

## Developing an IO Environmental Assessment in Khost Province: Information Operations at PRT Khost in 2008

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### Introduction

The goal of Information Operations (or “IO”) is to “influence, corrupt, disrupt or usurp adversarial human and automated decision making while protecting our own.”<sup>1</sup> But how does one know whether the decision process – either human or automated – has actually been influenced in some way? We can assume or surmise that, based on the actions of the target of the IO campaign, some desired effect was achieved or not achieved (but how much of that was based on our IO campaign and how much on other factors, perhaps unknown even to us?). We can also, if given the opportunity, ask the target after the fact whether campaign activities influenced their decision making.

Commanders conducting counterinsurgency operations should have two primary IO targets: the insurgents and the local population. John Nagl notes that “persuading the masses of people that the government is capable of providing essential services – and defeating the insurgents – is just as important” as enticing the insurgents to surrender and provide information on their comrades.<sup>2</sup>

The Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is not charged with directly targeting insurgents. Instead, its mission is to build the capacity of the host government to provide governance and development to the local population – to show the people that the government can indeed provide “essential services” as Nagl notes.

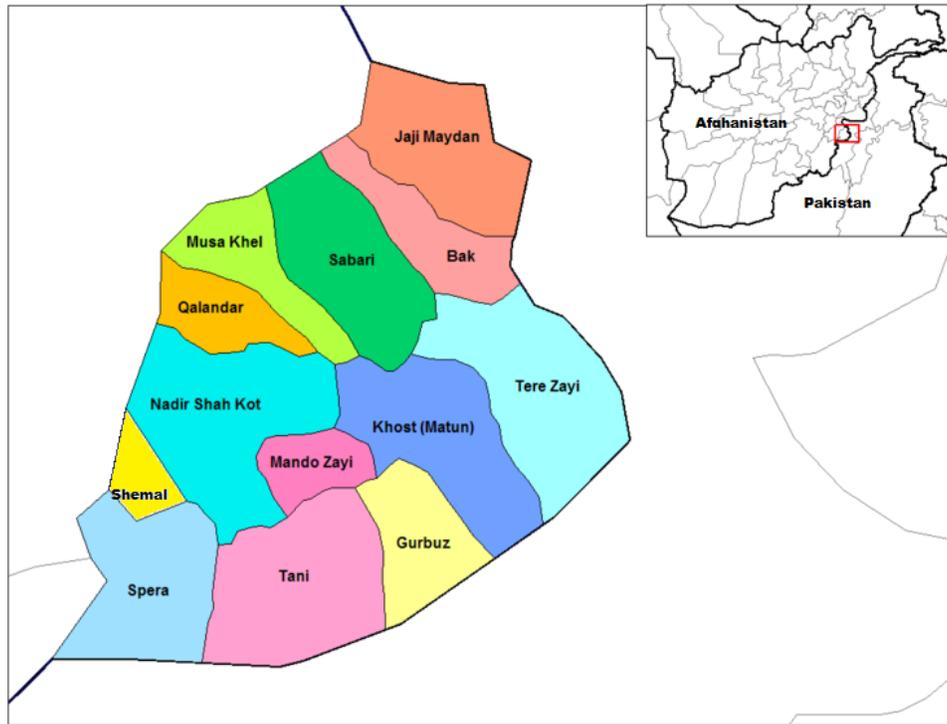
Information Operations traditionally suffer from a lack of available metrics by which planners can assess their environment and measure the effectiveness of their programs. It may be impossible to show direct causation – or even correlation – between Information Operations and actual effects (*i.e.*, did my PSYOP program actually have its desired effect?) in all cases. This often places IO practitioners at a distinct disadvantage when attempting to gain the confidence of unit commanders, who are tasked with allocating scarce battlefield resources and who are often skeptical of Information Operations as a whole.

This project developed an Information Operations Environmental Assessment tool that can be utilized and replicated at the unit level (battalion or less) for use by planners in order to establish an initial benchmark (where am I?) and measure progress toward achieving the IO program goals and objectives (where do I want to go?) The Provincial Reconstruction Team in Khost province, Afghanistan, needed a tool by which the leadership could benchmark current conditions and

evaluate the information environment under which the population lived. It was hoped that such a tool could help provide clues whether our IO (and overall PRT) efforts were having the intended effect.

### **Khost Province, Afghanistan**

The province itself is situated along the eastern border with Pakistan, adjacent to the notorious Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Kurram Agency and North Waziristan – areas which have recently been subject to a number of U.S. drone strikes. The major ethnic groups are Pashtun tribes who share the common tribal tradition of *Pashtunwali*. Recent estimates put Khost’s population at 639,849. There are 87,199 households which have, on average, 8 family members living there. Almost 98 percent of the population lives in rural districts, with the remaining 2 percent in the urban core of Khost City. Nearly half (46 percent) of households rely on agriculture as their source of income, and over half (54 percent) own or manage farmland or plots. Overall literacy is projected around 28 percent (44 percent of men versus 7 percent of women) though 52 percent of men age 15-24 are literate. There are 157 primary and secondary schools and 2,205 teachers working to educate 107,732 boys and girls in Khost. Khost is also home to a university – Shaik Zayed University – which had 687 students as of 2005. The vast majority of villages do not have health care facilities readily present.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1. Map of Khost Province, Afghanistan**

## IO Environment Assessment Tool

In order to create a user-friendly IO assessment tool, the decision was made to use a Likert scale approach. The Likert scale is a psychometric response scale where respondents provide a level of agreement to a statement or question. It uses a bipolar scaling method, measuring positive and negative on the extreme ends. (*i.e.*, Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) Likert scales are subject to distortion, such as central tendency bias, acquiescence bias and social desirability bias. However, it is readily comprehensible and easy to understand for the novice researcher, and presents a good start from which to develop a simple Information Operations Environmental Assessment Tool.

The tool used would ask participants open ended question or questions. Based on the response and follow up questioning, the interviewer would categorize the participant’s response on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the “best” and 1 being the “worst.” One important difference between traditional Likert scale methodology in survey research and this methodology is that the interviewer, not the respondent, is the one who quantifies the response. This is mostly due to issues of participant literacy and the hazards of having to translate between English and Pashtu, the dominant language spoken in Khost province, Afghanistan. Another difference is that the assessment tool does not directly ask the interviewer or participant to “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” with a specific statement. Rather, the scaling methodology provides examples to get an idea of what a security condition valued at “2” might be compared to “4” and the interviewer marks the appropriate value (a judgment call, to be sure). The figure below provides an example. (“ANSF” refers to Afghan National Security Forces, such as the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. “AAF” means “Anti-Afghan Forces,” which was the nomenclature used at the time to refer to the insurgents.<sup>i</sup>)

			Age	1	2	3	4	5
			Gender					
Category	Question	Scale/Example						
Security	In general, describe the security situation in your village.	1 ANSF ineffective, seriously corrupt, nonexistent; AAF operate freely and dominate						
		2 ANSF limited effectiveness, moderately corrupt; AAF activity significant						
		3 ANSF moderately effective, some corruption, AAF moderate presence						
		4 ANSF effective, little corruption; AAF activity small/limited effectiveness						
		5 ANSF very effective, barely to no corruption; AAF nonexistent or extremely small						

**Figure 2. Sample Assessment Tool Question**

The instrument is designed to gather data on five main domains: Security, Development, Governance, Economic Conditions and the View of the Future. In this way, IO planners can see if their programs had an impact on any or all of the major categories which are the emphasis of international efforts in Afghanistan. Using the tool, planners might give insight into the relationship between the categories. They can also gauge who the population “trusts” to provide

<sup>i</sup> During the author’s stay in Afghanistan, that nomenclature changed from “ACM” – Anti-Coalition Militia, to “AAF” to “EOA” or “Enemies of Afghanistan.” A series of three name changes over a nine-month period says more about us than it does about the insurgents, but that is the subject for an entirely different article.

truthful information, and what the primary source of information is (such as publicly available sources or other newspaper, radio, television, etc.)

### **Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research**

It is important to distinguish the use of the IO Environmental Assessment Tool from pure survey research or *quantitative analysis*. At the unit level, formal survey research, including random selection of participants, stratification, scaling and regression analysis would be impractical. IO planners at the unit level do not have the resources or the time to conduct such endeavors. Therefore, these results should not be taken to be an accurate reflection of public opinion in the same way we would suggest a public opinion poll in the United States might be (as much as can be said for that in any case!). This is an instrument that was designed and used under wartime conditions in an area of the world which can barely be said to be at a Third World level and with more than two-thirds of the population being illiterate.

The tool was also crafted so that, with a little training, IO planners at the unit level could train squad leaders and troops on its use and purpose, so that other members of the team might also be in a position to collect data for the IO effort. Its use can best be described as *qualitative research*, rather than quantitative.

Qualitative research has its strengths and weaknesses. While it is subjective in nature, it seeks to understand and gain insight into the thought process of respondents. It relies on inductive logic in order to generate hypotheses and conclusions. If the goal of Information Operations is to change the decision-making process by actors in order to influence their actions, then qualitative research attempts to gain insight into that thought process, recognizing that “how people think” influences their behavior.

Reliability is also an issue in qualitative research, since it relies on the interviewer (in this case, the author) to measure the data and therefore can become “personal” in nature. However, it can capture more dimensions of concepts that we seek to explore.

The reader may also ask whether it is possible to make generalized statements about a population of approximately 700,000 based on a little more than 200 interviews. The goal of all surveys is to be able to say something about a population based on interviewing a sample. The raw data itself is “correct” in the sense that it is an accurate reflection of what the respondent said. Problems arise when statisticians and pollsters attempt to use statistical methodology in order to say that within a given degree of confidence *an entire population* shares a certain opinion or point of view. That methodology – random selection of a sample, stratification, etc. – was not possible under the operating conditions in Khost province at the time. That being said, more than 200 interviews is a significant undertaking (especially for a one-man operation) and the data is consistent in its findings. Indeed, just the mere fact that we were conducting interviews on such a large scale in and of itself is extremely useful for units involved in counterinsurgency and reconstruction effort. But it is not data which can be generalized to the entire population and should not be confused as such.

## **Conducting the Assessments**

The PRT conducted missions almost daily during the time frame it was stationed in Khost (March through November 2008) and the IO officer traveled on the missions most of the time in order to collect data and conduct the assessment. The data was updated regularly and reported to the leadership team during the Battle Update Brief (or “BUB”), which was held three times per week. The IO officer was aided by a cultural advisor assigned to the IO unit, a local national working directly for Coalition Forces.

During the more than 200 interviews, several practices were adopted to elicit more “honest” responses. That being said, it is important to acknowledge up front that interviews are being conducted by an individual in an American uniform, wearing body armor and carrying weapons and with other American and Afghan military and police in the area. Despite the presence of a cultural advisor who was interpreting for the IO officer, some results may have been skewed, but how much or often is unknown.

There is a Pashtu saying that “A single ‘no’ is worth a thousand ‘yeses.’” This means that whenever questioned by someone, a “yes” response will tend to elicit follow up questions while a “no” response might end the questioning. After decades of brutal Soviet occupation, civil war and the repressive rule of the Taliban, most Afghans are understandably wary when approached and asked if they would mind “just answering a few questions.” We must also acknowledge this limitation.

Every attempt was made to conduct each interview separately, away from groups of civilians and military personnel. This was done to mitigate not only the presence of security personnel, but also to separate the individual away from his group of friends, who might influence him. However, this was not always possible.

The reader will note immediately that very few females were interviewed. Tribal customs in this area of Afghanistan do not permit interaction between foreigners (or even other non-family tribal males) with post pubescent females. Not surprisingly, when a PRT convoy would arrive in the area of any village, any females outside their compound returned indoors.

## **Data and Results**

The original benchmark study was conducted from 29 April to 16 June, 2008 and consisted of 98 interviews gathered in 11 of the 13 districts of Khost province. The follow-up study was conducted 29 June to 26 October, 2008. During this period, Coalition and Afghan Security Forces conducted a series of operations along K-G Road (Khost to Gardez Road) and in the several districts of Khost province. This provided us the opportunity to evaluate the effect of not only these operations but continued operations of the PRT and local government on the information operations environment.

Below are the frequency tables showing the location distribution, age range and gender of interviews conducted.<sup>ii</sup> Even though operational needs dictated the location and number of interviews, the sample size permits us to conclude that the data is fairly reliable.

Count of District	
District	Total
Bak	5
Gorbuz	5
Jaji Maidan	8
Mando Zayi	1
Matun	15
Musa Khail	9
Nador Sha Kot	10
Shemal	14
Spera	7
Tani	12
Tera Zayi	12
Grand Total	98

Count of Age Range	
Age Range	Total
17 or less	6
18 to 35	54
36 to 50	26
51 to 75	10
76 and up	2
Grand Total	98

Count of Gender	
Gender	Total
Female	5
Male	93
Grand Total	98

**Table 1. Benchmark Study Frequencies (29 April – 16 June 2008)**

Count of District	
District	Total
Gorbuz	19
Jaji Maidan	5
Mando Zayi	5
Matun	9
Musa Kahil	14
Nador Sha Kot	23
Qalandar	5
Shemal	5
Spera	1
Tani	10
Tere Zayi	8
Grand Total	104

Count of Age Range	
Age Range	Total
17 or less	19
18 to 35	39
36 to 50	34
51 to 75	12
Grand Total	104

Count of Gender	
Gender	Total
Female	3
Male	101
Grand Total	104

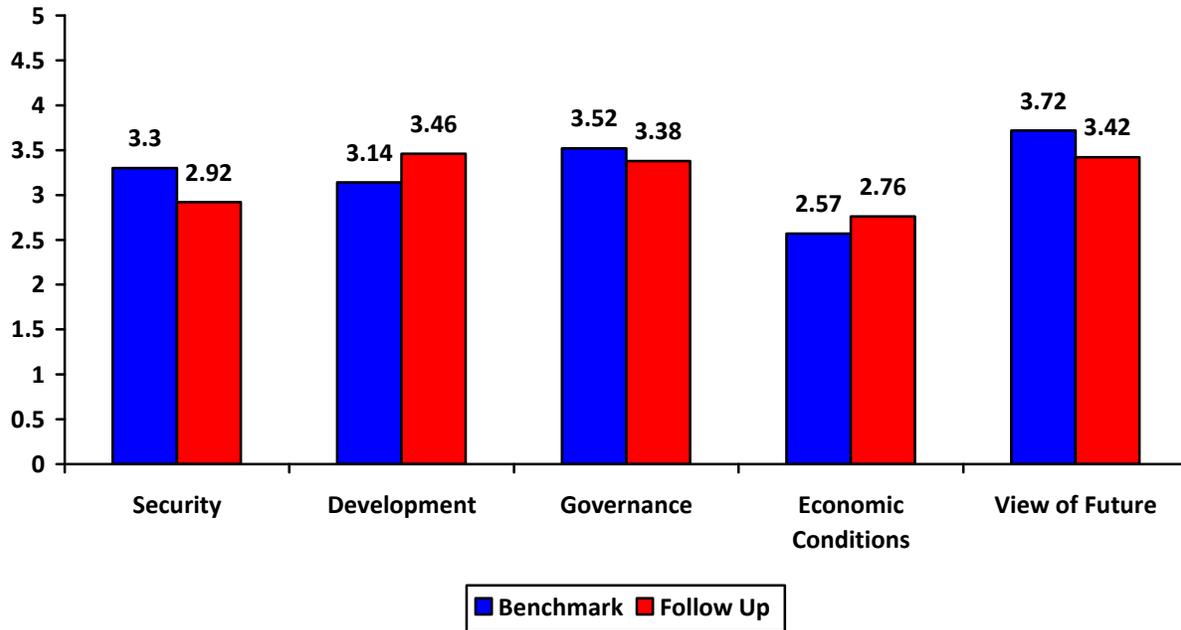
**Table 2. Follow Up Study Frequencies (29 June – 26 October 2008)<sup>iii</sup>**

The summarization of both studies below shows a remarkable consistency in the findings. Two measures show a slight improvement – Development and Economic Conditions – while three measures show a moderate decline – Security, Governance and the View of the Future. This reinforced the general understanding of facts on the ground during the time period the PRT was operating and seems to show that the situation in Khost had been following the same general trajectory as Afghanistan as a whole.

<sup>ii</sup> The author used Microsoft Office Excel 2007 for data collection and analysis.

<sup>iii</sup> No respondents were over the age of 75 were interviewed in the follow up study.

# Khost IO Environment

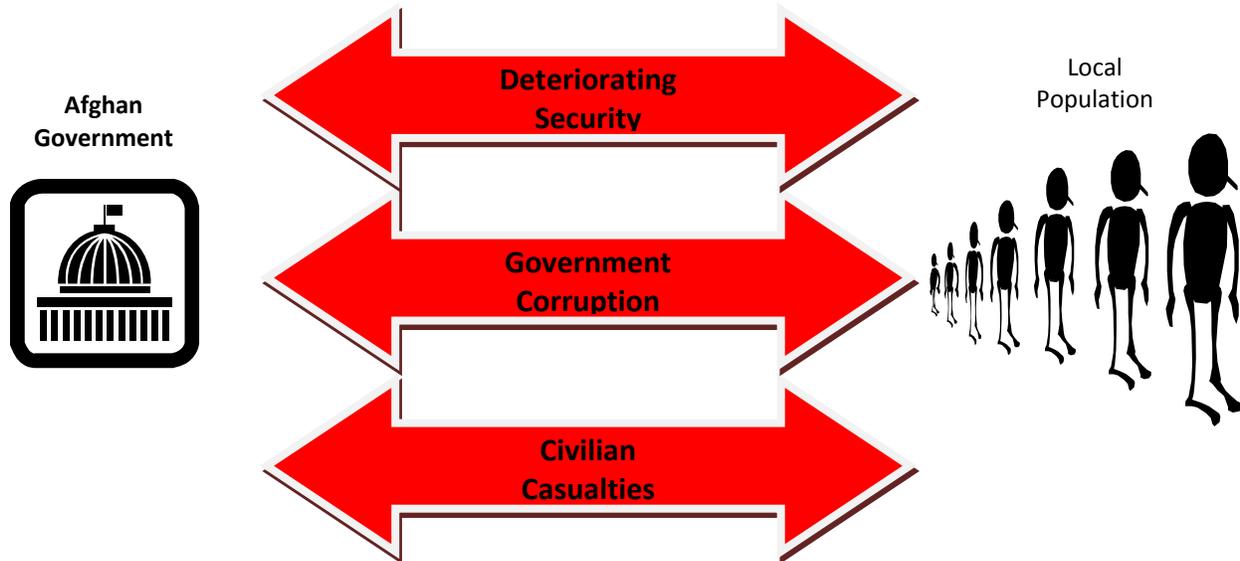


**Figure 1. Average Responses**

Several factors are likely in play. A significant increase in insurgent activity in the region – well reported in open source both in the international media and locally in Khost – plays largely into the insurgents’ goal of separating the population from the government by showing that the government is unwilling and/or unable to secure the population.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, a number of civilian killings by Coalition Forces, including a popular national cricket player in Khost<sup>5</sup>, has made the population feel uncomfortable with the international military presence. Endemic government corruption at the national and provincial level has also certainly contributed to frustration with the Afghan government.

At the same time, there has been some improvement in development in the province through the efforts of the Provincial Reconstruction Team and the maneuver units, and the beginning of the year-long effort to build the K-G Road, a U.S. Agency for International Development project. Food prices, as high as 5,000 afghani for 80 kg of flour in July, had fallen to about 2,600 afghani by November 2008. While this is still high by Afghan standards, the decrease in food prices has helped mitigate some economic fears.

The graphic below best summarizes what was believed to be the general situation. It should be noted, however, that two of the three main factors driving a wedge between the local population and the government are not directly tied to the insurgents, but are rather related to the Afghan government and the Coalition.



## Discussion of Findings

*Security.* At the conclusion of the benchmark study, joint operations began to attempt to improve security conditions in Khost province. According to McCreary, Khost province had only 13 clashes with Afghan and Coalition forces in October – a drop from 22 in September and the lowest since the May 2008 total of 14.<sup>6</sup> This also coincided with the traditional lull in cross border infiltration and attacks due to the onset of winter, as well as the increase of U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle attacks into Pakistan. It remains to be seen whether the reduced violence is permanent or simply a pause as the insurgents regroup, reorganize and make another push.

Perception of security in Khost declined from 3.3 to 2.92, an 11.5 percent decline.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of interviews were conducted during the ongoing security operations and extensive public coverage of the deteriorating security conditions in Khost and Afghanistan at large. It is possible that this is a lagging indicator, and that should significant activity in Khost continue to decline, we would see an improvement of public perception of the security environment.

That being said, there were some indications of a great deal of frustration with the Afghan National Police (ANP). “They hide behind ‘hescos’ during the day and are thieves at night,” according to one interview respondent. ANP currently receive inadequate training, poor equipment and low pay and are behaving accordingly. Improving their situation and increasing their presence in the outlying villages and districts may go a long way toward improving public confidence in the Afghan government. The Afghan National Army (ANA), on the other hand, is well liked and respected (as well as being better trained, equipped and paid). In areas where there are ANA units, respondents’ security perception was typically much better. It should be noted that members of the ANA are drawn from the national population and assigned nationwide, whereas ANP are drawn from the local community and assigned locally. One possible effect of this policy might be that ANP are more susceptible to bribery, intimidation and

corruption since the criminals and insurgents can easily find them and their families, whereas a member of the ANA might be from a province and tribe on the other side of the country.

There seemed to be an increase in complaints about Coalition Forces conducting searches – especially at night – and the growth in civilian casualties. Locals complained that only Afghan security forces should be permitted to conduct searches, and that they could be conducted during the day. They wondered why the Coalition could not just surround a house at night to prevent anyone from escaping and then wait until morning so the entire village could see who was being arrested and why.<sup>iv</sup> It should be noted that villagers said they had no problem with arresting those who aid the Taliban in any way. They also said that if villages permitted insurgents to use their village to stage attacks on Afghan and Coalition Forces, it was appropriate for the Coalition to respond, even if civilians are killed. This follows the *Pashtunwali* tradition of attacking those who permit their homes to be used as a base to conduct attacks on others. In that same vein, most locals were extremely pleased with American efforts to step up UAV cross-border attacks on Taliban and al Qaeda safe-havens in Pakistan.

For the local population, it is clear that despite the tens of millions of dollars of investment by the government and international community in public goods and services, security remains the paramount issue. As was expressed in many interviews, “What good is a school when we live under threat each day? The government does not take security seriously. At least under the Taliban, we had security.”

The frustration with Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to effectively react to and counter insurgent actions appears to be the driving force behind the anxiety expressed about security. The local sentiment that the government “does not take security seriously” was reinforced when it was pointed out that even when insurgents are arrested, they are soon released because of government corruption (i.e., bribing judges or village elders being coerced or bribed into vouching for the perpetrator’s innocence) or ineffectiveness. Afghan forces – primarily ANP – are suspected as being easily intimidated, unwilling to fight and largely corrupt. (It should be pointed out that the ANP do take the highest casualties among the ANSF.) The lack of confidence on the part of the population, coupled with the intimidation tactics of the insurgents and inability of Coalition and Afghan Forces to clear and hold large land areas may create a “perfect storm” in terms of a growing psychology of fear.

*Development.* Respondents’ perception of development improved by more than 10 percent, from 3.14 to 3.46. There was a significant increase in the number of projects and development, and with the beginning of construction on the Khost-to-Gardez (K-G) Road project by USAID – a long awaited national development goal – improvement was expected. Development remains one of the most positive aspects of the Coalition presence in Khost province. However, despite widespread public support for international assistance, there seemed to be mounting frustration at the perceived slow pace. Compared to other provinces, Khost is actually one of more developed in terms of road infrastructure, schools, cell phone availability and industrial production.<sup>8</sup> In spite of this, the vast majority of the population lives in poor conditions.

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<sup>iv</sup> The author is not criticizing Coalition military tactics, merely reporting what the common complaints were.

It appears that previous Coalition units might not have been effective in managing expectations on the part of the local population in terms of development. One common refrain is, “You have been here for six years. How come you have not done more? How come we still live like this?” While there has been much publicity on the fact that the local government and Coalition Forces have spent approximately \$50 million on reconstruction and development in Khost last year and this year, it might as well have been \$50 *billion* if the vast majority of the local population does not see a tangible benefit in their daily life.

To be sure, there are tangible benefits that are a direct or indirect result of the international presence. During the Taliban regime, there were no cell phones, televisions, barely any paved roads, few schools and even fewer clinics and hardly any personal automobiles. The local population seems to recognize this.

Continued emphasis on reconstruction and development by the local government and Coalition Forces will further legitimize the current Karzai regime and maintain popular support, but it is important to remember that this probably has a *diminishing* utility with the passage of time. Taken in context with the other measures of the environment (i.e., a deteriorating security environment) its effect is further compromised.

One mitigating factor in this is that Afghanistan has just emerged from decades of war and tyranny. The massive social upheaval has helped undo many of the cultural and traditional bonds that were the “glue” of the Afghan people. Coming out from under the shadow of Soviet occupation, civil war and the radical despotic rule of the Taliban, it is not unsurprising that people’s expectations are easily inflated as to the capability of highly developed and wealthy nations to radically transform and improve the infrastructure and standard of living. This was true in Iraq (a more developed nation than Afghanistan) whose population was initially frustrated with the pace of reconstruction after the U.S. invasion of 2003. It was also true of Russia after the fall of communism, where expectations failed to meet the reality of the daunting task ahead. Therefore, from an IO perspective, we should not be surprised at some level of disappointment being a constant factor.

*Governance.* On the eve of elections in Afghanistan, governance saw a marginal decline of 3.52 to 3.38 (nearly 4 percent). It is somewhat surprising that there was not a more noticeable drop due to recent national and international news reports of systemic corruption within the Afghan government. Part of this might be explained away by most Afghans’ tendency to accept some level of corruption as a normal conduct of government business, so long as public needs were being generally met. However, it should remain a concern for Coalition Forces operating in Khost, since nearly all local nationals believe that without Coalition presence, the government would collapse. Therefore, the Coalition becomes an enabler of corruption by supporting the government. Local villagers’ knowledge of who their district sub governor was remained poor, and most villagers reported having never even seen a representative of the Afghan government (national or local) visit.

*Economic Conditions.* Respondents’ satisfaction with the local economy seemed to marginally improve, going from 2.57 to 2.76, a 7.4 percent increase. This might have to do with the decline in food prices, which during the benchmark study, 80 kg of flour had reached more than 5,000

afghani (\$100). Since then, the price of flour moved to between 2,600 afghani to 3,000 afghani (\$52 to \$60). Many locals continue to travel to foreign countries to work and support their families back home in Khost. A concern from the benchmark study was the public complaining that under the Taliban, food prices were not as bad. This concern subsided somewhat.

*Average View of the Future.* Not surprisingly, anxiety about Afghanistan’s future seemed to grow. The average response fell from 3.72 to 3.42, an 8 percent drop. A hopeful sign was that again, no one responded that they believed life would be better under the Taliban. (Again, we note that interviews were conducted in the presence of Coalition and Afghan security forces, which might have influenced those responses.)

*Source of Trust.* There appeared to be some movement on who local nationals trusted to tell them the truth and help them with their problems.

Trust	
Government	32.65%
Taliban	0.00%
Elders	13.27%
Mullahs	12.24%
Coalition Forces	5.10%
No One	36.73%
Total	100.00%

**Table 3. Benchmark**

Trust	
Government	29.41%
Taliban	0.00%
Elders	33.33%
Mullahs	7.84%
Coalition Forces	3.92%
No One	25.49%
Total	100.00%

**Table 4. Follow Up**

Trust in the government declined from 32.65 percent to 29.41 percent while trust in elders rose from 13.27 percent to 33.33 percent. Those responding “none of the above” or “no one” fell from 36.73 percent to 25.49 percent.<sup>v</sup> Again, in another hopeful sign, no one said that they trusted the Taliban to tell them the truth or help them with their problems.

After the benchmark study, we thought that Coalition Forces might place more emphasis on the local government rather than tribal elders since tribal authority had been so undermined by decades of civil war and corruption. While locals still complained about elders expecting bribes in order to help their villagers, there did seem to be a general improvement in the satisfaction with the elders. This may be because while the population would prefer to have a government presence in their area (namely in the form of security forces), the fact that the government was unwilling and unable to do so meant that villagers had to turn to their elders in order to resolve disputes and protect them from insurgent activity. Many elders, seeing that Afghan and Coalition Forces were inadequate to provide effective security, made informal agreements with insurgents in their areas in order to keep them at bay. This probably had some impact on their standing, perhaps at the expense of the trust in the government. However, this is only speculation.

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<sup>v</sup> Note: “No one” or “none of the above” was never provided as an option for the respondent. Therefore, this is a measure of free response.

### Source of Information

The benchmark and follow-up study both show that radio remained the dominate medium as a source of news and information.

Source of Information	
Radio	77.55%
Television	20.41%
Newspaper	0.00%
Elders & Mullahs	1.02%
Family & Friends	1.02%
Total	100.00%

**Table 5. Benchmark**

Source of Information	
Radio	80.39%
Television	16.67%
Newspaper	0.00%
Elders & Mullahs	0.00%
Family & Friends	2.94%
Total	100.00%

**Table 6. Follow Up**

IO practitioners are quick to rely on radio as the primary means to shape public opinion in Afghanistan. Television is a distant second and the use of the internet (not included in the IO assessment tool) and newspapers were non-existent. However, almost all the interviews were conducted among villagers living outside the urban area of Khost city. Within the city, dozens of newspapers and magazines are published and internet cafes can be found, so we can reasonably assume that such mediums are used. What might be a critical area of future study is to determine what *key leaders* use primarily to obtain their news and information. Future IO campaigns might seek to “influence the influencers” to create a multiplier effect.

### Using the IO Environmental Assessment Tool

Collecting data is one thing, while using it is quite another. We noted in the beginning that IO practitioners often suffer from a lack of reliable metrics, which often leads to difficulty in encouraging battlefield commanders to allocate scarce resources toward full-spectrum Information Operations. Like it or not, “what gets measured, gets done” as the old engineering saying goes.

An assessment tool can have a variety of uses in counterinsurgency and post-stabilization operations. First, it can give a commander a quantifiable view of where the population might be in terms of broad domains – domains which are critical in such operations. Second, it can give clues to possible non-kinetic tactical options that might support the overall strategy of improving popular belief in the legitimacy in the host government. For example, our initial benchmark study showed substantial concern over economic conditions. During the interviews, we understood that was primarily tied to the rising price of food. At the time, the Taliban just across the border in Pakistan had announced locally that they would kill any truck drivers they found to be carrying food from Pakistan into Afghanistan. Taliban and criminal gangs operating openly in FATA would stop trucks bound for Khost and extract “taxes” from the drivers, which also had an inflationary pressure on food prices. Of course, the world-wide food shortage was a major contributor to rising food prices as well. However, people expected that their local and national government would act on ensuring food remained available and affordable. A major, coordinated effort to inform the population that the Taliban was partially responsible for rising food prices, coupled with a concerted effort by the national and local government (supported by

the Coalition) to bring in more food supplies to at least stabilize food prices might have served the twin strategic purposes of separating the local population from the insurgents as well as building popular legitimacy – all without firing a single bullet. This is obviously a simplistic example and it is not meant to suggest that such an undertaking would be easy to accomplish. However, it does show how the use of the IO Environmental Assessment Tool might provide alternate paths toward accomplishing strategic objectives.

Third, the regular, consistent use of the tool can give a glimpse into understanding possible variations in why specific tribes, villages or districts might have different perceptions on conditions, or where they obtain their information and who they trust most. It might serve as part of the tools used to look for indicators and warnings of potential conflict and concerns.

Finally, it can provide the IO practitioner and commanders with data on how the conditions within the information environment have changed over time, which can be used to measure whether overall strategic goals are being met.

These are probably just a few of what might be other uses for the tool. The goal was to provide IO practitioners at the unit level with an easy-to-use tool by which they might measure the effect of their Information Operations campaign strategy and tactics, and perhaps something to use to buttress their request to their commanders for more support and actions. No doubt that this tool is crude in its refinement and application, and it is hoped that if found useful, it can be replicated and improved upon.

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# IO Environmental Assessment Tool

Afghan Encounter Form  
 Provincial Reconstruction Team Khost

District: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Village: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Tribe: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

		Age	1	2	3	4	5
Category	Question	Gender					
		Scale/Example					
Security	In general, describe the security situation in your village.	1 ANSF ineffective, seriously corrupt, nonexistent; AAF operate <u>freely and dominate</u>					
		2 ANSF limited effectiveness, moderately corrupt; AAF activity <u>significant</u>					
		3 ANSF moderately effective, some corruption, AAF moderate <u>presence</u>					
		4 ANSF effective, little corruption; AAF activity small/limited <u>effectiveness</u>					
		5 ANSF very effective, barely to no corruption; AAF nonexistent or <u>extremely small</u>					
Development	How would you describe the level of reconstruction and development in your village? Can your children go to school? Do you have clinics nearby? Can you grow enough food?	1 No access to schools, clinics, potable water or food, etc. Barely <u>subsistence</u> .					
		2 Very limited access to services, little development going on. No <u>change over the past several years</u> .					
		3 Some services available, a few projects going on. Minimal <u>improvements over the past year</u> .					
		4 Services are available and more improvements are being made.					
		5 Services are available and superior to surrounding areas. Great <u>deal of development</u> .					
Governance	In your opinion, is the gap between the people and the government large or small? Does the current government help the people better than the Taliban did? Would you want the Taliban to return to power?	1 Very large gap, extreme dissatisfaction, extremely supportive of <u>Taliban</u>					
		2 Large gap, significant dissatisfaction, prefer neither Taliban nor <u>GIRoA</u>					
		3 Moderate gap and concerns, generally prefer GIRoA over Taliban					
		4 <u>Small gap and concerns, support GIRoA</u>					
		5 Very small gap, very few concerns, extremely supportive of GIRoA					
Economic Conditions	How would you describe the economic conditions of your village? Are jobs plentiful or scarce? Are your incomes rising, stagnant or falling?	1 Village is in abject poverty, even for Afghanistan. No jobs and <u>incomes falling sharply</u> .					
		2 Village is poor compared to others. Less than 1/3 can find jobs <u>and incomes are stagnant or falling</u> .					
		3 Village is similar to others. Between 1/3 to 1/2 can find jobs and <u>incomes are stagnant or rising slightly</u> .					
		4 Village is doing a little better than most. More than 1/2 can find <u>jobs and incomes are rising</u> .					
		5 Village is doing much better than normal. More than 3/4 can find <u>jobs and incomes are rising sharply</u> .					
View of the Future	Do you things are getting better in Afghanistan and your village? Do you have hope or despair for the future? Would your future be better under GIRoA or Taliban?	1 The country and the village are getting much worse and the <u>people are in despair</u> . Life would be better under the Taliban.					
		2 The country and village are declining and people are generally <u>unhappy</u> . Life might be a little better under the Taliban.					
		3 Things are staying relatively the same and people are very <u>concerned and somewhat hopeful</u> . They are indifferent to who is <u>in charge</u> .					
		4 Things are getting a little better, and have some hope for the <u>future</u> . <u>They prefer GIRoA over Taliban</u> .					
		5 Things are getting much better and people have a great deal of <u>hope</u> . <u>Strong preference for GIRoA</u> .					
Information Operations	What is your primary source of news and information?	1 Radio					
		2 TV					
		3 Newspaper					
		4 Elders & Mullahs					
		5 Family & Friends					
Information Operations	Who do you trust most to tell you the truth?	1 Government					
		2 Taliban					
		3 Elders					
		4 Mullahs					
		5 Coalition Forces					
		6 No One / None of the Above					

Note:

*The author is willing to make available his entire data set to any party who requests it. Interested individuals or groups should send their request to him at [jbebbber@gmail.com](mailto:jbebbber@gmail.com).*

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Publication 3-13 *Information Operations*, p. ix

<sup>2</sup> Nagl, John A. *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Program for Culture and Conflict Studies. *Khost Provincial Profile*. 2007. [www.npu.edu](http://www.npu.edu) (accessed June 27, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> McCreary, John. "Nightwatch Special Report: October 2008 in Afghanistan." *AFCEA Intelligence*. December 15, 2008. <http://www.afcea.org/mission/intel/nightwatch.asp> (accessed January 2, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. *Afghan Cricket Star Reportedly Killed in U.S.-led Raid*. August 27, 2008. [http://www.rferl.org/content/Afghan\\_Cricket\\_Star\\_Reportedly\\_Killed\\_/1194358.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Afghan_Cricket_Star_Reportedly_Killed_/1194358.html) (accessed January 2, 2009).  
Author's Note: Questions remain regarding the Cricket player's affiliation with insurgents, and to this author's knowledge, no classified data has been released.

<sup>6</sup> Official military reports of significant activities in Khost province, or "SIGACTS" remain classified.

<sup>7</sup> The author will note the change in the benchmark to the follow-up study as a percentage increase or decrease, however, he recognizes that this is not an exact measurement in a statistical sense. The Environmental Assessment tool can perhaps give us an idea of direction, but not an exact measure of variation.

<sup>8</sup> Program for Culture and Conflict Studies. *Khost Provincial Profile*. 2007. [www.npu.edu](http://www.npu.edu) (accessed June 27, 2008).