



# SMALL WARS

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## JOURNAL

## Transition Operations: A Discussion with 29 Articles

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this essay is to address the doctrinal vacancy that exists regarding Transition operations. Recognizing that much discussion is required to accurately establish what Transition is, when it occurs, and when related operations should proceed, we argue that COIN doctrine needs to be expanded to include Transition themes. Doing so will provide strategic guidance to tactical commanders handling multi-tour problem sets, and operating in relatively short rotation cycles*

### Introduction

As a commander, you have built upon the successes of previous units and made significant progress in terms of security, governance, and economic development in your assigned area. The insurgents, although still active, are unable to move freely or directly interfere in the population's daily lives. The Host Nation (HN) security forces are capable of planning, executing, and supporting their own operations up to the Battalion level. There are many problems remaining and it is still a dangerous environment, but things are "good enough." What's next?

At some point in Counterinsurgency (COIN) operations the initiative shifts to the HN forces and government. This is the process of Transition. Is Transition another phase of COIN which follows Clear, Hold, Build? Or is it a unique operation that waxes as COIN wanes? How, exactly, do you do it? Who is the proponent? The purpose of this document is to explore these and other Transition related questions. There is currently a doctrinal gap that is best illustrated by asking "I've cleared, held, and built, so now what?" While "build" is often considered to be an end-state, there has to be something which follows. That something is "Transition."

### What is Transition?

Currently, there is no accepted definition for Transition in US Doctrine. For the purpose of this discussion, we will define Transition simply as the transfer of responsibility from Supporting Nations (SN) to the Host Nation (HN).

How do we go from full-speed-ahead COIN operations where we call all of the shots to a fully functioning sovereign nation that provides security and services for its population? Although we have concluded one Transition (Iraq) and are in the midst of another (Afghanistan), we are still literally feeling our way forward, one unit at a time, without a coherent strategy, doctrine, or national policy. Battalion and Company Commanders want to know, "What comes after build?"

As previously stated, our doctrine is remarkably silent on Transition. FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency acknowledges the requirement for Transition in the late stage of counterinsurgency:

“The main goal for this stage is to transition responsibility for COIN operations to HN leadership. In this stage, the multinational force works with the host nation in an increasingly supporting role, turning over responsibility wherever and whenever appropriate. Quick reaction forces and fire support capabilities may still be needed in some areas, but more functions along all Logical Lines of Operations are performed by HN forces with the low-key assistance of multinational advisors. As the security, governing, and economic capacity of the host nation increases, the need for foreign assistance is reduced. At this stage, the host nation has established or reestablished the systems needed to provide effective and stable government that sustains the rule of law” (paragraph 5-6).

That is the sum total of the guidance given in our counterinsurgency manual.

Transition thus appears to be rather nebulous; it is something we desire and anticipate, but do not necessarily know how to achieve, or even understand. It may occur quickly, or be drawn out over an extended period of time. Like other operations in COIN, Transition will also occur differently in different locations, with various requirements and assorted timelines. Our own relief in place/transfer of authority (RIP/TOA) process even affects Transition. How do we maximize effects at this point, especially considering that the level of international effort is simultaneously in decline? What are the requirements for Transition, and what is the glide path to a smooth successful hand-off to the host nation? Is it a phase that comes after “Hold,” or is it part of the “Build” phase, both of which occur sequentially after “Clear?” One might also argue that once “Transition” has begun, the COIN fight is over for SN forces and the responsibility shifts to the State Department or the UN. Or does it?

There is no simple way of answering these questions, or the others which are raised throughout this paper. The answers may change with each particular case. However, without a dialogue on the subject these questions will continue to go unanswered and operations are likely to proceed with uncertain or frustrating results.

### **Should Transition be considered a distinct phase of COIN, or is it another operation entirely?**

Transition is unique for a several reasons. Once Transition begins the bulk of the COIN responsibilities shift to the HN. The HN is now presumed “sovereign” and must isolate the insurgency while providing security, legitimate governance, and essential services to their population. SN now take on a much more limited role, seeking to assist by offering appropriate advice, guidance, critical enablers, and logistics in support of HN operations. In reality and especially early in the process, SN forces still represent the most powerful and reliable means of effecting change. Without a Transition focus designed to limit its power, SNs will likely fail to allow HN leaders to gain the trust and confidence of the populace.

Working to bridge the gap between SN-led and HN-led operations is vital, but current COIN doctrine does not adequately address this issue in any but the broadest sense. How does a commander seek to reduce his role and transfer our “trusted agent” cache to his peers, who are now working under the control of a sovereign HN? To start with, in Transition operations the SNs must recognize their own influence and consider the implications of its size and impact. For example, SN commanders, company to brigade, tend to dominate meetings with HN counterparts and are often the most powerful leaders in the region. The unintended consequence is that when SN commanders assess their spheres of influence, they often overlook their own massive impact on the local population and the HN government. Transition entails a deliberate reduction of this impact which requires dedicated planning and measurement by SN units.

Transition is also unique because the focus and goals have changed. SNs are no longer providing security, governance, and economic development. Instead, the SN is supporting HN security operations,

empowering and advising HN government, while economic development is provided by the international community and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs.)

Transition is conducted with diminishing resources. The larger “effective” insurgency has been broken by a stout SN- led COIN fight. Transition means military forces are scheduled for departure. Any type of military surge, if one exists, is over and some form of continuous draw-down has begun. The draw-down will continue until there is either total withdrawal, or another international partner or diplomatic mission becomes prominent. SN generated funds for projects are purposefully winnowed, and it may take time before international investment and NGOs are able to fill the gap.

When these mile markers begin to appear, the nature of the SN’s mission has already become Transition. This is particularly relevant in the realm of governance. Although considered sovereign, the HN government is more than likely fledgling and remains in need of SN assistance. This means while the HN is countering its insurgency, the role of the SN becomes even more critical. The focus now becomes “nation-building” as SNs attempt to prop-up a nascent government while it addresses the root issues which led to an insurgency in the first place.

Acting in a supportive role is often difficult for most military units, as it entails a loss of control. Still, commanders must do this in order to develop a more stable “HN bottom-up” approach to stability. Sure, “top-down” approaches are easier to execute and it is tempting to enforce programs/obedience with SN forces. But when SN forces leave there are local leaders stranded with little ability to conduct operations intended to control segments of the population that have not yet committed themselves to maintaining stability.

### **Why do we see a Transition gap in operations doctrine?**

The gap in Transition operations doctrine is evident when talking to “ground” Soldiers. Ask Soldiers how to conduct a squad attack and there is a standardized doctrinal answer that represents the accumulation of institutional knowledge. Ask officers to explain COIN and there are consistent answers (though things do start to get foggy). Ask about Transition and chaos begins. Our experience shows that there is no clear doctrine for BDE and lower units in terms of Transition. The training rotations at our Combat Training Center (CTC’s) end prior to Transition, largely due to the absence of clear doctrinal guidance. While pre-deployment institutional learning is robust, it is largely focused on how to clear, hold, and build. The radio in a box (RIAB) is a prime example. In Transition operations the RIAB is no longer completely a Military Information Support Operations (MISO) asset, but becomes a mass communication tool useful for the development of the HN government. Certainly RIAB still has military applications, but the nature of its applicability changes. RIAB becomes more valuable when used to support HN government initiatives. That is something not covered in doctrine.

Is Transition the final phase of COIN, where SN militaries support the efforts of the international community to bring the HN to “normalcy?” Or is it a separate operation conducted by the State Department with military support? The argument could be made for either, but one point remains; our current doctrine and institutional training does not address the issue in a coherent manner.

### **Transition Operations 29 Articles**

Recognizing the value of David Kilcullen’s previous work (and T.E. Lawrence’s before him), we are suggesting our own set of “Articles” meant to assist units engaging in Transition. When we were hashing through notes and reports to come up what these articles might be, we expected to see a significant level

of cross over between Kilcullen's 28 and ours. However, what shocked us most was the clear difference between not only the operational focus, but also the approach. Primarily, Kilcullen's articles are focused on winning a COIN fight, whereas our approach centers on transitioning the win to the HN. We believe that Transition operations are best directed at the local governance; the intelligence, law enforcement, and security force training operations take on a secondary importance. Within this context, what follows are our distilled observations from Iraq and Afghanistan. Like all advice, it must be tempered with judgment and consumed with a grain of salt.

**1. Shift Your Focus.** At this point the host nation (HN) is fighting the Counterinsurgency fight, seeking to legitimize itself and establish trust with its populace. Therefore, the population's perception and trust in the government are the defeat mechanism that will end the insurgency. Start to replace the threat focus on your TOC wall with a population focus. Lethal focus is secondary when Transition is done well. Transition is not the time to hunt bad guys, unless it is done by the HN or supporting nations (SN) SOF. There are always exceptions, but the majority of the work in Transition must be focused on establishing and growing HN sovereignty/legitimacy. Establishing displayed proficiency in host nation security forces (HNSF) and HN leaders is a more robust challenge than pursuing a criminal micro-fraction of the populace. The end state is the local government being in synch, communicating with and attempting to answer the needs its populace. Our role is to improve the HN's ability to accomplish its own tasks and publicize this capability to the populace. We must mentor/train/advise HNSF how to execute its COIN fight.

**2. Downsize.** Eliminate reliance on SN forces and resources. This will be required as SN support is withdrawn IAW the established political agreements. The trick is in how to do it right. Far too often SN capabilities are exploited by HN leaders to their advantage. This is often perceived by the SNs as a culture of deceit and corruption. However, our role in the corrupting of these officials cannot be ignored. By design, seek to reduce your role in aiding the HN government and encourage them to use their own systems. One of the biggest problems faced by executive branch leaders in both Iraq and Afghanistan was access to their own legitimate budgets. Afghanistan in particular struggles to effectively move money from the Ministry of Finance down to the districts. This process lacks understanding and transparency by both HN and SN representatives. Rather than building projects from the National Training Center (NTC) playbook, put your effort into developing the capacity of your partner to navigate this system. This doesn't mean allowing the leader to fail or denying help when necessary. This type of approach will require a deft hand at denying the "path of least resistance" urges we have enabled in ourselves and taught to HN leaders. Instead of looking to impose western style systems (i.e. Rule of Law, Medicine, Female empowerment, etc.), look to create viability within the existing HN structures. Whether formal or informal, the existing HN structures are likely legitimate to the local populace. The measures of effectiveness are discovered in areas where we can do less, or even nothing at all. This part of the system now "works." Move on to other things that can be Transitioned. This too is a measure of effect. Once your partner sees you less as a source of supplies and more as a partner, you have succeeded.

**3. Develop a Non-Linear Lens.** Avoid thinking in a western linear fashion; think in terms of layers and relationships. Army campaign planning takes on the appearance of a thrusting arrow with a series of incremental goals which inexorably lead to victory. This reflects our methodical approach to problem solving,  $a+b=c$ . Transition operations defy this linear approach. The human/cultural dynamic means that Transition operations do not follow mathematical rules; instead,  $a+b=d$ , or maybe  $e$ . Tactical operations and SN metrics for success are largely irrelevant

as the HN takes over and struggles to gain social confidence. Their success is our success. Understanding how to achieve your commander's intent while synching your partner's goals is a political, not a tactical exercise. Patrols must seek to understand the population's connection, or lack thereof, to the government. Use the knowledge gained to aid the District Governor (or whomever) in linking communities or leaders. Make partnership and relationship building the primary goal of your organization.

**4. Cultural IQ.** Culture is not simple, so learn the basics before you deploy, then constantly study and discuss how things work. Read books on cultural and how to leverage it to your benefit. If all else fails, ask your partner. These questions not only allow you to develop your personal knowledge, but also provide opportunities to understand how your partner navigates his own culture. We are very good at teaching individual skills on how not to culturally offend during our pre-deployment training. Still, we do not spend nearly enough time learning how their cultural systems work, such as how conflict resolution is managed, or how water rights, for example, are controlled. Take time to understand limitations, but spend time learning how to leverage their culture to your advantage.

**5. The Cultural Line of Effort (CLOE).** The CLOE is just as important as the other lines of effort (LOEs) in your campaign plan. It seeks to use the nature of the populace to deny nefarious elements purchase with the populace. It offers the ability to find "natural" means of reaching, and more importantly, moving the populace towards HN governance. GIRoA district level governance provides a great example of how to use the cultural line of effort, such as annual festivities that are part of the seasonal rhythm in Afghanistan. These festivals provide a sense of community and cultural identity. Essentially, they represent means for GIRoA to satisfy the cultural needs of the populace. When utilized in the context of an Islamic traditional celebration, the western influence is minimized, and the effects are spread across the entire district.

**6. Cross Cultural Listening/Translating/Teaching.** Units in Transition must leverage culture to their advantage. Pre-deployment training must focus on learning the basics of culture, then making a plan to exploit culture as a tool. The time to fear culture as a means of offense is over; insurgents repeatedly use culture to their advantage. US forces must now seek ways to echo or mirror their cultural tactics techniques and procedures (TTPs.) Commanders should direct their ground leaders to report on cultural learning progress. Units that focus on these issues are miles ahead of their peers. Cross cultural listening is a "communicative path," and is not a one-way system. It speeds understanding on both sides. HN partnered leaders must learn Western/military culture to improve their ability to work with follow on aid based NGO's, etc., so invest resources in the effort. Find your Cultural Interpreters. (Hint: They should not be your language interpreters.)

**7. Informal Networks.** Understand the traditional roles for Elders and Informal Leaders. Instead of trying to influence their complex social structures, lean on HN leaders to navigate the social leader hierarchy. Recognize that their cultural acuity will always outweigh yours. Realize how HN goals align or do not align with their agendas. Know who they represent and the extent of their influence. Capitalize on it when possible and try to mitigate it when they are opposed to your goals.

**8. The County Seat.** The District Center (or local governance center) is the decisive point. It is the center of gravity. After all, we are trying to tie the population to their local government, something that is likely easier than tying them to a national government. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the top-down imposition of government created legitimacy problems for local leaders. How do

you as a SN military asset help the local governor gain influence with the populace? As military leaders, our mindset is predisposed for action, but often those actions are counter-productive or create responses that confuse or confound us. Insist that all operations/projects/KLEs and humanitarian assistance are designed to improve the perception of the government. Instead of handing out aid/money/projects through local agents in an attempt to put an “HN Face” on things, actually use HN leaders and governance centers to coordinate and distribute aid. Let them decide how, when, and to whom. Draw the populace to the governance centers as a centerpiece for service; a place where solutions are provided. Example: give one hand-crank radio to the village elder and direct him to the District Governor to obtain more. Another example: before deciding who gets humanitarian aid, let the Governor decide in conjunction with the elders, followed by a very public distribution ceremony at the governance center.

**9. HN Commander-in-Chief (CINC).** Too often we view and treat HN leaders as inferiors. Our undermining them results in the marginalization of that leader and worse, de-legitimization (if he ever was legitimate) with the populace. Treat him as the HN CINC for his area. Statements like, “I really don’t care what the governor wants, the boss says I have to...” are self defeating and problematic. This view of the “governor” as a figurehead is dangerous and undermines the mission. Consider how the US military as an organization treats its Colonels and Lieutenant Colonels when in command. An Agricultural Development Team would not dare show up unannounced, walk directly to a US battalion commander, and demand that the commander produce 20 Soldiers for a class the following day. One highlighted moment from a District Governor in Zabul province illustrates this point. During the emergence of this governor as an empowered leader, he was asked to provide an organizational sketch of the players in the district, or a map of “who is in charge.” He said, “There is room for only one sword in the scabbard.” This kind of realization is essential for the emergence of a “good leader.” Allow HN officials to lead and then assess their capabilities and needs. Judge them according to their reputation in the community, not by whether they do what we tell them to do.

**10. Collaboration Matrix.** The more you understand how they (HN) make decisions, the better you can work within their system. Equally as important is for HN partners to understand your decision making process. This mutual clarity creates collaboration; without this clarity, passive aggressive behavior, perceived corruption and/or even incompetence will be the result. You may refuse their request, or you may push forward with something they do not agree with; however, it should be by design, not default. Reveal to your partners why you ask certain questions, and describe your needs. Ensure that you understand their needs and requirements. This understanding will provide simple wins that will ignite operations and satisfy mutual goals. Collaborative decision making results in SN/HN goals which support or overlap each other.

**11. Cultural Decision Making Process (CDMP).** Take time to understand the “Cultural Decision Making Process.” It is the key to achieving your desired effects. When things just do not seem to work, reassess where we have forced action, or even delegitimized HN leaders. Top killers of true progress: decision before understanding, implementation before buy-in, short-circuiting the political process, too much money, and too much technology. Forcing the action results in failure and undermines HN legitimacy.

**12. Know your friend as well as you know your enemy.** We spend tremendous resources trying to know and understand our enemy, but seldom put the same effort (planning and analysis) into understanding our partners. Get to know them. Beyond the basic biographical information, understand who he is and why he makes decisions. The object is to be less dominant and more

persuasive. Our goal is influence, not coercion. If your partner refuses to do his job, your responsibility is to discover why. Do not assume they are lazy (reference your “Collaboration Matrix”). Finding the root cause of inactivity is essential to jumpstarting governance and population support.

**13. Their plan.** Capitalize on your partners’ plans and political savvy. Allow them to lead. You will know what must be done to accomplish your mission. Achieve your objectives through their mission. They will never tell you “No,” but they may stand by and watch you fail. This is especially true in terms of money and projects. Painful experience has shown that far too many projects were doomed to fail because of local conditions which SN simply did not understand. Let them decide how to address problems; it will probably be simpler, cheaper, and more effective than anything you can dream up or pull out of an FM.

**14. Attack perceptions/ignore reality.** Remember that in the battle for the population, it is perception that counts. Find out what the perception is, and look to HN leaders to determine how to change it. An area that only has one significant activity (SIGACT) per month is still a security problem if the population does not feel safe. Conversely, lack of running water may be unimportant if a communal well is the cultural norm.

**15. Build heroes.** Every culture needs heroes. Give them their heroes. HNSF training and missions provide a wealth of benefits. SN’s provide extensive training that would shock locals, yet it occurs largely without any local elder presence or media coverage. In Iraq and Afghanistan our own system of reporting portrayed fantastic growth in HNSF capabilities, yet this was unknown to the populace. In Zabul province, the Afghan National Police (ANP) in one district out-patrolled the rest of the security forces. They found more improvised explosive device (IEDs) and made more arrests than any others. Yet locals believed that they were only safe when International Security Assistance Force was present. This perception is not based on the level of actual threat, but the total lack of knowledge about their own Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) capabilities. We are very effective at training HNSF. However, if we never show the locals their HNSF capabilities, we have failed. Let the HNSF leaders run key leader engagement. Bring the elders in to observe training. Give the village men a class on fingerprinting and the evidence exploitation capabilities of the police force. Give the people their heroes.

**16. Two-pronged attack.** Echo your partner’s needs/frustrations through parallel paths. Utilize their administrative system while tracking and reporting through ours. If a request gets lost in their bureaucracy, use the SN system to find it and break the log jam. This will not only help you gain influence, but will also allow them to develop understanding and confidence in their own system.

**17. Marketing.** You have to market the HN “brand.” Utilize our resources to assist the HN officials in communicating. Avoid thinking of handbills and RIAB as an Information Weapon Systems and instead use them as “Mass Communication in Support of Political Development.” Start using it as a HN Communication System. Stop broadcasting approved messages. Listen—and then start communicating. What do the people want to hear? What does the HN official want to say? What messages are actually being received by locals from HN? What messages is HN receiving from locals? Give your partner the ability to mass communicate. Show them how to collect and assess marketing data. Figure out what, if any, success the people believe about HN progress. Our communications are more reliable in many cases, so develop their proficiency; run the radio like a station manager. Show your partner the possibilities, give

him the resources, and then get out of the way. Of course, you must still monitor to ensure it is not misused, but the benefits of surrendering control to the HN will far outweigh the risks.

**18. Their projects.** Understand what they want, identify what we want, and find out where the overlap occurs. A great tool for Battalion and Brigade commanders is to ask, “Is this project HN inspired? HN led? HN approved?” If there are “no’s” in this survey, you can still implement the project. However, it is done by design and not simply for the sake of doing a project. Recognize projects as tools to improve the ability of the government to meet the needs of the populace. The best way to ensure this is to restrict your work to those projects nominated by the informal leaders and approved by the HN officials. These methods assist HN officials when they graduate from SN support to NGOs and international investors.

**19. Beware of “free radicals.”** Ensure that all key enablers (provincial reconstruction team (PRT), district stability team (DST), agriculture development team (ADT), civil affairs team, female engagement team (FET), etc.) operate in support of HN Government plans—require total compliance within your battle space. These enablers bring tremendous capability to Transition operations, but determine success based upon number of projects completed or dollars spent, not by effects achieved. Bring them in early and often to ensure that they understand both HN and SN campaign plans.

**20. Social initiatives must reflect social norms.** Social initiatives must be addressed through the HN plan. We cannot unilaterally impose western standards and expect overnight change. Support women, children and disabled only through the HN official’s plan and direct guidance. Understand the end state before approaching these challenging and hazardous initiatives. Beware—these can backfire with amazing speed.

**21. Spend effort, not money.** Spectacular results can be obtained when working through the HN cultural system. No money for a state of the art, multi-grade school? Build a one room schoolhouse in the traditional fashion for pennies on the dollar. Give the community the materials and let them build it themselves. No funds for road repairs? Use the HN security forces engineer equipment. No more cash-for-work garbage collection? Have the HN official organize a neighborhood clean-up day through the local elders. Whenever the HN requests assistance for mundane services, ask what the community has done to address the issue before SN intervention. Consider your surplus items as valuable, as they often are consumed after we discard them. Use these items as a means of barter which provides you with a social lever.

**22. Circle of friends.** Many cultures do not build relationships like Americans. Our common faith in each other and need to achieve allows us to quickly build trust and work in conjunction. Additionally, we vest respect in individuals based upon title or position. Residents in places like Iraq and Afghanistan are not apt to expose themselves to unknown groups or people. This hesitance has been vital to their survival. Expecting HN leaders to immediately “partner” or trust unknown entities, including HN peers, is unrealistic. Spend enormous social time with the local political leaders; remember that all politics are local and in these countries, everything is based upon personal relationships, not rank or duty position. In the First Gulf War, General Schwarzkopf spent his evenings drinking tea until 2:00 A.M. or 3:00 A.M. with the Saudi crown prince for just this reason.

**23. Court Investors.** Seek out international partners/NGOs and advise HN Government Official’s on how to do the same. This presents a challenge to any combat arms unit. As SN funds and resources draw down, it is important to supplement the fledgling government’s efforts

with outside agencies. This also presents opportunities to identify social magnets that bind the populace to the government. In Iraq, the Ctesiphon arch provides an illustration of a social magnet that requires outside attention. This archeological site coalesced lethal groups into a single community. The curator of the site had no understanding of English or access to the international heritage site community. How then does he work to preserve a damaged and crumbling, ancient archeological site? COIN doctrine does not address this need. However, it must be part of Transition. HN capability and stability is required for an archeologist's site visit, but the repairs may only be effectively worked through NGOs. Department of State may have assets assigned for archeological considerations, but the work will also require professionals in the field and a significant source of funding. Helping the HN local government official navigate these new challenges is essential to a fledgling government that struggles to provide aid that is available outside of his country. In Transition, SNs must work to learn these partners, then work to Transition this skill to district or other appropriate government officials.

**24. Audacity.** SNs must have the courage to take risks and be aggressive. Audacity in Transition is finding non-traditional avenues of approach, while trusting your partners to reach your goals. Audacity is 100% sharing of information, intelligence, and planning. Transition focus means that SN platoons no longer lead or direct patrols; instead they accompany and support HNSF. Audacity is developing training that transfers an acceptable level of skill on to their partners, then trusting them to sustain it. Audacity is leaning on a "cultural line of effort" that feels weird and unmanageable. Audacity is believing in HN leaders, seeking ways to support them, shoring up their weaknesses when possible, and learning how they lead. Audacity is marshalling your men, weapons and materiel in support of their plan, not yours. Audacity for leaders above Battalion level is allowing your commanders the freedom to do these things. Audacity is learning that the less we force on the HN, the more we can understand their leaders' plans, thus increasing our chances for holding on to our gains. Rather than executing projects, enablers like PRT and CA Teams now seek to transfer their skills to their partnered sections. Tactical Psyop Teams (TPT) no longer look to broadcast messages, but to Transition their skills and ability to HN assets.

**25. Master the art of indirection.** All things are possible when you master the art of indirection! Don't utilize the frontal attack when you can flank the objective. Instead of forcing your solution on your partner, convince him it was his idea. Seek out the local leaders, their friends, their relatives, etc., to gain indirect access to the real power brokers. (Remember those Informal Networks?) A good way to find out who they are—ask, "Who would you go to if someone stole your goat, or if you needed help with your family?"

**26. Dare to fail.** Remember, despite your education, Western upbringing, training, and "superior" intellect, you do not, in fact, have the answers. Trust your partners, even though this means surrendering control. You may have long losing streaks. But you will learn something with every failure. Realize that this mission will be accomplished only through trial and error. Usually, there will be multiple errors.

**27. Slow is smooth, smooth is fast.** Everything will take longer and be harder than you think. Work by their timeline, not yours. Expect delays and setbacks. Get over it and get on with it! The Transition timeline can be equated to sand in an hour glass; time is always slipping and there will never be more assets and people on the ground than at that moment in time. There is an overwhelming urge to seize these fleeting opportunities, but with this kind of focus, mentoring/advising/partnership takes on a new more frantic approach and can lead to disaster. Have the courage to limit your expectations. Growth and progress must be organic and

incremental, proceeding at a measured pace, not hurried beyond what the system can handle. Proceed on their timeline. Move things at an appropriate pace, being urgent but not frantic. Remember the difference between speed and momentum.

**28. Continuity of effort.** Transition calls for a sustained effort. It is a marathon and not a sprint. Actually, the current model is a long-distance relay race as SN units will be handing their partners and mission off to a replacement unit every 9-12 months. It is imperative not to lose momentum by changing course after every RIP/TOA. Every unit wants to rewrite the campaign plan. Every unit wants to make their own mark on the mission. During a recent deployment, one Afghan Province saw four different brigade campaign plans in less than a year. Dare to continue the efforts of your predecessors. Make changes to the campaign plan only for a *raison d'être* and only after much soul searching. If our campaign plan is successfully nested in the HN campaign plan, then we will only require changes when our partners do so.

**29. Rinse and repeat.** Routinely conduct self-evaluations focused on the factors mentioned above. Ask yourself, “Are we forcing our solutions on our partners? Are we listening? Are we succeeding in ways that are new to us? Are we even aware of where we are succeeding?” Most true progress is incremental. There are few ground-breaking revelations. Look back at your progress and chart your growth. Show this growth to your partners and higher headquarters and let the HN officials show this growth to the population. Now do it again.

### Concluding Remarks

Transition is a tenuous thing. It is hard to do and rather frightening. It is not frightening in terms of an enemy you cannot defeat, but in the exposure and risk involved in surrendering control to the HN. The defeat mechanism is the populace, yet, if an army dominates the populace, the results will almost certainly be negative. The solution often involves reducing our involvement in day-to-day decisions and operations, while still maintaining the ability to influence events when necessary.

This paper has highlighted the doctrinal vacancy that exists regarding Transition operations. It also details the difficulty of conducting Transition operations. We hope that we have contributed to the early stages of a dialogue about what Transition operations looks like. We admit that our work and experience does not give the adequate “macro focus” necessary to provide comprehensive answers to these questions. We acknowledge that a great deal of discussion is required to firmly establish what Transition is, when it occurs, and when related operations should proceed.

Transition can't simply be, “We are leaving...good luck.” That is not Transition; that is a gamble! This approach denies the HN what it needs, which is a durable system of support that shows a clear path to sovereignty and support from the international community.

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- {6} <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/no-trainers-no-transition>

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