing use of terrorism and proxy forces like the Haqqani network and certain cadres of the Afghan Taliban to influence its standing in Afghanistan and use them as instruments to further their own foreign policy.

Stephen D. Krasner argues that U.S. patience with Pakistan should have ended a long time ago. He refers to Admiral Mullen’s testimony where the admiral said that the Pakistani state and its government, specifically the Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), “use proxy forces as their strategic arm.”¹⁹⁴ Mullen further said that the Haqqani network had been responsible for many of the major engagements of 2011, including the hotel attack in Kabul and a truck bomb that killed 77 soldiers.¹⁹⁵ Because of these attacks, the Pakistani government’s problems and disregard for U.S. requests to firmly deal with the militant threat, as well as reducing their contact with proxy forces, Krasner argues that the U.S. government should now treat the country as a hostile country, much the same as Iran or North Korea. The Pakistani nuclear program and its proliferation of nuclear weapons to countries that the U.S. sees as hostile underlines the need for stopping the aid that has been given to support the military and civilian projects.¹⁹⁶ Krasner recommends this because as he sees it, the lack of cooperation from the other party shows that the U.S. has no “stick” left to use against Pakistan other than a drastic one. If anything, to completely neglect the relationship with the intent to spur the country into action.¹⁹⁷ While conducting this neglect, emphasis is also put on a far more unilateral response to militancy in the tribal agencies. He therefore advocates increased use of drone attacks and incursions by Special Forces units to neutralize targets within Pakistan. His reference to Admiral Mullen indicates that he is not alone in his recommendation to completely ignore the Pakistanis, and there are likely more people in the current administration that sees the issue with Pakistan as something that should be addressed more harshly. Even Obama said that the “days of a blank check” are over.¹⁹⁸

The problem with expressing these types of sentiments is that it feeds into the “fear-machine” that the military establishment wishes the Pakistani public to listen to. Again, the handling of the Bin Laden operations and drone strikes attests to this. Krasner also sees it as

¹⁹³ Stephen D. Krasner Talking Tough With Pakistan in *Foreign Affairs* Volume 91 No. 1: p. 89-91

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 87 (Talking Tough to Pakistan)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 87 (Talking Tough to Pakistan)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 91 (Talking Tough to Pakistan)

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 93 (Talking Though to Pakistan)

¹⁹⁸ White House, *Remarks by the President on the Way Forward in Afghanistan* 06-22-2011

imperative for the U.S. to have a better working relationship with India.¹⁹⁹ This would most likely feed into Pakistani fears of a strong India in Afghanistan with the blessing of the U.S. It would appear the current situation is that the Pakistani government has failed to uphold its promises and live up to its part of the deal with U.S. If the U.S. begins to neglect the relationship with Pakistan, it would likely be detrimental to the effort in Afghanistan. Pakistan's proxy forces would be given the green light to increase operations in Afghanistan because strategically it would make sense for Pakistan to undermine U.S. progress. This may make sense to the military and ISI, but with the political and civil unrest in the country, it would seem that Pakistan might not be able to carry through a unilateral approach if a shift in U.S. policy were to come. What does appear to be a more likely result is a further worsening of security for operations within Afghanistan, especially in the eastern border areas. As we have seen with COIN operations in Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan, heightened activity leads to a worsening of the security environment that again leads to a more unstable Afghanistan and in turn more violence in the tribal agencies as well.

4.2 Proxy Forces and Militancy in the Tribal Agencies

Pakistan has been a frequent user of proxy forces as a "strategic" part of its foreign policy, especially in relation to India. These forces are used both against India in the conflict in Kashmir and to exert influence on politics in Afghanistan in order to gain strategic depth in the region to further put pressure on India. Pakistan has a long-standing history of using these forces as a covert arm of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and its military establishment.²⁰⁰ The attacks on the parliament in Mumbai in 2008 were an example where the Pakistani intelligence services were implicated.²⁰¹ There have been a long series of near clashes, both with India and the U.S. because of the long-standing ties between the military and militants who have sought refuge in the FATA areas. These areas, from the Russian invasion and until present day, have become refuges because of the support that the Pakistani intelligence services sent through these areas.²⁰² The history of this area and the use of the Mujahedin in the 1980's against the Soviet invasion created the base for the current security issues that

¹⁹⁹ Stephen D. Krasner Talking Tough With Pakistan in *Foreign Affairs* Volume 91 No. 1: p. 93

²⁰⁰ Matt Waldman *The Sun in the Sky: The Relationship Between Pakistan's ISI and Afghan Insurgents* June 2010: p. 4-5

²⁰¹ Somini Sengupta *At Least 100 Dead in India Terror Attacks* November 26 2008

²⁰² Ahmed Rashid *Decent Into Chaos* 2009: p. 266-267

threaten COIN operations in Afghanistan today. Both the Haqqani Network (HQN) and HiG were spawned out of the “first” Jihad against foreign invaders in Afghanistan. The sons of those fighters are now part of the insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁰³

The use of proxy forces, which now has become a significant security issue for Pakistan and the United States in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, stems from the handling of these fighters from the time that they fought against the Russians. After the war, Pakistan was not able to reintegrate the fighters coming back into the tribal agencies from Afghanistan. These fighters later became the heads of the HQN network and HiG, networks that could be considered the biggest threat to operations in Afghanistan from the Pakistani side of the border. The two networks are both active in Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan. HiG has a more definite presence in Kunar and Nuristan. HQN has presence in Nangarhar and Kunar, using the latter as an infiltration route from which to launch attacks in the capital.²⁰⁴ The security issues that these two groups represent thus may be considered a product of both American and Pakistani failure to responsibly deal with militants when they have used them as strategic partners earlier.

Pakistan has nevertheless maintained close ties to both groups because it seeks to have the ability to affect politics in Afghanistan. Specifically, Pakistan has wanted to have the ability to stop Indian influence on the government there. Pakistan has, in many cases, used covert ways of attacking Indian installations in Afghanistan through the use of these forces. Most prevalently the HQN has been used, as they seem to have a significant ability to conduct operations more similar to highly organized military operations. This means that HQN is able to conduct specialized operations that require significant planning, several phases of attack and has the ability to attack targets that insurgents would rather stay away from because of the likelihood of casualties on their part.²⁰⁵

The lack of control in the FATA areas can be contributed to the historic mismanagement of the Pakistani state towards these areas. Thus, there are both socio-economic factors and security policy factors that play into the Pakistani government’s lack of ability to now control their proxy forces. The ISI has had a long-standing relationship with these forces and were the ones to who helped them get organized as far back as the Soviet

²⁰³ Rohan Gunaratna and Kuram Iqbal in *Pakistan: Terrorism Ground Zero* 2012: p. 10-12

²⁰⁴ Fabrizio Foschini *The Entegal Seven: Around Mehtarlam, an ‘Insurgency Corridor’ in the Making* May 10 2011 Afghanistan Analyst Network

²⁰⁵ Michael Semple *How the Haqqani Network is Expanding From Waziristan* September 23 2011 Foreign Affairs

invasion and also during the Taliban regime in Kabul before 9/11.²⁰⁶ As the ISI and the military has left HQN and HiG alone because these two networks have stayed away from Pakistani military targets these groups have become autonomous. The autonomy arose from the support-fleeing fighters got from these two networks as they changed base of operations from mainland Afghanistan to the Pakistani border areas. They were now much more capable of fending for themselves with improved weaponry, better communications, and extremely well developed terrain knowledge. These two groups have become the main two insurgent threats, excluding the Afghan Taliban lead by Mullah Omar.

HiG's leader, Hekmatyar Gulbuddin, has said that he is willing to entertain the idea of some kind of accord with the U.S. and the current Kabul regime. However, an article from late 2010 suggests that even if he might be willing to talk, what the Afghan people would think of a "peace" deal with this violent insurgent may not go down well.²⁰⁷ This might be one of the more difficult aspects for Kabul, Islamabad and Washington to handle. However much the governments may want to reconcile the autonomous insurgent groups, they may experience difficulty because the population may resent the notion that these people whom the government previously has labeled as criminals now get a free pass because the U.S. wants to withdraw. Hence, the Government of Afghanistan is not able to quell the insurgency on its own and Pakistani leaders continue to view their live and let live policy with the networks as beneficial even though they could end up having less control over them.

The Haqqani Network has no intention of giving up its "Jihad" and the freedom fight for fellow Muslims in Afghanistan against infidel foreign invading forces. They are considered by the U.S. to be irreconcilable in most part. This means that they cannot be persuaded to lay down their arms and surrender. They are one of the few insurgent groups that also have been listed as terrorists and that is usually tantamount to being a group to be neutralized rather than conciliated, even though some talks have been initiated.²⁰⁸ These talks seem to strengthen the aggressive stance of the HQN, as well as increasing its attacks in Afghanistan. The willingness of the Network to enter into talks seems slim at the present moment also because of the increasingly large operations that they have conducted in Afghanistan. Jeffery Dressler has written two reports on the Haqqani Network for the Institute for the Study of War. Dressler's findings seem to underline the analysis above. Haqqani is growing in both strength and operational ability alongside becoming stronger in its

²⁰⁶ Aquil Sah *Mullen Takes on the ISI* September 24 2011 Foreign Affairs

²⁰⁷ Michael Crowley *Our Man in Kabul* March 9 2010: p. 2-4

²⁰⁸ Bill Roggio *U.S Adds Senior Haqqani Leader to Terrorist List* November 1 2011 The Long War Journal

sanctuaries in Waziristan to the point where they operate like a violent shadow government,²⁰⁹ levying taxes and controlling both legal and illegal businesses.

One argument against the focus on the HQN as a viable part of the government structure in Afghanistan comes from the stance that this group has no real public support. This is linked to their indiscriminate use of suicide bombers and suicide attackers that often cause civilian casualties. Their more spectacular attacks in the last few years, though aimed at Afghan security forces and ISAF forces, have caused a significant number of civilian casualties and therefore created more fear than support.²¹⁰ Though this is a relevant argument with regard to establishing a workable security environment in Afghanistan and securing partners with that objective in mind, the Haqqani network is different from the Taliban. The Taliban has publicly said that they may be interested in an agreement that does not exclude the current regime in Kabul or a type of democratic government where they may be a part. The agenda they forward seems more intent on removing a great deal of American influence in Afghanistan, specifically the removal of foreign troops. The key part of that stance is the willingness to possibly be part of a peaceful solution through dialogue.

The Haqqani network, on its part, is waging a “Jihad” and controls significant criminal enterprises in the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The resolution for them seems in tune with Al-Qaeda’s objectives rather than with the Taliban’s. This is clear also from the network’s blatant disregard of Mullah Omar’s edict that as much as possible civilians should not be targeted in operations.²¹¹ The disregard of Omar’s orders indicates also that the structure of the Afghan Taliban is fragmented and that that organization has to deal with elements that do not adhere to the centralized hierarchy.

The lack of control that can be experienced by all networks and organizations that participates in this conflict illustrates and underlines all the difficult facets that have to be taken into account in the dialogue between the Pakistani government and the U.S. government. For example, with regard to the Haqqani Network, the Pakistani military intelligence as a whole may not support the network, but they may have elements that do. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said in late 2011 that:

“Coalition and Afghan forces have increased pressure on the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other insurgents, including a new operation in eastern Afghanistan launched in recent days. But our commanders on the ground are increasingly concerned, as they have been for some time, that we

²⁰⁹ Jeffrey Dressler *The Haqqani Network: A Strategic Threat* Mach 2012: p. 13-14

²¹⁰ Seth G. Jones *Why the Haqqani Network is The Wrong Target* November 6 2011

²¹¹ Raheel Kahn *Pakistani, Afghan Militants Target Worshippers* January 26 2012 Central Asia Online

*have to go after the safe havens across the border in Pakistan. Now, I will be quick to add that the Pakistanis also have reason to be concerned about attacks coming at them from across the border in Afghanistan”.*²¹²

This indicates that the U.S. government seems less convinced that the Pakistani ISI has been overtly and willingly supportive of all of the Haqqani Networks operations. Rather the ISI and the military establishment seem to have possibly realized that they have to severely restrict its foreign policy engagements that involve using these types of proxy forces. Pakistan, on the other hand, may disagree and see the United States as demanding too much because it has lost a high number of personnel while supporting U.S. objectives. In her remarks, Clinton does in fact mention this aspect from the Pakistani point of view.²¹³ This shows that, despite the distinctly troublesome aspects of their relationship, the bi-national dialogue is still there, even though Pakistan has made attempts to break off from dialogue. The dependence between the two countries, in terms of this conflict, is still there and is not likely to disappear for some time.

4.3 U.S. Drone Attacks in Pakistan and Reactions to Them

The American War on Terror has come to include several aspects that are controversial to partners of the U.S. in this war. The most controversial in the eyes of Pakistan may be the drone operations in their tribal agencies. These operations have targeted Al-Qaeda operatives, high-ranking leaders of the Taliban and other high value targets linked to other insurgent and terror organizations. There has been less controversy in the international community over these strikes than there has been inside of Pakistan. The interplay between action, words and reactions with regard to this issue will be analyzed in this section.

The drone strikes in Pakistan seem to have been seen by the Pakistani government as a necessary evil. As noted, the raid that neutralized Bin Laden angered the government and the military because they saw it as an infringement on Pakistani sovereignty. This is true; there were no warnings before the raid was conducted. In contrast to the Bin Laden operation, however, the drone strikes have been launched from bases inside Pakistan with the government’s knowledge, at least most of the time. Though the Pakistani government has publicly voiced concerns regarding the drone strikes, this seems to have more to do with

²¹² United States, Department of State *Opening Remarks Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee* October 27 2011

²¹³ *Ibid.* (*Opening Remarks Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee*)

domestic policy than foreign policy. In general, anti-Americanism is closely linked for groups who want to gain or keep political power in Pakistan.²¹⁴ It would seem that the military needs the sentiment that is clearly anti-American to maintain its powerful position in Pakistani society. The stopping of supplies running from Pakistan and Afghanistan, along with requiring CIA officials and other contractors to leave the country (measures which have now been rescinded) as a somewhat of a limited response, considering their presentation of the strikes and other grievances with the U.S. in for the Pakistani public.²¹⁵ It would seem that, though the Pakistani government finds the presence of U.S. forces highly embarrassing and would like to see them go, the country is so dependent on the support it receives from America that it would not make sense to escalate difficulties in the relationship to the point where aid would be completely halted.

The drone strikes have caused an uproar in the ISI and the Pakistani government, but they have not been attracting the type of international condemnation that one might expect for what the Pakistanis call a clear breach of sovereignty and an offense to the Pakistani people.²¹⁶ Going beyond the immediate responses from the Pakistani government, the main disapproval of drone strikes is not limited to Pakistan and its supporters. The Pew Research Institute recently conducted a study showing that drone strikes are rated unfavorably among several allied nations and that there are signs of dwindling support for it among close allies to the United States.²¹⁷ But even with this lack of approval from the international community the drone strikes are still part of the U.S. main counterterrorism strategy in the tribal areas. These attacks have been focused mainly in North and South Waziristan, which is where the Haqqani Network has its sanctuaries along with other militant groups among them, Al-Qaeda.²¹⁸ Though this could be attributed to America's counterterrorism strategies, the attacks on these groups in this fashion could cement and to a certain extent "prove" to fence-sitters that the fight or "Jihad" against the Americans is completely justified because of the drone strikes. Civilian casualties are most likely one of the major factors that Networks are able to recruit at the level they do. The situations in FATA provide militants with an ample supply of youths

²¹⁴ Ahmed Rashid *Pakistan on the Brink* 2012: p. 9-11

²¹⁵ Sebastian Abbot *Pakistan NATO Supply Routes Set to Reopen Thursday* July 4 2012 The Huffington Post

²¹⁶ Salman Mashood & Declan Walsh *Pakistan Gives U.S. a List of Demands, Including an End to CIA Drone Strikes* April 12 2012 The New York Times

²¹⁷ Pew Research Center *Global Opinion of Obama Slips, International Policies Faulted* June 13 2012 Global Attitudes Project: p. 2

²¹⁸ Chris Kirk *Obama's 262 Drone Strikes in Pakistan* June 8 2012 Slate; Jeffrey Dressler *The Haqqani Network: A Strategic Threat* Mach 2012: p. 13-14

that are “unemployed and ripe for conversion to the mission of the militants”.²¹⁹

Compounding this, the loss of family members or relatives because of unintended collateral damages as a result of drone strikes is likely to create more militants rather than reducing the numbers. As we have seen this is the case in Afghanistan where COIN efforts have caused civilian casualties. Though one cannot make a causal link to increasing drone attacks in North and South Waziristan, there seems to be a connection in terms of the number of large attacks conducted by insurgents who have their bases in the tribal agencies.

To sum up, in this chapter we have seen that there are a number of interrelated aspects of the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan that affect the COIN operations in Afghanistan, directly and indirectly and at different levels. At an overall level, it seems clear that not only the military, but also the economic support from U.S. to Pakistan is of indirect importance. There are strong indications that Pakistan’s economic problems create the soil for recruiting youth to extremist groups; not necessarily for ideological or religious reasons, but just as much for economic reasons. Recruitments to these groups will also have consequences for the operations in Afghanistan, in particular in the eastern provinces that border Pakistan, and where the insurgents operate on both sides. Pakistan’s use of proxy groups, which also operate on both sides of the border, affects the COIN operations both directly and indirectly, because the U.S. considers the use of proxy groups as a sign of the Pakistani government’s lack of ability or even will to exert political control/authority in its own territory. This makes the U.S. more inclined to reduce its military and economic support to Pakistan. In short, the instability in the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan seems to contribute to maintaining the political instability within Pakistan, which in turn makes the U.S. even more reluctant to give them military and economic support. This somewhat vicious circle may very well increase the strength of the insurgent groups that have safe havens in Pakistan and thus worsen the conditions for COIN operations in eastern Afghanistan.

The effect of drone strikes in Pakistan in terms of the COIN operations in Afghanistan, specifically in the eastern provinces, is affected by close ties between residents in Eastern Afghanistan and across the border into Pakistan. This means that just by conducting drone strikes on the other side of the border, one can end up with two distinctly negative effects. Firstly, a more destabilized border area that will very likely see an increase in militant activity

²¹⁹ Shuja Nawaz *FATA – A Most Dangerous Place* January 2009 Center for Strategic and International Studies: p. 21

due to the instability. Secondly, a worsened security situation in provinces that are important to Afghanistan's ability to maintain its own security past 2014. For these reasons, the drone attacks may be counterproductive to the end state objective, which is to leave Afghanistan and to make sure it does not become another safe haven for Al-Qaeda.

Chapter 5

5 The Endgame

The war in Afghanistan has gone on for ten years. It is nearing its likely drawdown in 2014; the time when both the U.S. and allies have stated they will draw down their contribution as well. Therefore, this time period after President Obama's strategic change has been and is going to be crucial. This thesis focuses on three eastern provinces, for two main reasons: First, the eastern provinces discussed have received "attention" in terms of COIN for a shorter period of time than for example the southern and northern parts of the country. This means that the operations have not been focused there for an extended period of time, giving the insurgency more "space" to grow. This time has allowed the insurgents to strengthen their ties across the border, as well as to "dig into" the local population. This in turn may make it easier to measure progress and setbacks there. Second, these provinces share a border with Pakistan, and the hypothesis regarding that was that these provinces are likely to give a better indication of impact stemming from any positive or negative changes in the U.S.–Pakistani relationship. There are several aspects that have been examined with regard to both the COIN operations in these provinces and how the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan may impact these operations. In this concluding chapter, the objective is to take a look at the strategy for and the implementation of COIN as a whole, and to try to give a more comprehensive picture of the extent to which the implementation of the core elements of the strategy have been successful, and for what reasons. As a part of this comprehensive picture, some conclusive considerations on the impact of the U.S. and Pakistani relations on the COIN operations in Nuristan, Kunar and, Nangarhar are presented.

5.1 The New Strategy and Challenges in Measuring the Results

From the preceding analysis of COIN operations in the three provinces, it is possible to make some general observations about the American lead COIN effort. One of the main points is the strategy itself. This analysis has taken as its starting point the *Commander's Initial Assessment* (2009); President Obama's speeches where he outlines the strategy for Afghanistan, and documents that specifically discuss COIN operations. In these documents, and in operations on the ground, it is important to define the specific goals that the campaign seeks to achieve. Within this objective, there are certain difficulties that complicate both the

creation of a strategy and the implementation of that strategy.

In the creation of a COIN strategy for Afghanistan, the trust from, cooperation with and communication with the population was to become a cornerstone of the strategy. It was considered of utmost importance to change perceptions within the population itself, and to change the operational culture of the soldiers who were conducting the counterinsurgency operations.²²⁰ It would be imperative that the counterinsurgency effort was conducted in a way that not only took into account the general difficulties of a COIN effort, for example to focus on the enemy's weakness, what areas they are the strongest, what makes the population support the insurgents, what kind of action must be taken to weaken this support, and so on. The COIN effort would also have to be adaptable to the "unique complexities" that Afghanistan represented.²²¹ That meant that the "national" insurgency was to be treated in a way that took into account that there were three regional insurgencies and not a single nationwide one that could be fought successfully with just one strategy or approach.²²² The insurgencies that were identified were located in the south, north and east. To begin with, before McChrystal did his assessment, it would seem that most of the coalition forces were focusing their efforts in the south, trying to quell an insurgency in the least populated area of Afghanistan.²²³ This area was the main strategic launching area for the Taliban, but only focusing there would allow them to move somewhere else. McChrystal recommended to focus on all three, and not just one; this would mean that three COIN operations would have to be implemented with different strategies that would be adapted to local conditions.

To do this would mean a learning process for the American forces in COIN operations. This learning process for the counterinsurgents was a problem to the American and coalition soldiers. According to the assessment, the problem of operational difficulties had not been dealt with well enough in the past. It would seem as if it had not been taken into account at all. The problem with developing a comprehensive approach to COIN was the recognition that in this type of operation, there was no a silver bullet for the campaign and for Afghanistan itself. A silver bullet approach means that one discovers a tactic or strategy that works in every scenario. This would be impossible because of the regional differences in Afghanistan.

Though the assessment made by McChrystal and the Obama administration's

²²⁰ International Security and Assistance Force, Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009: 1.1-1.3

²²¹ Ibid. p. 1.1

²²² Ibid. p. 1.1

²²³ , Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon *Afghanistan Index* May 16 2012: p. 5

approach to operations in Afghanistan has reflected an understanding of this predicament, the full force of this issue seems not to have been recognized. This means that even though the general understanding is that there are regional differences within the insurgencies, the troop levels never became the numbers originally asked for to conduct successful COIN operations.²²⁴ This can be illustrated by comparing the request for troops in Afghanistan to successfully conduct COIN operations, to what was actually deployed there.²²⁵ The difference shows the lack of political will on the part of the administration to recognize the magnitude of what the campaign would require in total. The problem with assessing the progress in the implementation of COIN is that there is no comprehensive way of measuring it in a univocal way. There is no set way of measuring how well or badly a set of operations are going in an area. This means that to measure the results of the COIN effort, the person or organization who conducts the review of the operations has to choose a limited set of metrics based on what they are measuring the progress of. This creates a double edged sword for the validity of the assessment. On one hand, the entity conducting the review may very well choose those metrics that best support their initial perceptions. This opens for the possibility that one can find evidence for most arguments or positions within the vast data that exists on operations in Afghanistan; it is simply a question of selecting them. On the other hand, choosing metrics based on the strategy laid out by policy makers gives the opportunity to examine the metrics that best indicate how well an operation is going, in relation to the political reasons for the strategy. In the case of the strategy change set about by the Obama administration, which implied to focus much more on the population of Afghanistan, the so-called population centric approach to COIN, gives the researcher the ability to select metrics that for example reflect the population's attitudes changes. In this analysis we have chosen metrics that are diverse, but that nevertheless have one aspect in common: They all relate to the population which is the base for the insurgency. All the metrics have been used to try to create an adequate analysis of the situation in each of the three provinces. Thus, one has to be aware that these metrics give an overview of how the progress has been in the area through the lens of "population centric" COIN.

²²⁴ Center for Strategic and International Studies, Anthony Cordesman in *Global Security Forum Transcript* April 11 2012: p. 6

²²⁵ Eric Schmitt & Thom Shanker, General Calls for More Troops to Avoid Afghan Failure September 20 2009 *Washington Post*; Amy Belasco *Troop Levels in the Afghan and Iraq Wars, FY2001-FY2012: Cost and Other Potential Issues* July 2 2009 Federation of American Scientists

5.2 Challenges in the Implementation of the New Strategy

The assessments that have been made regarding the operations in the three provinces are several. First, the operations in all three provinces experienced setbacks as well as progress. There is no discernible clear positive progress; it is rather a few successes interrupted by failure. The magnitude of the failures appears not to be related to a single aspect, but to the interplay between several aspects combined with multiple certain failures. This was evident when analyzing civilian casualties in relation to difficulties in establishing a connection with the central government in Kabul. In instances where there had been civilian casualties caused by Afghan security forces and coalition forces, this also caused significant mistrust toward the government. The mistrust was amplified by the lack of ability for officials from the Afghan government to operate in the area. In addition to that, the use of shadow courts would also influence the civilian population's attitudes toward the government in Kabul. This means that the failure of a COIN operation can be traced to the failure of maintaining focus on the interplay between several different aspects of the COIN operation. This kind of interplay between different aspects of COIN is not necessarily grasped by measuring the development by single metrics.

On the other hand, it seems that the success of one operation can be measured with one metric because it measures a specific reaction within the operation. A general positive trend can be traced through several of these metrics showing positive progress. However, if the other metrics indicate a problem or a negative result, this impacts the analysis of all the other metrics and questions what they really indicate. This could lead to a conclusion that negative impact is stronger within a difficult COIN operation. It appears that it would be easier to track negative progress rather than positive.

An example of what might be the consequences of this could be the decided drawdown of troops in 2014. This decision does not appear to have been made based on the assessment of sufficient positive progress with COIN in Afghanistan. Especially because the progress is difficult to measure accurately, it would now appear that the decision to withdraw forces is based on political assessments in the U.S., and not on positive progress in Afghanistan. Obama announced that there had been major strides made in Afghanistan with the partnering of U.S. and Afghan security forces.²²⁶ He also emphasized again the

²²⁶ United States, White House, *Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Nation from Afghanistan* May 1 2012

importance of focusing on the objective, which is to remove al-Qaeda as a threat to the U.S.²²⁷ The problem with this objective becomes even clearer when seen in conjunction with what has been documented from the use of metrics to assess the COIN operations. If the strategy does not work together with local conditions, it is very difficult to measure success. This seems to be the biggest strategic problem with the operations in Afghanistan. The objectives and goals are not in sync with the original mission, and neither is the decision to drawdown in 2014. It appears to be a foreign policy decision made for domestic purposes. This means that the decision to drawdown is based on lack of political will on the part of the American public, rather than on the successful completion of goals in Afghanistan.

The implementation of the new strategy that would focus on the population as the main target for peaceful operations was started, as we have seen, after a period of time had gone by when the Afghan population had been waiting for the better part of six years for any improvement. Adding to this difficult situation was the growth of the insurgency, which for almost five years had been allowed to grow fairly unhindered, especially in the eastern part of Afghanistan. Focus had been on the south, north, and to some extent the area around Kabul. The change in strategy also would focus on the east, where McChrystal had assessed there to be a strong growing insurgency. This was not only because the area had been “left” by the effort to begin with, but also because of these provinces’ proximity to the Pakistani tribal areas, which now more than ever served as the safe havens for a growing number of militants. It would become clear that one of the greatest issues with implementing the new strategy was the nature of the insurgency in the east, specifically Nuristan, Kunar and Nangarhar, which share some of the Afghan-Pakistani border. The insurgents in these areas have been left alone for a longer period of time, which is compounded by these provinces’ proximity to the safe havens in Pakistan.

The consequence of all this was that the implementation of COIN was, and is, national and local at the same time. In a conventional war, one has a frontline which moves in either direction; forwards or backwards. Counterinsurgency operations are far more complex, and the “frontline” is to be found at a high number of locations at once. Some locations affect only local conditions. One example of this might be the location of a forward operating base (FOB) in conjunction with the location of a village. In that case, one could experience difficulties with getting the local population to trust the counterinsurgents and the Afghan government because the insurgent shadow governments provide better “services,” i.e. they produce

²²⁷ Ibid.

tangible results.

An example of a national problem is the use of air support and the adhering risk of civilian casualties by air strikes. As we have seen from the analysis of the three provinces, one of the main obstacles for achieving positive progress within the eastern regions was civilian casualties that were the result of air strikes. The United Nations reports on civilian casualties in Afghanistan corroborated this perception. This illustrates the difficulties with conducting COIN operations, and the multiple “fronts” that these operations have to be fought on. Even though insurgent Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) cause more than 60% of civilian casualties, which is far more than coalition caused casualties due to air strikes, the casualties caused by International Assistance and Security Forces (ISAF) seem to have mattered more.²²⁸ This was evident in all three provinces. It appears that the ISAF caused casualties weigh heavier than insurgent caused casualties. Whether this is due to the ability of the insurgents to capitalize on the operations failures of the coalition forces, or because faith in the security provided by ISAF forces is diminished, is difficult to establish. In any case, the multiple “fronts” put enormous pressure on the counterinsurgents, because they have to “win” every time on all fronts almost simultaneously. The insurgents only have to outlast the counterinsurgents, and can do so in a far more cost effective way. This is a problem that the new strategy faced, and that the operations in Afghanistan still face.

Counterinsurgency efforts in Afghanistan faced some issues that made it more complex than it was expected to be. Part of that problem was the lack of a functioning government within the country. During the civil war in the nineties, and during the Taliban regime, there had been no real government to speak of that had functioned properly. This might be one of the issues that still faces the Karzai government today. Because of the lack of a functioning central government, there are many local and regional power structures that are difficult to work around and with. In addition to those regional and local structures, the government of Afghanistan also faces the shadow governments set up by the insurgents, which as noted earlier produce results that are immediate in the eyes of many villagers. In difference to this, many of the projects that are the responsibility of (or associated with) the central government, are not projects that show a rapid impact. This is not only due to a lack of government, but also due to a lack of resources for ongoing projects and the problems with making the results of the projects visible to the local people.

McChrystal’s assessment tried to take this into account by its analysis of what he

²²⁸ International Security and Assistance Force *Monthly Trends* September 24 2012

called the “information environment”, in which important parts of the perceptions of the local people are formed. The assessment describes the information environment as a “deed based” environment, where the most of the immediate results are those which get attention.²²⁹ The importance of this type of environment has shown to be evident in the case of both Nuristan and Kunar. These provinces are comprised of mostly villages, where word of mouth is the main source of information. The infrastructure for communication is not well developed in any of these two provinces, and that makes the local people more dependent on word of mouth, which in turn makes them more sensitive to negative progress, meaning civilian casualties or collateral damage. It would appear from the analysis of the two provinces that the strong negative impact of both civilian casualties and collateral damage, compared to the relatively sparse positive impact of the projects undertaken or supported by the government and ISAF, is linked to this “deed based” environment. Slowly progressing projects in more or less remote places do not really appear as “deeds” worth mentioning, and the less they are mentioned, the less their impact. Another impact on the attitudes of the civilian population in Nuristan and Kunar related to the “deed based” environment was that the counterinsurgents were not able to maintain security for those who assisted them. As seen earlier, the American COIN personnel left the province of Nuristan almost all together. It would appear that acts like that in a volatile province such as Nuristan, where HiG amongst others operate, would be a poor choice because of the “word of mouth” structure in the more remote provinces.

A somewhat similar kind of problem can be illustrated with the population in Kunar, where in certain areas the faith in government and in the foreign troops is fair. The problem lies in Kunar’s close proximity to the border of Pakistan, where insurgents have a better hold on the people living there, and where the risk for foreign troops has historically been higher. That risk, combined with poorly developed infrastructure, has led to what could be described as an approach where the path of least resistance is king. This means that the Afghans have proved historically to be good at adapting to changing winds politically and militarily. On the other hand, the experiences from Nangarhar have shown that in areas where there is something to build on, however small the effort, things seem to be going better. Projects which run somewhat smoother, and the startup of others, have taken place in that province. Among them is the Afghan reintegration program, which can be considered a success in terms of Afghan standards. That may not be saying much for the overall assessment of the COIN

²²⁹ International Security and Assistance Force, Stanley McChrystal, *Commander’s Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009: p. 1.2

effort, but it has shown that it is possible to achieve success with some important elements of the COIN approach. This success has made it clear that some important criteria have to be fulfilled if such successes are to be obtained. That is; the resources required not only to start projects, but more importantly, to keep them going. This has been one of the COIN strategy's largest problems. The time to be spent on, the quality of, and the resources devoted to projects are often skewed. This creates projects that face challenges in being continued after the startup period, and implementing the strategy of handing them over to the Afghans thus becomes even more difficult. These kinds of resource problems in dealing with the constructive aspects of the implementation, illustrate some key aspects that make COIN difficult.

Another key problem in the implementation of COIN can be represented by the keyword "culture." A main effort made at the beginning of the Obama administration was to change the strategy to focus on the "population centric" dimension as the most important dimension to COIN. This focus implied several difficulties, of which the most common have been examined in this thesis; the aspects of culture. As has been seen from the analyses of the three provinces, the population of Afghanistan is diverse. There are villages and tribes that differ from each other; they have different needs and different approaches to the insurgents and the coalition forces. As has been noted, McChrystal therefore emphasized one particularly important aspect regarding the realization of the strategy: The implementation of COIN would have to be locally adapted to local requirements. For one thing, this would require more troops, but above all it would require that the troops and the strategy be flexible enough to counter the insurgents' ability to exploit weaknesses in the population centric COIN effort.²³⁰

One of the more critical weaknesses in this respect was the lack of a sufficient number of troops. Therefore, the American forces are not able to maintain complete control of the areas of operations, which in turn leads to a drop in security for the local population. This represents an unfortunate paradox for the coalition forces operating in Afghanistan. They cannot be in every village all the time, which gives the insurgents an inherent opportunity to counter any attempt to reduce the population's support to the insurgents. This does not necessarily mean that the local population aids the insurgents willingly. Much of this support comes from the lack of any other alternative, as has been seen from the example with the shadow governments that have been set up by the different insurgent groups. Because of the

²³⁰ International Security and Assistance Force, Stanley McChrystal, *Commander's Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009: p. 2.6-2.8

need to adapt to local requirements on the ground, the issues that the counterinsurgents have to deal with become localized as well. This means that the implementation of the COIN strategy has to take into account that it cannot be locally implemented without being tailored for the specific requirements on the ground. These requirements may vary significantly within a single province. In Nangarhar for example, there is both an urban and a rural population, and their needs cannot be met without examining the needs on the ground carefully.

Having to deal closely with culture is one of the features of COIN that differentiates it from other types of military campaigns. As has been seen from the analyses in chapter three, the importance of cultural understanding cannot be underestimated. As noted, the coalition seeks to rebuild an Afghanistan with a strong central government, which allows for some regional autonomy. The most common difficulty with this is the diverse cultures and the difficulties that the culture and way of life in Afghanistan creates for attempts to establish a “modernized” government of a Western kind. As seen from the argumentation of Thomas Barfield, the Afghans are not inherently opposed to centralized rule as some scholars paint a picture of.²³¹ However, the culture in the eastern provinces is both urban and rural, and particularly among the latter we may find views on democratic political institutions that are somewhat conservative compared to a Western way of thinking. This is especially the case in both Kunar and Nangarhar, among the Pashtun tribes in the mountainous areas that border Pakistan. This may therefore not be the most ideal place to impose radical changes to political life and practices. It seems that with regard to culture in these areas, the U.S. would benefit from leaving some of the issues for an Afghan leadership, and to focus instead on the cultural aspects that can be impacted. For example, trying to move the population away from what could be considered medieval law practices, and showing by example that the government in Kabul can actually perform their duties to a satisfactory degree. It is important that expectations are raised to an acceptable level. Promises have to be adapted to what can actually be done. This is one of the issues that have plagued the COIN operations in the north eastern provinces of Nuristan, Kunar, and Nangarhar. Even though the need for local adaption of COIN was emphasized in general from the beginning of the implementation, the discovery and acknowledgement that there were different insurgencies in different parts of the country may have come too late for the provinces that had received less attention.

The differentiated cultural landscape in Afghanistan is a general challenge to COIN, and as demonstrated in chapter three, the Pashtuns in the eastern provinces have a distinct

²³¹Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* 2012: p. 274-275

culture that can be difficult to combine with the westernized way of thinking about democracy and government. Adding to this difficulty are the relations that span the borders of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The insurgents benefit from having relations that go back to the era of the Soviet invasion, or even further. The Pakistani tribal areas have housed sanctuaries for insurgent fighters for decades, and this creates a different climate for the insurgency to thrive in. So while the COIN operations in Afghanistan have to adapt to local conditions on the ground; a local tactical approach, it also has to be implemented on a strategic level, i.e. a national approach. This national approach, in turn, has to fit into an international approach that takes into account the local conditions in Pakistan. This illustrates the complexities that the proximity to Pakistani tribal areas adds to the already complex operational picture in Afghanistan for the U.S. counterinsurgency effort.

5.3 Challenges in the U.S.–Pakistani Relationship

The effect of the U.S.–Pakistani relationship on the COIN effort in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, is not something that is casual. It is difficult to measure in a definite sense how this relationship affects specific aspects. As the preceding analyses have shown, it is more of a continuous “push” effect. This means that the Pakistani influence on the COIN effort in these provinces is not linked to one specific action. Rather, it is the sum of American actions in Pakistan, in addition to Pakistan’s domestic and foreign policy, that comes together to form an influence. The more specific impacts are therefore difficult to measure. In this thesis, the focus has been on three issues that from the scholarly literature seem to be of particular importance in understanding the main types of impact that the U.S.–Pakistani relationship has on the COIN operations in Afghanistan.

As has been noted, there is a difference between the impact that this relationship has at the strategic and tactical level, i.e. the national and local level. Nationally, Pakistan’s foreign policy, and especially their use and support of proxy forces, is an important strategic threat to the safety and security within Pakistan itself, and more importantly to this thesis, inside Afghanistan. Both the Haqqani network (HQN) and Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HiG) have been “employed” and supported by the Pakistani government, openly and covertly. This is an aspect which to a certain extent is separate from Afghanistan. According to most scholars and political commentators, these proxy forces are intended to give Pakistan depth in fighting India. It is therefore arguably more of a side effect that these groups also have a vested

interest in fighting “Jihad” in Afghanistan. They have kept their autonomy to a great extent, and the HQN have become far more self-sufficient than the Pakistani government would seem to like them to be. The HQN have also been excluded from peace talks, while the HiG have to some extent been approached about coming to the table in 2014. This gives Pakistan a problem when it comes to the relationship with the U.S. On the one hand they have HQN, a group that they support which in the eyes of the U.S. government and ISAF is regarded “irreconcilable.” On the other hand they support the HiG, a group that is a more acceptable option. This two sided foreign policy issue for Pakistan is also affected by U.S. actions in the tribal agencies of Pakistan. The drone program targets the Haqqani network and its supporters to a significant degree. However, this has shown to create and aid their cause as much as it removes threats, as seen in the analysis of drone use.

Earlier in this analysis, it has been established that it is not possible for an army to “kill” itself out of an insurgency. The COIN efforts’ focus on the population is important; it illustrates that there is no outcome that can be acceptable by using force as a primary means of establishing peace. This is common knowledge in Afghanistan; to gain any victories it is paramount to separate the population from the insurgents. The more insurgents that are killed, the more will take their place, based either on the notion of vengeance or the notion of a cause. It is also vital to create a government that the population trusts, and this has yet to be fulfilled in Afghanistan. The idea that some kind of democracy is the best way to establish a less unstable state is a cornerstone. The American drone program thus seems to be a paradox, as it is likely that it creates more insurgents than it removes. The goal is to strike at the most prominent insurgent leaders, and therefore seemingly cut of the head. Hence the drones target the personnel that the U.S. sees as legitimate targets; those whom if removed will cripple an organization. The analysis of these actions points toward a serious problem with what is accepted by the international community, and with how this is perceived in the areas where it is experienced. As seen earlier, there is a definite lack of focus in the western media regarding drone strikes, meaning their impact on civilian life and the legality of these types of operations. If the American government is to aid the Afghan government in creating a stable and democratic state that will survive the 2014 end point that Obama has set, then it appears very conflicting to use the number of drones that have been used against the tribal areas of Pakistan.

One could argue that the U.S., in using such measures to this degree, undermines their own credibility in operations in Afghanistan. This would arguably be worse in the areas of

eastern Afghanistan that share a border with Pakistan. The tribes in these areas do not actually regard the border between the two countries as a barrier, and they travel back and forth as they please for the most part. This means, as shown in chapter four, that the cultural and familial bonds stretch across the border in a way that may be impacted by the use of drone strikes. The U.S. could be causing more friction than it needs to by escalating the use of drones, as Obama has done over the course of his presidency.²³² The paradox with this is that the officials, such as Admiral Mullen, have on occasion “attacked” Pakistan for the use of their proxy forces, and for how the Inter-Services Intelligence operates. Though not completely comparable, the two do share a divergent point. Each of the two parties, Pakistan and the United States, seek to achieve political and strategic gains through the use of these “techniques.” Pakistan on its part has used these types of forces for a very long time, seemingly in an almost institutional manner. The U.S. has also used the type of targeting that is now being conducted in the Pakistani tribal areas for an extended period of time.

In the media, the use of drones seems to receive far less attention than it warrants. Pakistan’s aid in the “War on Terror” is not something that is mentioned very often either. Arguably the Pakistani government is facing some very serious problems, and its difficult relationship with the U.S. requires a significant number of resources as well. The paradoxical relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan is very difficult to sum up in any short and concise way. However, some conclusions may be drawn. Pakistan is struggling with several significant domestic issues that require a strong government and a reversal of the dire economic situation. The country is also seeking to continue to subvert certain efforts in Afghanistan to attain “strategic depth” against Indian interests. It has its own very clear domestic and foreign objectives, which do not coincide with America or Afghanistan. This creates a very difficult climate for international relations for the government of Pakistan. Those difficulties are compounded by the emergence of the Pakistani Taliban, which is waging its own insurgency against the Pakistani government. All these factors combine to build a multifaceted and three dimensional threat nexus against Pakistan’s own interests. The United States on its part is seeking to dismantle al-Qaeda and remove the possibility of an Islamic fundamentalist safe haven in Afghanistan. That has been the objective since late 2001. That objective has turned into a massive nation-building effort in Afghanistan, with the goal of establishing at least to some degree a workable democratic solution for Afghanistan in

²³² Chris Kirk *Obama’s 262 Drone Strikes in Pakistan* June 8 2012 Slate; Pew Research Center *Global Opinion of Obama Slips, International Policies Faulted* June 13 2012 Global Attitudes Project: p. 2

order to stem fundamentalist resurgence in the country. This has led to a long and strenuous mission in Afghanistan that is supposed to achieve its tentative end point at the end of 2014. Even after 2014, the U.S. will continue to struggle with the militants and terrorist organizations in Pakistan's tribal areas. The drone program is making it easier to conduct counterterrorism operations in areas that the government cannot do anything about in a conventional sense. This is the largest obstacle outside of Afghanistan for the U.S. The government in Washington cannot let militancy grow in these fairly uncontrolled areas; especially not when the President has cited this as their main objective in the region. The U.S. has to rely on Pakistan for control in the tribal areas. It would seem that the objective of combating terrorism and insurgency in these areas falls mostly on Pakistan, which in turn generates a problem for the U.S. The United States have poured money into Pakistan, and as Steven Krasner argues, this give without being given anything in return cannot and should not be allowed to continue.

The operations in Afghanistan are not impacted by one aspect of the U.S.–Pakistani relations. Rather it would seem that the sum of the actions of both countries combines into a toxic cloud on the eastern border of Afghanistan. In part, this is because the mission, as stated by America, does not include Pakistan having a strong influence over the government of Afghanistan. The trouble for Pakistan is that it is in need of the money that the relationship with the U.S. yields. They do not wish to be viewed by the American government as a country similar to Iran. Pakistan is therefore dependent on having a relationship that struggles along for the duration of the major American military presence in the region. To a degree, this presence dictates the Pakistani government's ability to influence Afghanistan. As well, it limits the American ability to cut all ties with Pakistan, because they are a difficult partner.

In Afghanistan, this relationship is creating difficulties in the areas where stability is needed most. Because of the proximity of Pakistan's unruly tribal areas to eastern Afghanistan, the impact of, for example, failed economic policies by the Pakistani government, could lead to an increase in militants who seek to fight "Jihad" against the American presence in Afghanistan. As a result of lack of options, combined with fundamentalist mullahs and religious scholars, this could lead to a dangerous increase in militancy, both for Pakistan and Afghanistan. On the other hand, it could also end up being a response to American unilateral behavior when it comes to the drone program. Killing insurgents has not been successful in stemming the influx of Pakistani based militants into Afghanistan. It would rather appear that these policies are creating more insurgents; not less.

The insurgents' ability to use new media to relay their message creates further problems for the American government, as it struggles against a media image that is reinforced by both insurgent propaganda and anti-American interests in Pakistan.

Afghanistan is, and will be for a very long time, a country that is wrought between its artificial Western influence and its regional neighborhood. On the one hand there is the ISAF mission, and on the other hand there is the struggle with regional power brokers and the issues that arise from the lack of ability to control the country centrally. Every issue that faces Afghanistan is severely compounded by the international players, who seek to achieve political and strategic goals based not on what is best for Afghanistan, but rather what is best for them. This appears to be the best argument for why the U.S.–Pakistani relationship matters more than was first realized in the early stages of the “occupation” of Afghanistan.

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