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Afghan Governance Considerations

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President Karzai appears to follow an imperial-confederacy form of governance which assumes that disparate Afghan territories are controlled by autonomous groups and where quid-pro-quo and patronage relationships assist in imposing order and stability. The system of government in Afghanistan is therefore an ad hoc combination of political expediency and private enterprise. It is efficient in its own way, but can also lead to flagrant abuses and corruption. The following are a number of considerations that might shed light on the Karzai government's approach to counterinsurgency.

I start with a two assumptions. First, the tension between the Karzai government and the various groups competing for influence and resources is an expression of power. Second, competition takes place within an established power-sharing system that includes urban and rural, sectarian, political, economic and tribal/qawm groupings.

Throughout history rulers and administrators located in the capital had to resort to various methods to retain power and prevent attacks from the countryside or to check the process by which a new dynasty might arise to seize power. The countryside and its inhabitants embody a continuous danger that threatens urban life and government.

State power, then as now, spreads outward from a number of urban centers with a force that tends to grow weaker with distance. The distance from the center of power influences the amount of force the ruling authority is capable of projecting to achieve national control at any given time.

For analysis or assessment purposes, the reach of state power and its power projection capability can be divided into three regions of influence. Each region differs in regard to the nature and extent of state control.

In an outlying region where the population cannot be checked or forced to yield, the administrative authority attempts to secure a certain level of influence by political manipulation setting one powerful family against another or giving formal investiture to one qawm rather than another. At a minimum, the ruling authority will attempt to prevent rebellion.

The ruling authority may exercise more direct control by means of local strongmen in areas closer to the centers of power. Local strongmen are given investiture in return for support of the provincial or central government. This relationship is reinforced on occasion by increased

military presence or the withdrawal of recognition and transfer of investiture to a rival strongman.

The third region consists of strategic areas vital to the survival of the regime. Here the authorities maintain more direct control. Permanent military garrisons or security force presence maintains order to prevent the emergence of local centers of power.

The dividing line between the outlying region and the area closer to the center of power is not fixed. It depends on the influence of the ruling authority and the changing balance of power.

Relationship between the Central Government and the Provinces

All provincial administration is based on the premise that “Afghans rule -they don’t administer”.

A provincial governor, either as a member of the ruling family or once he has pledged his loyalty to the central government will organize the administration of the area under his control in accordance with the political and security realities in the province.

The provincial government administrative structure may well be similar in its composition to the central government ex. ministries, bureaucratic administration etc; but the conduct of day-to-day governance will be heavily influenced by specific administrative and security requirements and reflect the character of the inhabitants in a specific locale.

The notion of a uniform administrative structure runs counter to the reality we are facing in Afghanistan. Administrative procedures are tailored to fit the local area’s political and security realities.

Civil-Military Relations

Civilian control over the military consists of a deliberate policy of breaking up undue concentrations of military and police power under any one commander.

The mechanism to assure civil dominance over the security forces consists of carefully regulating the flow of supplies and pay.

Civilian officials charged with resupplying security forces may also play one commander off against another. This tactic can be used to prevent any concentration of power and defiance should a security force commander find himself tempted to bring armed forces to bear on the decision-makers in the capital.

The intent is to strengthen the root by weakening the branches.

This simple model to express the dynamic in play:

- If you are loyal: you get paid.
- If your loyalty is questionable: you get paid for services rendered.

- If you are disloyal: you do not get paid.

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