



Tribes and Afghanistan: Choosing More Appropriate Tools to Understand the Population

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This article makes the argument that intelligence preparation and strategy for counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan should not be based on assessments of tribe – ever. Tribal "affiliation," "influence," "identification," and "dynamics" poorly correspond to actual local conditions. Information about tribes inaccurately and insufficiently assesses Local Population (LP) behavior and degrades ISAF's ability to make appropriate decisions by distorting and obscuring real indicators of behavior. To understand and influence LP behavior in Afghanistan, ISAF should discontinue its focus on tribes and instead increase focus on the access to locations, resources, information, and expertise that constrain LP capabilities, and the availability of institutions, routines, face-to-face interactions, and costs and benefits that constrain LP intents.

Background

Referring to tribes¹ to assess the behavior of LP assumes that people do things *because* they affiliate, identify with, or are in some other way influenced by their tribe. Tribes are only important to counterinsurgencies if that assumption is true: if tribes do not influence the behavior of LP, then tribal affiliation is just an interesting but irrelevant local detail. Such irrelevant details need not – should not – be included in serious assessments of LP.

If tribes *do* influence LPs in any substantial way, then the only way to determine the usefulness of a tribe-focused assessment is by comparing it to other, competing explanations. It is entirely reasonable to ask whether tribes can explain the behavior of LP *more accurately* or *more consistently* than other concepts can (accuracy), and whether tribal explanations of the behavior of LP allow ISAF to choose feasible, acceptable, and suitable courses of action (COAs) *more frequently* or *more consistently* than other explanations do (decision advantage²). These two

¹ **Tribe** as a term has no consensus definition among anthropologists. In this document, the term is a translation of a local Afghan term, *qabile*, which can be defined as a "localised [group] in which kinship is the dominant idiom of organisation, [...] whose members consider themselves culturally distinct (in terms of customs, dialect or language, and origins)," and who have been politically unified for much of their history (see Tapper, R. 1983. "Introduction," in *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan*, Richard Tapper, editor. London : Croom Helm).

² **Decision advantage** is the extent to which an analytic assessment improves a commander or operator's ability to make decisions. (*Decision advantage* is the term used by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, first employed in the Director of National Intelligence's Vision 2015. The U.S. military's Joint Vision 2020 uses the synonymous term *decision superiority*.)

criteria – accuracy and decision advantage – serve as a basis for comparing competing explanations.

It should go without saying that the behavior of LP should be assessed using the most effective tools available. Unless tribal explanations are better than competing explanations, tribal assessments should be abandoned. In this paper, we compare the effectiveness of tribal explanations to that of a simple ecological explanatory model, and conclude that tribes are the less-effective of the two. This indicates that assessing the behavior of LP in terms of tribe wastes scarce time and resources by devoting attention to a less-effective tool, and that therefore abandoning that tool in favor of a superior competitor can better assist the objectives or operations of ISAF.

Tribal Explanations are Inaccurate

Over the past several decades, research in the field of anthropology has demonstrated the inherent inaccuracy of the concept of *tribe*. Rather than provide any insight into people's behavior, tribe is merely a convenient term used in everyday speech to oversimplify complex environments. Detailed, world-wide historical surveys have demonstrated the incoherence of tribes and similar social groups, and the consistent irrelevance of tribal affiliation to behavior.^{3 4} Researchers in various fields working among many different populations have demonstrated how tribes and other group labels consistently fail to explain or forecast behavior.^{5 6 7 8} For nearly three decades, an entire methodological tradition in anthropology has documented, among other things, the statistical lack of fit between tribal/group labels and measurable patterns of behavior.⁹
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All of these researchers reach a single set of conclusions: members of any particular tribe are often more similar to tribal non-members than they are to other tribal members, and tribal membership does not determine the vast majority of decisions people make – even decisions about the tribe itself. In other words, tribes demonstrate a lack of “construct validity.”^{11 12 13} The

³ Wolf, Eric R. 1982 *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

⁴ Tapper, Richard. 1988 *Ethnicity, Order, and Meaning in the Anthropology of Iran and Afghanistan*. In L. –P. Digard (Ed) *Le Fait Ethnique en Iran en et Afghanistan*. Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

⁵ Brubaker, Rogers. 2004. *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁶ Cohen, Anthony P. 1994. *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

⁷ Laitin, David. 1986. *Hegemony and Culture: The Politics of Religious Change Among the Yoruba*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ Monsutti, Alessandro. 2004. Cooperation, Remittances, and Kinship among the Hazaras. *Iranian Studies* 37(2).

⁹ Romney, A.K., S. C. Weller, and W.H. Batchelder. 1986. “Culture as Consensus.” *American Anthropologist* 88:313-38.

¹⁰ Dressler, William W. 2007. “Cultural Consonance and Psychological Distress: Examining the Associations in Multiple Cultural Domains.” *Culture and Medical Psychiatry*, 31(2):195-224.

¹¹ **Construct validity** refers to the degree to which an analytic concept (a “construct”) can be considered an accurate representation of ground truth. The construct of tribe describes a group of people as the same, and prioritizes information about that group based on the assumption that tribe members are like each other and not like tribe non-members.

¹² Handwerker, W. Penn. 2002. “The Construct Validity of Cultures: Cultural Diversity, Culture Theory, and a Method for Ethnography.” *American Anthropologist* 104(1): 106-122.

idea that tribes represent a coherent and consistent element of LP's operating environments has consistently failed to be supported by rigorous testing.¹⁴

Tribal Explanations Hurt Decision Advantage

Ethnographic research has shown that a focus on group affiliations can hinder decision-makers' ability to make appropriate decisions about a population.¹⁵ Because tribal affiliation does not neatly correspond to actual patterns of behavior, a decision based on the assessment that a tribe collectively "acts a certain way" will automatically (1) wrongly affect tribe members who do not actually act that way, and (2) fail to affect many tribe non-members who actually do act that way. Because tribe-based assessments use assumption rather than evidence to answer so many questions about the LP, it is simply impossible to assess the suitability or even the feasibility of decisions derived from such assessments.

Reliance on tribal explanations of the behavior of LP also makes it easier for local powerbrokers to influence commanders' decisions in ways that run counter to the interests of both ISAF and LP. Assessments that a local powerbroker is a 'tribal leader' infer that benefitting or injuring that leader will somehow benefit or injure the rest of the tribe. When ISAF acts as if that powerbroker represents his tribe, the powerbroker then gains legitimacy and resources that he never enjoyed among his actual fellow tribe members. Powerbrokers often use these gains to benefit themselves and those close to them while negatively affecting the larger LPs, which may result in LP members actively resisting ISAF in order to rid themselves of the locally-illegitimate powerbrokers.

There is No Good Reason to Use Tribal Explanations

Despite problems of inaccuracy and poor decision advantage, tribes are commonly referred to as key social groups in Afghanistan. This assertion is usually justified in one of three ways:

Reference to Others' Opinions. It is common for articles on Afghanistan to assert that tribes influence the behavior of LP. These articles typically support such claims by citing other articles that make similar assertions supported by still more references to articles written by other, like-minded authors, in a prime example of groupthink.¹⁶ For example, a December 2009 report claimed that "tribally-based networks do remain an important political force in Kandahar,"¹⁷ while supporting that claim only by citing a short journalistic article on insurgent conflict in the

¹³ Handwerker, W. Penn. 1997. "Universal Human Rights and the Problem of Unbounded Cultural Meanings." *American Anthropologist* 99(4):799-809.

¹⁴ **Rigorous testing** would require widely-corroborated ethnographic methods and statistics that demonstrate that members of a tribe consistently tend to exhibit patterns of behavior not exhibited by tribe non-members. Absent such findings, the assertion that tribe members behave similarly is entirely unsubstantiated.

¹⁵ Wikan, Unni. 2001. *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁶ **Groupthink** is "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (see Janis, Irving L. 1972. "Victims of Groupthink." Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, pp. 9).

¹⁷ Forsberg, Carl. 2009. "The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar." *The Institute for the Study of War*. 14.

city,¹⁸ a book on small arms which included some research on Afghan gun ownership but no actual findings in regard to tribes,¹⁹ and a book by a journalist based on her experiences in Kandahar after 2001.²⁰ These sources were not a sound basis for making authoritative claims about the relevance of tribes or tribal membership.

Reference to Local People. Afghans themselves often refer to tribes, but articles that rely on these references fail to demonstrate that local people's explanations are accurate, consistent, or reflective of reality. When local Afghans reference tribal and other local identities to explain certain events or behaviors they usually do refer to some of the factors that actually influence behavior, but their explanations also include a lot of irrelevant, trivial, or simply incorrect information.²¹ For example, local Afghans sometimes claim that members of their tribe espouse an honor code such as Pashtunwali.²² But these claims say nothing about the factors that make conformity to the code possible and/or desirable, are usually drastically different from individual Afghan to individual Afghan (not to mention from village to village), and also offer no evidence that the claims have a basis in reality. If and when the actual decisive factors can be determined, behavior can be explained without any reference to the code at all. The fact of the code itself only obscures the important information. The fact that local people talk about tribes is not a sound basis for making authoritative claims about tribes' relevance.

Reference to Isolated Examples. There are many examples of an author describing one or two discreet situations in terms of tribal affiliation.^{23 24 25 26} For example, reports often refer to a "tribal leader." The "leader" portion of the designation is the only part that really matters: for any number of reasons (resources, connections, charisma, constant interaction, luck), a leader is able to influence other people to act in certain ways. It is those resources, connections, charisma, interaction, luck, and other factors that make the leader important. The tribal designation is not necessary to describe or explain the behavior. Examples that "prove" tribal importance invariably make sense without any reference to tribe at all, which strongly suggests that such examples are instances of confirmation bias.²⁷ They are not a sound basis for making authoritative claims about the relevance of tribes.

¹⁸ Jennings, Conrad. 2008. "Update from Kandahar: A City in Crisis and Implications for NATO." *The Culture and Conflict Review*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Special Edition), The Naval Postgraduate School.

¹⁹ Bhatia, Michael, and Mark Sedra. 2008. "Afghanistan, Arms and Conflict." London: Routledge.

²⁰ Chayes, Sarah. 2006. "The Punishment of Virtue. Inside Afghanistan After the Taliban." Penguin Books.

²¹ Pettigrew, Thomas F. 1979. "The Ultimate Attribution Error: Extending Allport's Cognitive Analysis of Prejudice," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 5(4), pp. 461-476.

²² Hawkins, Jonathan. 2009. "The Pashtun Cultural Code: Pashtunwali." *Australian Defense Force Journal*, 180, pp. 16-27.

²³ Jones, Schuyler. 1974. *Men of Influence in Nuristan: A Study of Social Control and Dispute Settlement in Waigal Valley, Afghanistan.* Academic Press Inc.

²⁴ Roy, Olivier. 1990. *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁵ Roy, Olivier. 1989. "Afghanistan: Back to Tribalism or on to Lebanon?" *Third World Quarterly*, 10(4): 70-82.

²⁶ Glatzer, Bernt. 2001. "War and Boundaries in Afghanistan: Significance and Relativity of Local and Social Boundaries." *In Weld des Islams*, 41(3): 379-399.

²⁷ **Confirmation bias** is a tendency for people to prefer information that confirms their own ideas, regardless of the plausibility, credibility, and reliability of that information. Confirmation bias may entail selectively gathering data, interpreting evidence to suit the desired conclusions, or recalling only information that suits the opinion.

Articles which claim that tribes influence the behavior of LP lack rigorous testing to support their assertions. Those articles that have attempted an all-source analysis of the concept, such as the extensive literature review of the work of anthropologists and historians in Afghanistan published in September 2009 by the Human Terrain System Reachback Center, reveal an “overwhelming consensus position” that tribes have very little influence on people’s behavior in Afghanistan.²⁸

On the surface, tribal explanations make sense: members of the same tribe behave similarly and/or cooperate because they are from the same tribe. However, a full explanation must be able to account for both the effect and the *lack of effect*. Tribal affiliation cannot explain similarity and/or cooperation among members of *different* tribes, nor *dissimilarity* and/or *discord* among members of the *same* tribe. This inability to account for exceptions to the rule indicates that tribal explanations are more convenient than they are accurate. Additionally, tribal explanations provide no mechanism²⁹ to explain *how* tribal factors can influence behavior.

Constraint-Based Explanations Are One Alternative to Tribe-Based Explanations

To sum up our argument thus far, there is already a substantial amount of evidence from the social sciences indicating that tribal explanations are generally inaccurate and inappropriate. Additionally, all documents purporting to offer evidence in support of the effectiveness of tribal explanations derive their evidence from uncorroborated, unsubstantiated, or otherwise unsound sources.

Consider instead just one viable alternative to tribe-based explanation. Ecological explanations assume that the drivers of a population’s behavior are so diverse and so variable as to make the behavior essentially random. Nevertheless, patterns of behavior develop out of that randomness if and when conditions in the population’s environment *constrain* the population’s ability or intent to engage in certain forms of behavior. These constraints eliminate some behavioral possibilities, which make the remaining possibilities more likely by default. A constraint-based assessment focuses on the terrain in which a population operates in order to explain the behavior of the population itself.

LP members observe and respond to those features of their daily operating environments that limit the extent to which they can develop the capability and/or intent to engage in certain behaviors. For the purpose of this paper, we use below only those constraints that are universally influential, meaning they affect behavior regardless of the location or culture of the population. These key “social terrain” features were selected from replicated research findings in cognitive neuroscience and developmental psychology based on the extent to which explicit mechanisms in the human brain could be found for each feature.^{30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42}

²⁸ Afghanistan Research Reachback Center White Paper. 2009. “My Cousin’s Enemy is My Friend: A Study of Pashun “Tribes” in Afghanistan.” TRADOC G2 Human Terrain System.

²⁹ A **mechanism** is the means by which a cause elicits an effect. An explanation without a mechanism is just an interesting story – there is no way to know if such a story should be believed. The lack of a causal mechanism in tribal explanations also makes it extremely difficult to judge where, when, how, and behavioral influence should be changed, or to anticipate second- and third-order effects that will emanate from those changes.

³⁰ Greenspan, Stanley I. and Stuart G. Shanker. 2004. *The First Idea: How Symbols, Language, And Intelligence Evolved From Our Primate Ancestors To Modern Humans*. Da Capo Press.

This also ensured that the accuracy of these constraint-based explanations has already been demonstrated through rigorous testing.

The comparative effectiveness of constraint-based explanations can be seen in a wide array of situations. For instance, often a local leader in Afghanistan must be replaced because of poor performance, death, opposition, or any number of other reasons. ISAF and GIRoA usually have an interest in forecasting the selection of a replacement. Whether attempting to forecast the actual selection, or to forecast the probable outcomes of one person being selected over another, intelligence analysis must first identify the constraints to which the previous leader adapted that made him successful or unsuccessful. Eight factors can constrain any leader's influence:

- **Sites.** The LP was dependent upon sites to which the leader controlled access. These could include such sites as trade routes, housing, or security checkpoints.
- **Resources.** The LP was intimidated by or dependent upon resources to which the leader controlled access. These could include such resources as guns, land, or other forms of wealth.
- **Information.** The LP was able to respect the leader for his knowledge. This could mean he had access to specialized information, or that he was skilled at conveying that information effectively.
- **Expertise.** The LP had to rely on the leader's expertise for certain endeavors. This could mean the leader himself had the expertise needed, or that he knew the people who had the expertise.
- **Institutions.** The LP was able to tie its affiliation with the leader to accepted community practices or traditions. These traditions could be couched in broad ethnic or religious terms, but could just as easily refer to extremely localized customs.

³¹ Mohr, Lawrence. 1996. *The Causes of Human Behavior: Implications for Theory and Method in Social Science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

³² Pinker, Steven. 1997. *How the Mind Works*. New York: Norton.

³³ Bargh, John A. and Tanya L. Chartrand. 1999. "The Unbearable Automaticity of Being." *American Psychologist* 54(7):462-479.

³⁴ Cahill, L., and McGaugh, J. L. 1998. "Mechanisms of Emotional Arousal and Lasting Declarative Memory." *Trends in Neurosciences*, 21(7), 294-299.

³⁵ Chiel, H., & Beer, R.. 1997. "The Brain has a Body: Adaptive Behavior Emerges from Interactions of Nervous System, Body and Environment." *Trends in Neurosciences*, 20, 553-557.

³⁶ Compton, Rebecca J. 2003. "The Interface Between Emotion and Attention: A Review of Evidence from Psychology and Neuroscience." *Behavioral and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews* 2: 115-129.

³⁷ Dijksterhuis, A., and Bargh, J. A. 2001. "The Perception-Behavior Expressway: Automatic Effects of Social Perception on Social Behavior." In M. Zanna, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 33. San Diego: Academic Press, 1-40.

³⁸ Eagleman, David. 2004. "The Where and When of Intention." *Science* 303:1144-1146.

³⁹ Haidt, Jonathan. 2001. "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment." *Psychological Review* 108(4): 814-834.

⁴⁰ Marks N.L and H. Miller 1984. "Ten Years of Research on the False-Consensus Effect: An Empirical and Theoretical Review." *Psychological Bulletin* 8: 728-735.

⁴¹ Nairne, James S., Sarah R. Thompson, and Josefa N. S. Pandeirada. 2007. "Adaptive Memory: Survival Processing Enhances Retention." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*. 33(2): 263-273.

⁴² McGaugh, James L. 2000. *Memory – a Century of Consolidation*. *Science* 287: 248-251.

- **Routines.** The LP was familiar with the leader's actions to the point that his behavior was predictable. This could mean the leader maintained the same patterns of behavior despite changing conditions, or that conditions during the leader's tenure had changed so little that his behavior had remained the same by default.
- **Signaling.** The LP engaged in consistent, face-to-face interaction with the leader. This could mean he was closely related to most LP members, or that he simply cultivated long-standing relationships with them.
- **Outcomes.** The LP associated the leader with certain key outcomes. This could mean the leader had truly done things that benefitted the LP, or that he had simply lived so long that he had established a good, stable track record.

This constraint-based explanation of local leadership predicts that LPs will select new leaders who seem able to adapt to the previous leader's constraints, and that new leaders will succeed or fail based on their ability to actually conform to those constraints.

This was the case in Kandahar in 2007 when Mullah Naqibullah died and GIROA chose his replacement. The constraints determining Naqibullah's influence over the LP included:

- His record of successful outcomes, such as his mujahidin activities in the 1980s,⁴³ his negotiations with the Taliban in 1994,⁴⁴ and his mediation between Hamid Karzai and Mullah Omar in 2001.⁴⁵
- His consistent face-to-face interaction with the LP, as he remained in the district among LP nearly his entire life though Soviet, Taliban, and post-Taliban periods, with his influence decreasing only after the fall of the Taliban, when interaction with non-local actors became important.^{46 47}
- His access to important resources, as he reportedly received support from the U.S. during the 1980s and from the Pakistan Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) during the 1990s,⁴⁸ with his influence waning after losing funding after 2001 and control of the local police in 2005.⁴⁹

Many people over whom Naqibullah had influence were affiliated with the Alikozai tribe, but Naqibullah did not maintain identical influence across all Alikozai areas. To explain Naqibullah's influence in terms of "tribal dynamics" misses the key factors that allowed his success. Nevertheless, when Naqibullah died in 2007, GIROA president Hamid Karzai declared

⁴³ Pigott, Peter. 2007. "Canada in Afghanistan: The War So Far." Dundurn Press Ltd. pp. 112.

⁴⁴ Rashid, Ahmend. 2001. "Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia." New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 28-29.

⁴⁵ Zulfikar, Shahzada. 2002. "The Fall and After." Newsline.com.

⁴⁶ Giustozzi, Antonio and Noor Ullah. 2007. "The inverted cycle: Kabul and the strongmen's competition for control over Kandahar, 2001-2006." *Central Asian Survey* 26(2), pp. 177.

⁴⁷ Giustozzi, Antonio. 2008. "Koran, Kalashnikoc, and Laptop. The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan." New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 20.

⁴⁸ Rashid, Ahmend. 2001. "Taliban. Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia." New Haven: Yale University Press. pp. 28-29.

⁴⁹ Giustozzi, Antonio. 2008. "Koran, Kalashnikoc, and Laptop. The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan." New York: Columbia University Press. pp. 20.

Karimullah Naqibi, a young man whose only claim to influence was his familial relationship to Naqibullah, the replacement leader. The government gave Karimullah resources to bolster his position,⁵⁰ making other local leaders much more constrained by comparison. However, these same leaders were much less constrained than Karimullah in regard to those other factors that had enabled Naqibullah's original influence, and therefore maintained various degrees of real influence among the LP.

While Naqibullah's unconstrained access to all relevant factors had enabled his influence, the presence of multiple, partially-constrained prospective leaders impeded their influence and fragmented the population. Competition between various leaders eventually allowed insurgents to advance their presence and interests in the area. While many people on the ground clearly saw the effects that Karzai's pick would have, tribal explanations of local influence do not anticipate the results of Karimullah's succession. They also fail to anticipate how Achakzai tribal leaders would be unable to control a young tribesman once he gained control of the border police and transportation routes of Spin Boldak province,⁵¹ or how the actions of corrupt Afghan National Police units could hinder reintegration of former insurgents regardless of those insurgents' tribal affiliation, or how Popalzai-tribe member Mullah Berader would be chosen to replace Alikozai-tribe member Mullah Obaidullah in the Taliban's senior leadership, or any number of other examples.

Constraint-based explanations anticipate all of these results. If ISAF or GIRoA knows the constraints to which LPs must adapt, that indicates ways to anticipate LP behavior and estimate that behavior's success. If those constraints are not known, that indicates clear information gaps which should be filled and addressed. Either way, knowledge of constraints helps decision makers in ways that knowledge of tribes does not.

Conclusion

Reliance on tribal explanations fails to help ISAF understand or anticipate LP behavior. ISAF is better served by identifying the concrete factors that allow or constrain behavior, rather than trying to ascribe that behavior to a person or social group. Reliance on tribal explanations wastes critical time and resources by focusing attention on superficial customs, terminology, and other hyper-local characteristics rather than on durable and substantial influences. It is not surprising therefore, that "tribal engagements" rarely yield consistent and lasting successes.

In all ISAF operations, operators need to engage with local powerbrokers in a way that satisfies those powerbrokers without undermining LPs' local interests, GIRoA's national interests, or ISAF's strategic objectives. Such a balance between competing demands is difficult enough to achieve even under the best of conditions. There is a better chance of success if operators can collect and organize ground truth in a way that provides them with a clear view of their options and a clear appreciation for the consequences of choosing any particular option over the others. Tribal explanations cannot do that.

⁵⁰ Forsberg, Carl. 2009. "The Taliban's Campaign for Kandahar." *The Institute for the Study of War*. 37.

⁵¹ Aikins, Matthieu. 2009. "The Master of Spin Boldak." *Harper's Magazine*, December, pages 52-62.

Constraint-based explanations do not make the assumption that tribal or other group affiliations are causal. Constraints can explain cross-tribe similarities – similar behaviors are adaptations to similar constraints – as well as within-tribe differences – different behaviors are adaptations to different constraints, without any need to refer to problematic tribal concepts. Constraints can explain everything tribal affiliation can explain, as well as what tribal affiliation cannot explain. The accuracy and direct relevance of a constraint-based framework allows analysts and operators to sift through the sometimes-overwhelming amount of information about LPs to specifically extract the information that is more likely to be useful, and to analyze that information in a way that is more likely to be actionable.

Reliance on tribal explanations inaccurately identifies and describes LPs, inaccurately identifies causes of behavior, fails to tell ISAF commanders and operators what they need to know, and often fosters counterproductive strategies, policies, and operations. Given these inherent weaknesses as well as the explanatory power of just one alternative, to insist upon using tribes to understand LP is to choose a complicated and deeply flawed explanation over a simple and defensible one. There is simply no reason to continue to assess Afghanistan's local populations in terms of tribal affiliation.

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