Some Considerations for Planning and Executing a Military-Political Engagement in Afghanistan

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This paper supplements the <u>Tribal Engagement Workshop</u> *(TEW)[1]* <u>Summary Report</u>*. The intent is to provide an alternative mental model for planning and a sample template for executing military-political engagements in Afghanistan.*

Disclaimer: Much intellectual energy has been expended on whether to label our outreach efforts in Afghanistan as tribal or community engagements. This paper therefore does not attempt to settle the issue as to the primacy of tribal- and/or community- or interest-based identities. Suffice it to say tribal identities exist in Afghanistan but community and/or interest groups may not necessarily organize themselves based on these tribal identities. What matters most is that we engage the locals within their own cultural frame of reference.

This paper highlights a number of planning consideration in the development of a military-political campaign in which tribal engagements and/or community outreach initiatives represent tactical actions. It introduces the planner and operator to a different mental model for analyzing and assessing tribal and/or community engagements and their role and function in support of a military-political campaign. This paper introduces planners and operators to three frontier tenets, four basic strategies, five tactics and a sample template for preparing and participating in a military-political engagement/campaign.

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[1] The Small Wars Foundation hosted a two-day Tribal Engagement Workshop (TEW) focused on Afghanistan from March 24-25, 2010 in Fredericksburg, VA. The TEW was cosponsored by the <u>Small Wars Foundation</u>, the U.S. Joint Forces Command <u>Joint Irregular Warfare Center</u>, the U.S. Marine Corps <u>Center for Irregular Warfare</u>, the <u>U.S. Army / U.S. Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center</u>, and <u>Noetic</u>. The workshop was designed to address conceptual issues associated with tribal engagement and explore the considerations that operators and planners would have to address in order to implement a tribal or local engagement program.

Frontier Tenets

The first tenet that should be considered by planners and operators, General Purpose Forces (GPF) or Special Operations Forces (SOF), when developing or participating in military-political engagements/campaigns is to accept the inevitable fact that the military *doesn't solve* frontier problems or impose solutions. The military *manages* frontier conditions.

The fact that the military can only manage conditions leads to the second tenet that all military commanders, and by default government administrators, require local allies. Irregular warfare makes for strange bedfellows. This truism is implicitly and at times explicitly expressed in our "by-through-with" approach. "By-through-with" embodies two separate and distinct suppositions concerning frontier operations. The first supposition is that we must create and depend on local allies in a given area of operations (AO) whether at the national or local levels. The second is our need to project local participation - although it remains our preference to control on-going operations indirectly. Local forces are routinely advertised as the proponent of a given operation and credited with taking the lead even though this may not be the case. Also, we are continuously reminded and urged that locals should lead these military-political operations and that all efforts are to be made to gain the support of the political structures in the village or valley regardless of the circumstances.

A third frontier reality is that the military commander and/or government administrator may initially be forced to cooperate with locals who do not possess a clearly defined political identity. When unable to pinpoint a clearly defined political identity military commanders and government administrators tend to create an identity for the local population if only to categorize them as for, neutral, or against the government.

Military commanders and government administrators are challenged when dealing with communities lacking an authoritative leadership and /or a constantly changing group identity and membership. It is only logical that the military commander and/or government administrator who must deal with numerous ethnic groups, tribes, sub-tribes and clans; village and valley rivalries, criminal networks and local bandits, nomads, strongmen, warlords, merchant families; intricate and complex social, political and security alliances and internationally networked trade and bazaar structures (to name just a few of the confusing identities and social structures) would do all in his power to simplify the player roster.

To manage the complex menagerie of players, solidarity and/or interest groups, military commanders and government administrators usually seek to group the players into simpler social categories and to establish clear political boundaries in place of the multilayered identities and constantly shifting alliances. It is not uncommon to see military commanders and government appointed administrators create and impose identities based on the needs and policies of the state and not necessarily those of the local community. While some might recoil at the practice, creating these social and political identities actually serves a governmental purpose for it is the means by which urban and rural inhabitants are integrated into the political apparatus of the state. To better manage a given territory, whether in urban or rural settings, government administrators may promote an identity, suitable ideology, and grievance for local consumption so as to better shape, manipulate, and control the target population. Prolonged contact between the military, civil administration and the local population then alters existing social centers of power by reinforcing some, reorienting others, or eliminating still others outright and rebuilding them from scratch.

To recap, the three frontier tenets to consider when planning and developing a military-political campaign are as follows:

> Military commanders and government administrators *don't solve problems* or impose solutions. Instead, military commanders and government administrators *manage frontier conditions*.
> Military commanders and government administrators *require local allies* to succeed.
> Military commanders and government administrators seek to *impose a political identity, ideology, and grievance* for local political consumption so as to shape, manipulate, and control the local population.

Frontier Strategies

A given military-political strategy is a plan of action to successfully realize a given objective. Planners identify the intermediate objectives of the various engagement activities and develop an appropriate strategy to exploit a single or series of engagements in support of an overarching regional or theater political-military campaign.

Frontier strategies can be classified into a minimum of four general plans of action.

The first strategy is to simply *pick a side and hold your nose*. This strategy identifies and supports an existing leader, solidarity group or political structure in the village, valley, or district regardless of what unsavory conduct has been attributed to this local ally.

The *blood in the water* strategy seeks to exploit an existing conflict among factions and manipulation of personal rivalries so as to take advantage of infighting. One faction is played off against the other. Once the contending factions have been sufficiently weakened, government forces or a government ally may be allowed to consolidate power.

The third strategy is the *shotgun marriage*. In this strategy a military or government administrator establishes a patronage relationship with a given leader or solidarity group and when appropriate, transitions this relationship to the central government. Government authority is gradually consolidated through the controlled distribution of patronage resources.

The final strategy is a *combination of the three* depending on the specific phase of a military-political campaign plan**.**

To recap, the four general plans of action when executing a military-political campaign are:

> ➢ Pick a side and hold your nose.
> ➢ Blood in the water.
> ➢ Shotgun marriage.
> ➢ Combination of all three as required.

Frontier Tactics

The tactics or calculated actions of *weakening, isolating, attacking-attracting, co-opting, and/or integrating* are based on the assumption that there exists among the populace of a given territory a continuum of relative interests. Relationships between groups are an expression of these relative interests. Relationships are established to achieve objectives and can range from being an adversary to that of an ally. Between the extremes lie degrees of associations and cooperation. These associations vary from being considered an obstacle, neutral or an accomplice.

A tribe, solidarity group, or village cluster may be considered an obstacle to a competitor's power ambitions but at the same time be considered an accomplice to

check the rising power of a different competitor. An ally may remain neutral on a partner's initiative yet be considered an adversary on a different matter, especially if one's own interest are threatened. In a very real sense, there are *no true "enemies" only potential allies*. The fact that everyone is a potential ally does not imply that there is no role for fighting. Fighting is a form of negotiation, especially when renegotiating the social contract, and a clear signal that another's negotiation position is to be taken seriously.

Tactics are executed singly or in combination. A tactical series might consist of isolating and fixing an opponent in place. An opponent's military and political allies might be attacked to weaken and to isolate him further. A strong opponent may be isolated politically and weakened economically while attracting and integrating his rival into one's own alliance network. The application of "weaken, isolate, attack-attract, co-opt and integrate" will vary according to local conditions and differences in local conditions and target audiences. Note that the tactics of "weaken, isolate, attack-attract, co-opt and integrate" are not solely military activities but also constitute distinct political maneuvers.

A general pattern that emerges is for certain groups to rise above others. In time this pyramid flattens as additional groups are integrated into the existing alliance network. A second pattern is for state actors to create patronage relationships with weaker rivals and to establish themselves as the hegemon.

Sample Template

Appropriate application of human factors and cultural terrain models assist commanders and planning staffs to effectively communicate intent within the target audience's cultural frame of reference; a means to observe how the social system actually behaves within its own cultural frame of reference and to provide for a predictive analysis capability as to how military initiatives may affect the social system's overall behavior.

The following template assumes that a distinct social structure exists in an area of operation. The social structure and its environment together constitute the social system.

1. Social Structure and the Environment

    1.1 A social structure is a set of behavioral rules.

1.2 The environment provides resources for social use and puts constraints and restraints on social behavior. In Clausewitzian terms this is the difference between real and true war.

1.3 All social environments contain rival social structures.

2. Behavioral Rules

2.1 A set of social rules govern competition between individuals, tribes and solidarity groups framed on the dual principles of equality and retaliation. Additional principles include nang (honor), melmastia (hospitality), nanawaty (sanctuary), and badal (revenge).

2.2 Competition among equals, equality, honor, competition, and protection of namus (protection of female members synonymous with protecting wealth, land, or homeland). Note that not all within the social system are considered equals. "Yes, you are my rival but you are not my equal". Rules of conduct when engaged in active competition will vary among equals and those considered not of equal social stature.

2.3 Rivalry. Intricate alliance networks with rival factions in other villages, or sub-tribes. In event of conflict, each side has supporters among other factions or groups outside one's own solidarity group.

2.4 Galang culture. The word galang may also refer to the superior, irrigated farmlands of a valley. The word in terms of culture has also come to mean the behavior of people living in the lowlands who have been historically susceptible to conquest and taxation. Lowlanders have been accused of being more willing to forego honor for the sake of survival; an accusation that many farmers have had to endure for centuries. Farmers are naturally tied to the land and more susceptible to central control and taxation.

3. Operating Environment

3.1 Treat every village and its associated territory as a separate entity and know the key personalities, leaders and communicators who influence and shape decisions and actions.

3.2 Village territoriality is distinct and separate from the governmental administrative jurisdictions of district and province.

3.3 Every territory, section, valley, village and village cluster is therefore a separate political - military engagement/campaign.
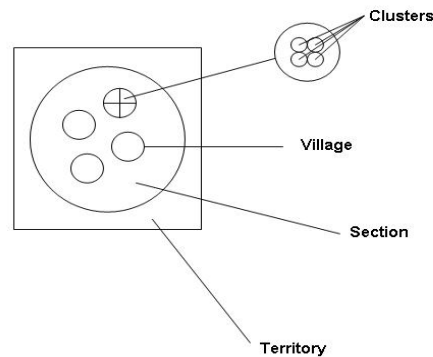
Territory divided into sections. Each section comprised of several villages. Each village has several clusters.

4. Ownership of Village Land

4.1 Family groups live in close proximity to one another and hold common land. This common land is divided into hereditary possessions termed lots.

4.2 Hereditary possessions are divided into family lots and smaller household plots. Individual household plots may be denominated into portions of thirds, sixths or twelfths.

4.3 Rent-free lands may be given to mullahs or other clergy.

5. Village Distribution System

5.1 Family groups within the village may receive shares of communal property such as pasture and/or farmland and water. The place a family holds in the village hierarchy may determine the size of the share. The strong usually provide a portion of their share to the weaker. Changing the size of a share requires much negotiation since it involves communal property and perceptions of status and prestige.

5.2 Introducing resources into the existing distribution system is likely to disrupt the system. It upsets the existing power relationships. Consider the *effects desired and the unintended consequences* if you seek to introduce resources into the community.

5.3 If we seek to introduce resources into the village distribution system recommend that the following contractual stipulations are first met and that all initiatives and transactions should be managed on a quid pro quo basis.

   5.3 a. Ensure that all the terms and conditions of the risks are clearly understood by all parties to the transaction.

   5.3 b. All partners involved in the transaction must share both the associated risks and profits.

   5.3 c. Each transaction must be tied to an identifiable tangible asset, not a promise that something will be done. If the promise is not kept, the defaulter forfeits the asset.

6. Alliance Networks
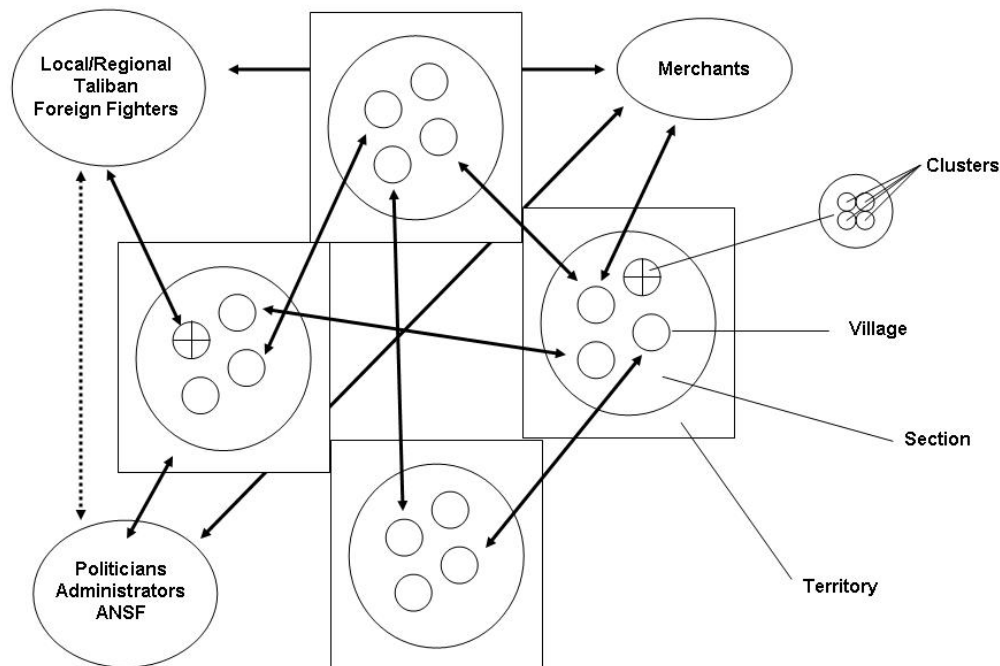
Intricate alliance networks with rival factions in other villages, or sub-tribes. In event of conflict, each side has supporters among other factions or groups outside ones own solidarity group.

7. Community Policing System

7.1 The Arbakai system or a form of this system may exist in the area of operation. The Arbakai is a three-tier decentralized system functioning at the levels of the tribe, the sub-tribe and the community. Every level of the Arbakai is administered by its own Jirga, which has financial autonomy and administrative authority within a geographically defined area.

7.2 The Arbakai is responsible for the implementation of law and order based on the decisions made by the Jirga, to whom they are responsible.

7.3 The Arbakai are often understood to be a militia, but there are clear differences between militias and the Arbakai. First, the Arbakai are unpaid. Second, they are not hired by government, a person, or a company. Third, they carry responsibilities which are approved and recognized as the common or public good.

8. Priority Information Requirements

8.1 What are the current alliance networks in the area of operation?

8.2 Which groups, factions, families are currently engaged in feuding relationships and why?

   8.2.1 What are the current alignments for and against the feuding parties?

   8.2.2 What is the cause for feud i.e. land disputes, blood debt, on-going rivalry?

8.3 Who are the leading merchant families in the territory?

   8.3.1 Is there a merchant hierarchy?

   8.3.2 What does the mercantile structure look like i.e. who are the senior families? Remember: soldiers come and go but merchants are forever.

8.4 How are markets and bazaars organized and financed?

8.4.1 Who is the market or bazaar administrator/security officer/headman?

8.4.2 Who determines who will be named the market or bazaar administrator/security officer?

8.4.3 What security measures safeguard a market or bazaar?

8.4.4 How are market and bazaar security personnel recruited?

8.4.5 What percentage of profit do the merchants pay (security tax) to the market or bazaar administrator/security officer for services?

8.5 How is trade organized and financed?

8.5.1 Who controls the trade routes and where?

8.5.2 Which families control the transit trade in the district/province?

8.5.3 Who are the key brokers and fixers in the district/province?

8.5.4 How are caravans organized and financed?

8.5.5 How are caravans secured? Example: current security tax between Kandahar and Uruzgan province for small loads equates to 100% of the load; larger loads are charged at a lower rate.

8.5.6 Who are the more powerful "badragga" or armed escorts that convey travelers through the limits of their own territory, handing them over to another badragga beyond their own territorial limits in district/province?

8.5.7 Who are the families or solidarity groups that control the more powerful badragga in the district/province?

8.6 What is the relationship between merchants, bandits, government officials, administrators and Taliban in the village, valley, district or province?

8.6.1 When, where and how will Taliban commanders attempt to exploit economic relationships with merchants in district or province?

8.6.2 Who are the key opium traffickers and links to merchant families?

8.6.3 How extensive is the systems of political protection to facilitate trade?

8.7 What is the relationship between government officials, farmers and merchants in the province?

8.7.1 When, where and how will government leaders and merchants attempt to exploit relationship to consolidate power and marginalize, intimidate or attack their political and or economic rivals in the district or province?

8.8 Do permanent alliances or alliances of convenience exist between Taliban, farmers, merchants and government officials in the province?

8.8.1 What conditions (political, economic and security) must exist for an alliance of convenience to develop between the Taliban, farmers and merchant family?

8.8.2 What conditions (political, economic and security) must exist for an alliance of convenience to develop between the Taliban and local government officials?

8.9 Does a local community policing/security system (Arbakai) exist in the area of operation?

8.9.1 If so, is it led by its own Jirga, financially autonomous, with its own administrative authority and geographically defined area?

8.9.2 On average, how long can we expect the local security element to be active before disbanding?

8.10 What type of taxation, duty, or levy system presently exists in the area of operation?

8.10.1 How are taxes, duties and levies assessed and collected?

8.10.2 Which organization assesses and collects taxes, duties and levies?

8.10.3 How are taxes, duties and levies spent? Does the community benefit from the redistribution of wealth?

8.10.4 What is the mechanism to reintroduce funds back into the village?

8.10.5 What is the mechanism in the village to determine how village and public funds will be spent?
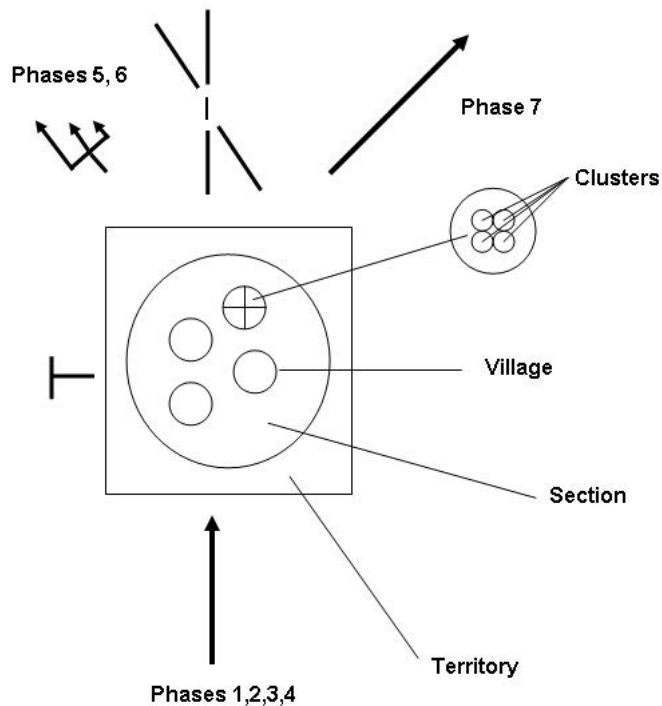
Political - Military Engagement Concept (Sample)

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