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Throwing the Book at the Taliban

By *SWJ Editors*

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Throwing the Book at the Taliban:

Undermining Taliban Legitimacy by Highlighting Their Own Hypocrisy

by Colonel Greg Kleponis

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My language assistant, Hamid came to me just the other day to express a safety concern he had for both he and his family. I paid attention because in the five plus months I have known him he never seemed to worry about security. In fact, one of the first things I noticed when arriving in Afghanistan was the lack of fear our Language Assistants, Cultural Advisors and local partners showed when working with us. This is in marked contrast from my observations during three years in Iraq where we lost more than a few interpreters to assassination. Hamid and I have traveled to various provinces throughout the country with the Deputy Minister and we have walked the streets of Kabul, in relative safety. What suddenly changed this? What did I see in his eyes that day that I had seen in the faces of my Iraqi Interpreters? I recognized it as fear and at last the real possibility that the enemy could and would take reprisals on those Afghans who assist us whom they most loathe -- interpreters.

He brought to my attention a communiqué allegedly released by Mullah Mohammad Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, issuing new orders to his commanders in Afghanistan, and obtained by NATO. A NATO spokesman stated that Omar issued the orders from Pakistan, calling on Taliban commanders to capture or kill Afghan civilians working for foreign forces or the Afghan government. This would represent a reversal of a previous order issued by Omar in 2009 directing the Taliban to avoid targeting civilians. In Hamid's words, "Sir they changed the rules!" I had no idea what he was talking about; rules for terrorists and insurgents? I then remembered that I had first heard about the Taliban's so called Rule Book from Dr. David Kilcullen, the noted Counterinsurgency theorist and adviser, over lunch at the Army Navy Club in Washington a few weeks prior. He also made mention of it in his book *Counterinsurgency* but only as a passing reference. The idea of a Rule Book for insurgents so intrigued me I decided to find out just what was in it, why it was issued, and how (knowing our experience with the Afghan National Security Force's [ANSF] habit of disregarding or selectively apply rules) how the Taliban was doing in the compliance arena. I also had to ask myself that if a 25 year old ethnic Tajik living and working in downtown Kabul "knew" the rules, how pervasive among the population was this knowledge and how could it be leveraged?

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