



The Fight for Marjah: Recent Counterinsurgency Operations in Southern Afghanistan

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In early 2010, in response to violent and rampant insurgent operations in the long-held Taliban stronghold of Marjah, located in central Helmand province, the International Security Assistance Force and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan began implementing a population-centric counterinsurgency campaign. This strategy stands in contrast to the counternarcotics and counterterrorism focus in Marjah from 2001 to late 2009. Initial elements of this new campaign plan were implemented in February 2010 when Operation Moshtarak began in Marjah.

This paper details the counterinsurgency (COIN) operations in Marjah over the last year. The first section of the paper provides a background on operations in Marjah from prior to 2009 and an explanation of the structural organization of insurgent forces in Marjah. The second section of the paper describes Operation Moshtarak, the February 2010 assault on Marjah. This section details efforts by ISAF and Afghan forces to clear insurgents from their stronghold in Marjah as well as the actions by insurgent fighters to target ISAF forces and to maintain their influence over the population through intimidation. The paper concludes with a discussion of governance and policing efforts in Marjah. Counterinsurgent forces struggled to form a legitimate political authority and police force capable of convincing the local population that a new governing authority would bring security to Marjah. The case study of Marjah provides useful examples of successful and failed tactics and policies for future COIN operations in southern Afghanistan.

The Path to Marjah

On June 23, 2010, President Barack Obama affirmed that the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan was to do “whatever is necessary to succeed in Afghanistan, and in our broader effort to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda.”¹ The strategic goals remain to “break the Taliban’s momentum” and “build Afghan capacity,” while “relentlessly applying pressure on al Qaeda and its leadership, strengthening the ability of both Afghanistan and Pakistan to do the same.”² As stated by President Obama at West Point in December 2009, there are three core elements to American strategy: “a military effort to create the

¹ President Barack H. Obama, “Statement by the President in the Rose Garden,” June 23, 2010, the White House Office of the Press Secretary, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statement-president-rose-garden>, accessed June 28, 2010.

² Statement by President Obama, June 23, 2010.

conditions for a transition; a civilian surge that reinforces positive action; and an effective partnership with Pakistan.”³ The NATO campaign strategy for achieving these objectives is to apply population-centric counterinsurgency along with the Afghan government in prioritized populated areas.⁴ The three-stage process was designed to first gain momentum and control in important population centers before passing responsibility onto Afghan security forces and then sustaining security with a more limited role.⁵

The operational design for southern Afghanistan envisioned a three-stage counterinsurgency process to protect key population centers and expand the authority of the Afghan government. Insurgents were to be physically and psychologically separated from local inhabitants.⁶ First, Operation Moshtarak Phase I⁷ repositioned forces to increase freedom of movement along major highways in the south, and reinforced several other units to concentrate on protecting populations within their areas of operations.⁸ Moshtarak II, the next phase, consisted of “governance-focused shape, clear, hold and build operations in central Helmand Province, with the aim of extending the authority of the Afghan Government to the previously ungoverned areas of Nad Ali District, including the town of Marjah.”⁹ As ISAF and Afghan forces continue to solidify security gains in Helmand, a third phase calls for operations in central Kandahar province along the Arghandab River and near Kandahar City.¹⁰

Population-Centric Counterinsurgency in Marjah

The goals of the counterinsurgent actions in Marjah was to gain the loyalty of the local populace by providing security and legitimate government authority, and to separate insurgents from the people by removing their resources and intelligence and reducing insurgent capabilities and influence. Although contexts change, the fundamental tenets of population-centric COIN remain focused on security and governance. The basic need of security must be assured, “along with food, water, shelter, health care, and a means of living.”¹¹ Before institutions can be developed to provide basic governance and maintain security in Marjah, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan forces must disrupt insurgent momentum and support.

Inherent in COIN is the use of military force. Killing, capturing, or coercing insurgent fighters remain fundamental elements of a population-centric strategy; however, these tactical methods are not strategic ends. They are a series of acts that must be measured against other acts according to their contribution for

³ President Barack H. Obama, “Statement by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” delivered at the Eisenhower Hall Theatre, United States Military Academy at West Point, West Point, New York, December 1, 2009, the White House Office of the Press Secretary, available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>, accessed June 28, 2010.

⁴ Department of Defense report to Congress, “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan and United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghanistan National Security Forces (April 28, 2010), prepared in coordination with the Secretary of State, the Director of National Intelligence, the Attorney General, the Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Secretary of the Treasury, p. 12.

⁵ DoD to Congress, April 28, 2010, p. 12.

⁶ DoD to Congress, April 28, 2010, p. 29.

⁷ For clarity and simplicity, Operation MOSHTARAK Phase 1 and Operation MOSHTARAK Phase 2 are referenced in this analysis as Moshtarak I and Moshtarak II.

⁸ DoD to Congress, April 28, 2010.

⁹ DoD to Congress, April 28, 2010.

¹⁰ Operation MOSHTARAK Phase 3 has been renamed as Operation HAMKARI BARAYE KANDAHAR (Dari for “cooperation for Kandahar”). Rod Nordland, “Afghanistan Strategy Focuses on Civilian Effort,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 2010.

¹¹ Kalev I. Sepp, “Best Practices in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Review*, Vol. 85, Iss. 3 (May/June 2005), p. 9.

ending the overall insurgency. Whether conducted independently or measured in isolation with other tactics, focusing solely on capturing or killing insurgents dangerously elevates “one important capability in counterinsurgency to the level of strategy.”¹² Raids to kill or capture insurgent leaders or facilitators are simply a means of eroding resources and intelligence. These means must be used in coordination with other tactics in accordance with the central tenets of an effective counterinsurgency campaign. This approach was not applied consistently since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan. Forces only recently began applying a population-centric counterinsurgency in central Helmand.

November 2001-Winter 2009: Marjah’s Fluctuating Insecurity

Marjah is not a newly contested area. ISAF and Afghan forces have sporadically fought insurgents for control over Marjah in clashes of varying intensity for more than eight years. When engaged, ISAF actors have prioritized counter-narcotic and counter-terror actions over the security and governance objectives that are central in a counterinsurgency campaign. These priorities and changing degrees of commitment have produced an oscillation of control and leadership in Marjah since 2001.¹³ The result has been fluctuating insecurity since that time.

Local fighters battled members of the original Taliban regime in November 2001, while the American-supported militia of Gul Agha Sherzai launched operations near Kandahar City.¹⁴ A force led by tribal commander Abdur Rahman Jan defeated the Taliban in Marjah, and the Taliban fled after two days of fighting.¹⁵ Jan became the police chief of Helmand province, while an ally of his became governor.¹⁶ They placed associates in positions of power across the province and in Marjah as they consolidated authority in the region.¹⁷

ISAF forces and members of the new Afghan government remained focused on poppy eradication in Marjah, and local leaders appeased these interests. Several of these eradication policies were carried out by Afghan soldiers and other government agents who paid farmers for cooperating and coerced many who did not.¹⁸ But these efforts were only intermittently pursued due to limited resources in Marjah and central Helmand.¹⁹ Throughout Afghanistan, the U.S. prioritized counter-terror operations that went after

¹² Herbert Raymond McMaster, “Centralization vs. Decentralization: Preparing for and Practicing Mission Command in Counterinsurgency Operations,” in Thomas Donnelly and Frederick W. Kagan, eds., *Lessons for a Long War: How America Can Win on New Battlefields* (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 2010), p. 68.

¹³ Christopher Torchia, “Analysis: Hard Part In Marjah Has Only Just Begun,” The Associated Press, March 4, 2010.

¹⁴ Japan Economic Newswire, “Military Action Continues in Afghanistan Ahead of Bonn Talks,” November 24, 2001.

¹⁵ Anand Gopal and Mark Sedra, “The Battle For Marjah,” *Dispatches from the Field: Perspectives on the Afghanistan Conflict*, Centre for International Governance Innovation, March 8, 2010.

¹⁶ Gopal and Sedra.

¹⁷ Gopal and Sedra.

¹⁸ In Marjah during April 2002, government advisors reportedly paid 350 U.S. dollars in cash for each half-acre of poppy crop they were allowed to destroy. Afghan security forces also lethally shot eight people protesting the program in Kajaki, and protesters killed a government worker. Zahid Hussain, “Four Die in Attack on Afghan Minister,” *The Times* (London), April 9, 2002; Ainuddin Khan, “Afghan Officials Say Poppy Eradication Campaign Is Expanding, Though Farmers Said to be Harvesting in Many Areas,” Associated Press Worldstream, April 13, 2002; Christopher Torchia, “Afghan Opium Farmers Shoot At Drug Eradication Team, Killing One Member,” The Associated Press, April 8, 2002; Torchia, “Afghan Farmers Kill Gov’t Worker,” Associated Press Online, April 8, 2002; Torchia, “Under Armed Guard, Afghan Poppy Eradication Program Gets Under Way,” The Associated Press, April 10, 2002.

¹⁹ See Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of*

high-level enemy targets, and security was a secondary concern. When security was a priority, it remained focused near Kabul and had limited reach into the southern provinces.²⁰

ISAF officially extended its area of responsibility to southern Afghanistan in July 2006, but by that time “Helmand’s security situation had deteriorated.”²¹ Anti-drug operations continued sporadically from 2002 to early 2008, as did limited government assistance programs and government services. But these initiatives were restricted by inadequate resources as the region was not prioritized. Gradually, dissatisfaction with local government grew, as did violence against government actors and local collaborators.²² Insecurity in Marjah increased in 2007 and 2008 as attacks became more brazen, including improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and suicide-bomb attacks against Afghan police, army forces, and civilians.²³ The eventual result was an expulsion of government forces.

In September 2008, insurgent forces gained control of Marjah.²⁴ Local police and militiamen allegedly abandoned their responsibilities as insurgents drove out the weak government forces.²⁵ Marjah became “the nucleus for [militant] operations in the south”²⁶ and provided a safe haven where insurgents “felt secure and where they could gather, equip and train their forces,” as they “moved and stored weapons and explosives, and where the links between insurgents and narcotics trade have been at their strongest.”²⁷ The area was now a center for local fighters and leaders, a hideout and staging area for high-ranking commanders, and an occasional sanctuary for foreign fighters.²⁸ The hub of insurgent and criminal activity was the Loy Chareh bazaar.²⁹

Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (New York: Viking, 2008); Barnett R. Rubin, “Saving Afghanistan,” *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2007).

²⁰ In early 2007, approximately 32,000 ISAF forces engaged in security operations while over 8,000 were involved in counter-terror operations. In Rubin, “Saving Afghanistan,” 65. For mission and goals in Afghanistan, see ANNEX I: International Security Force, “Agreement On Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending The Re-Establishment Of Permanent Government Institutions”; International Crisis Group, “Countering Afghanistan’s Insurgency: No Quick Fixes,” International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 123 (2 November 2006), p. 3; “NATO’s role in Afghanistan: The evolution of ISAF,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization (English). Available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_8189.htm#mandate, last updated July 7, 2010. Accessed July 23, 2010.

²¹ Jeffrey A. Dressler, *Securing Helmand: Understanding and Responding to the Enemy* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, September 2009), p. 7.

²² Agence France Presse—English, “Afghan Intelligence Official Shot Dead by Taliban Rebels,” August 4, 2005; Gopal and Sedra; Pajhwok Afghan News, “Feature: Poppy Cultivation on the Rise in Helmand,” November 14, 2006; Pajhwok Afghan News, “Land Dispute Claims 6 Lives In Helmand,” August 6, 2005; Pajhwok Afghan News, “Major Anti-Drug Operations in Nangarhar, Helmand,” June 6, 2005; Pajhwok Afghan News, “‘Night Letters’ Scare Helmand Teachers, Residents,” January 3, 2006; States News Service, “U.S. Drug Chief Sees Progress Against Drugs in Afghanistan,” April 11, 2006.

²³ Agence France Presse—English, “Eight Dead In Fresh Afghan Unrest: Officials,” April 9, 2008; Associated Press Worldstream, “6 Police Killed by Taliban in Southern Afghanistan,” July 20, 2007; Noor Khan, “29 Militants Killed In Clashes, Bombing In Southern Afghanistan,” The Associated Press, February 28, 2008; Pajhwok Afghan News, “Helmand On Verge of Becoming Terror Center: Governor,” March 7, 2007; U.S. Fed News, “Two Children, Two ANA Killed In A Suicide IED In Helmand,” July 13, 2008.

²⁴ Tom Coghlan, “Taliban Advance in the Shifting Sands of Anarchy and Tribal Feuds,” *The Times* (London), September 29, 2008.

²⁵ Coghlan, “Taliban Advance”; Dressler, *Securing Helmand*, 18.

²⁶ U.S. Fed News, “Afghan, Coalition Forces Seize Single-Largest Drug Cache To Date, Kill Dozens of Militants in Helmand,” May 27, 2009. See also Abdul Mueed Hashimi and Zainullah Stanekzai, “Marja District Mostly Cleared of Militants: Officials,” Pajhwok Afghan News, May 19, 2009; International Security Assistance Force news release, “Intense Fighting in Marjah,” May 20, 2009.

²⁷ Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom, “Marines Shatter ‘Illusion of Enemy Safe Havens,’” States News Service, March 26, 2009.

²⁸ Gopal and Sedra. “The presence of foreign fighters, in particular, bristled many. One elder recently told me: ‘There are good Taliban and bad Taliban. The bad ones are like an *achar* [a pickle dish made with a variety of

From September 2008 to early 2010, the Taliban consolidated control over Marjah through a basic administrative system. Locals reported instances of public punishment for people caught stealing.³⁰ Additionally, there were “persistent reports of a Taleban amnesty for government officials and police who swap[ped] sides,” as well as “a promise that the Taleban [would] defend poppy fields from government eradication.”³¹ While there was little positive praise for the new leaders, the Taliban did provide basic functions that previous leadership had failed to deliver. Entitlements were delivered through an unsophisticated system of basic taxes, repair work, and a justice structure with police and a court.³²

ISAF and Afghan forces launched a series of raids in Marjah throughout 2009 to seize insurgent resources and disrupt Taliban operations, but they did not maintain a persistent presence. In March 2009, 700 British, Dutch, and Afghan troops led an assault of helicopters, tanks, and armored vehicles into Marjah.³³ This assault aimed to “surprise the enemy and disrupt their movement and planning,” in order to create confusion among insurgents by “hitting their fighting forces across several of their key, central locations.”³⁴ The expectation was that this would “allow the spread of legitimate Afghan government.”³⁵ Troops fought throughout the city and conducted patrols “to reassure the local population of the continuing security, stability, and governance in the area”—but they did not have enough forces to remain in the area and when they left, the Taliban regained control.³⁶

With insurgents still in control of Marjah, ISAF again assaulted the area approximately two months later with a two-day operation in May 2009. The operation, which was described as a major offensive, produced claims that ISAF and Afghan National Army soldiers had cleared the majority of the district.³⁷ American and Afghan anti-narcotics agents supported by U.S. Marines raided the Loy Chareh bazaar,³⁸ and the ensuing fighting involved airstrikes, suicide bombers, IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades, small arms, and machine gun fire.³⁹ Yet, similar to the previous assaults, the attacking troops did not have the resources to hold the area. As stated by an ISAF spokesman, the “intent was not to seize and permanently hold the Loy Chareh Bazaar, but to throw a wrench into militant activities.”⁴⁰

ingredients]. There are Pakistanis, Arabs, Chechens, [it seemed like] everybody in the world [was in Marjah]. They respect no one. They are our oppressors.” To Anand Gopal while in Marjah during 2008, in Sedra and Gopal.

²⁹ Dressler, *Securing Helmand*, 19.

³⁰ Coghlan, “Taleban Advance.”

³¹ Coghlan, “Taleban Advance.”

³² Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 140-141; Gopal and Sedra.

³³ Operation Aabi Toorah (“Blue Sword”) was conducted by 500 Royal Marines from 42 Commando Royal Marines, 120 soldiers of the Danish Battle Group, the Afghan National Army’s 205 Hero Corps, using RAF Chinook and Royal Sea King helicopters, Viking armored vehicles, and Leopard tanks. In UK MoD, “Marines Shatter.”

³⁴ UK MoD, “Marines Shatter.”

³⁵ UK MoD, “Marines Shatter.”

³⁶ UK MoD, “Marines Shatter.”

³⁷ Mueed Hashimi and Zainullah Stanekzai, “Marja District Mostly Cleared of Militants: Officials,” Pajhwok Afghan News, May 19, 2009.

³⁸ Tim McGirk, “Drug Trade Complicates U.S. Task In Marjah,” *Time*, March 6, 2010; Tim McGirk, “Afghanistan’s Fix,” *Time*, March 22, 2010.

³⁹ Targeted News Service, “Afghan Commandos Kill 18 Enemy Fighters in Helmand Province,” May 20, 2009, released by U.S. Department of Defense Armed Forces Information Service; U.S. Fed News, “Afghan, Coalition Forces Seize Single-Largest Drug Cache to Date, Kill Dozens of Militants in Helmand,” May 27, 2009, released by U.S. Army Special Operations Command on May 22, 2009; U.S. Fed News, “Afghan Commandos Continue to Disrupt Militant Activity in Southern Afghanistan,” May 27, 2009, released by U.S. Army Special Operations Command on May 19, 2009.

⁴⁰ U.S. Fed News, “Afghan, Coalition Forces.”

By early 2010, ISAF and Afghan forces attempted to regain control of the area several times. Local residents had “heard promises from the central government before.”⁴¹ As additional forces arrived in Afghanistan as part of the new counterinsurgency strategy, ISAF and Afghan forces prioritized Marjah as the first destination for many of the incoming forces.

Insurgent Forces in Marjah: Organization and Command

By early 2010, Marjah contained approximately four hundred organized insurgents within its ninety square miles and among its 75,000 people.⁴² While the precise organization of insurgents in Marjah and the relationship between commanders is unclear, some insight may be gained from general examinations of Taliban military organization in Helmand and throughout the south. The decentralized nature of the Taliban provides for autonomous leaders and but infiltration and disruption by counterinsurgents. For example, the Taliban leadership in Marjah proved to be inspiring to followers and aggressive in tactics. Furthermore, command autonomy among Taliban leaders has increased as ISAF intelligence abilities has disrupted Taliban communication through modern technology.

Taliban fighting units are decentralized into personal networks around charismatic leaders, and “the pyramid of command has been flattened” in recent years.⁴³ A local commander leads a small group of fighters that are personally loyal to him, usually around twenty people.⁴⁴ These smaller units “typically arrive in the Taliban as a formed band, with its own weapons.”⁴⁵ Several units are linked to a more senior commander through their leaders.⁴⁶ Since fighters are personally linked to their small-unit leader as his *andiwāl* (“comrades in arms”), the death of a leader has unclear repercussions.⁴⁷ Although a close relative or trusted subordinate may replace the commander, it is unknown whether replacements provide the same leadership traits that “the strength of the unit appears to derive principally from.”⁴⁸ This focus on the small-unit leader “appears to produce a culture of elevated self-sacrifice on the part of fighters,”⁴⁹ as “the lower levels will sacrifice their lives to save their leadership.”⁵⁰ The degree of autonomy granted to these units varies according to the trust in local commanders by higher authorities, and the ability of these higher leaders to communicate with the local units.

The Taliban divide their area of operations into four regional commands, and each command possesses “a great deal of autonomy in planning and implementation.”⁵¹ Command autonomy has increased as

⁴¹ Heidi Vogt, “Afghan President Visits Town Seized From Taliban,” Associated Press Worldstream, March 7, 2010.

⁴² On estimated number of insurgents, see C.J. Chivers, Dexter Filkins, and Rod Nordland, “Half of Afghan Town’s Taliban Flee or Are Killed, Allies Say,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 2010; Kristen Chick, “Civilian Deaths Mounting In Marjah Offensive,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 16, 2010. The numbers for Marjah’s population and geographic size should be regarded as a general guide, and not precise measurements. The size and population of Marjah remain contested, as are its precise boundaries. For geographic size, the ninety square miles is simply an estimate that does not include the Sistani Peninsula west of the main area and only limited portions of the desert along the east of and west of the city. The population has been estimated as low as 50,000, but most sources report between 70,000 and 80,000 people. This report splits the difference at 75,000.

⁴³ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 142.

⁴⁴ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143; Antonio Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects*, The Century Foundation, Summer 2010, p. 5. Available at <http://www.tcf.org>. Accessed July 2010.

⁴⁵ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143.

⁴⁶ Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban*, 5.

⁴⁷ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143.

⁴⁸ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143.

⁴⁹ Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143.

⁵⁰ Major Dick Ringennburg, quoted in Coghlan, “The Taliban in Helmand,” 143.

⁵¹ Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban*, 9.

improved ISAF intelligence has undermined the ability of insurgents to use modern communication devices without detection.⁵² Instead, communication is conducted through messengers and couriers. In the upper echelons of command, questions remain over the level of cooperation between commanders.

Taliban fighters in Marjah fell under the larger authority of Mullah Abdul Qayyum Zakir, the military commander of southern Afghanistan, though the precise layers of leadership between local fighters and Zakir is unclear.⁵³ Zakir “was given charge of the military campaign in the south” in January 2009 following his release from an Afghan jail after detention in Guantanamo Bay.⁵⁴ Zakir, a native of Helmand province, is suspected to run operations from Quetta, Pakistan. He is rumored to be a skilled commander with “evident military skills.”⁵⁵ The former governor of the Kajaki district in Helmand, Abdul Razik, assessed Zakir as “smart” and “brutal.”⁵⁶ Zakir reportedly visited the sub-commanders in central Helmand before Moshtarak II, a bold decision if the reports are accurate considering ISAF capabilities in air surveillance, communications intelligence, and the number of ground troops between Quetta and Marjah.⁵⁷ Personal visits like those conducted by Zakir seem rare.

It is unclear what Zakir’s guidance to his sub-commanders may have been at the onset of Moshtarak II. Insurgents are rumored to regard Zakir as “a highly ideological fighter, in contrast to some Taliban who may have fought for material gain.”⁵⁸ Yet Zakir can also be pragmatic.⁵⁹ He reportedly helped with a book of rules to limit civilian casualties, has mediated between disputes, and “headed a committee that received complaints about abusive local commanders and removed them if necessary.”⁶⁰ This pragmatism challenges assumptions of Zakir as a purely ideological fighter that pursues unchanging ends without concern for their costs. Yet whether motivated by unchanging ideals or pragmatic goals, Zakir pursues his objectives with renowned aggressiveness.

Despite his pragmatism, Zakir often supports riskier strategies than previous Taliban’s leadership’s “minimum-risk policy of using small-unit harassment actions to wear down and outlast the U.S. presence.”⁶¹ Instead, Zakir is known for an “enthusiasm for operating in the field and his aggressive style of combat”—an aggressiveness that could also lead to higher casualties and a resulting decrease in human

⁵² Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban*, 9.

⁵³ Kathy Gannon, “Former Gitmo Detainee Said Running Afghan Battles,” *The Associated Press*, March 4, 2010; Tim McGirk, “Tale of Two Taliban Reveals U.S. Dilemma,” *Time*, March 15, 2010; Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Mullah Omar Names Major Taliban Appointments to Replace a Captured Leader,” *Newsweek*, March 22, 2010; Moreau and Yousafzai, “Baradar’s Taliban Successors,” *Newsweek*, February 20, 2010; Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Mullah Omar Names Major Taliban Appointments to Replace a Captured Leader,” *Newsweek*, March 22, 2010; Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Not Your Father’s Taliban,” *Newsweek*, May 7, 2010; Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Taliban in Turmoil,” *Newsweek*, May 28, 2010; Jerome Starkey, “Rift at the Top of the Taliban as Rivals Battle to Control Helmand Insurgency,” *The Times* (London), April 23, 2010.

⁵⁴ Gannon, “Former Gitmo Detainee.”

⁵⁵ Gannon, “Former Gitmo Detainee”; Gopal, “Qayyum Zakir.” For the relationship between senior leadership of the Quetta Shura Taliban and leaders like Zakir, see Jeffrey Dressler and Carl Forsberg, “The Quetta Shura Taliban in Southern Afghanistan: Organization, Operations, and Shadow Governance,” *Institute for the Study of War*, December 21, 2009; Antonio Giustozzi, *Negotiating with the Taliban: Issues and Prospects*, The Century Foundation, Summer 2010; Tom Coghlan, “The Taliban In Helmand: An Oral History,” in Antonio Giustozzi, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 119-153.

⁵⁶ Gannon, “Former Gitmo Detainee.”

⁵⁷ Anand Gopal, “Qayyum Zakir: The Afghanistan Taliban’s Rising Mastermind,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 30, 2010.

⁵⁸ Gopal, “Qayyum Zakir.”

⁵⁹ Gopal, “Qayyum Zakir.”

⁶⁰ Gopal, “Qayyum Zakir.”

⁶¹ Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Not Your Father’s Taliban” *Newsweek*, May 7, 2010.

capital among the Taliban.⁶² In late 2009, questions concerning campaign planning and execution between Zakir and his subordinates remained unresolved. Despite this uncertainty, ISAF and Afghan forces conducted a major operation against these insurgent forces in early 2010, assaulting Marjah in the initial application of COIN in Afghanistan.

Zakir is reportedly in charge of operations, while logistics are controlled by Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Mansoor.⁶³ Rifts reportedly exist between military commander Zakir and logistician Mansoor as they have competed for power following the February 2010 arrest of Mullah Abdul Ghani Barader in Karachi, Pakistan.⁶⁴ Tensions “[were] reportedly highest in central Helmand” as fighters with allegiance to both Zakir and Mansoor massed before Moshtarak II, forcing those loyal to Barader to choose which man they would support.⁶⁵

Initial Application: Moshtarak II and the Balance of Forces

Before ISAF and Afghan actors could change local authority and governance in Marjah, they had to fight to establish positions in Marjah from which to contest insurgents.⁶⁶ During the initial stages of the operation in February 2010, many insurgents fought while some fled, and others hid among the local population. By March 2010, ISAF and Afghan military, civil, and political actors had established a foothold for convincing Marjah’s populace that they represented a legitimate authority over the insurgent alternative. This process began with shaping operations in preparation for a major assault.

Prior to attacking Marjah, unmanned aerial devices and U-2 spy planes conducted aerial surveillance and reconnaissance of proposed routes and helicopter landing areas, locating weapons caches and roadside bombs.⁶⁷ Special Forces first conducted raids in early February 2010,⁶⁸ followed by U.S., Canadian, and Afghan forces establishing control northeast of Marjah to prevent the area from being used as a potential insurgent exit and to protect lines of communication with nearby bases.⁶⁹ Forces then assaulted the town, with “over 3,000 Marines, 4,400 Afghan troops, nearly a thousand British and hundreds of U.S. Army

⁶² Moreau and Yousafzai, “Not Your Father’s Taliban.”

⁶³ Jerome Starkey, “Rift at the Top of the Taleban as Rivals Battle to Control Helmand Insurgency,” *The Times* (London), April 23, 2010.

⁶⁴ Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, “Taliban in Turmoil,” *Newsweek*, May 28, 2010; Starkey, “Rift at the Top of the Taleban.”

⁶⁵ Starkey, “Rift at the Top of the Taleban.”

⁶⁶ For a detailed analysis of preparing for and executing Moshtarak II, see Jeffrey Dressler, “Operation *Moshtarak*: Preparing for the Battle of Marjah,” Institute for the Study of War, February 11, 2010; Jeffrey Dressler, “Operation *Moshtarak*: Taking and Holding Marjah,” Institute for the Study of War, March 2, 2010; Jeffrey Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” Institute for the Study of War, July 9, 2010.

⁶⁷ Tom Vanden Brook, “U.S. Shift Afghan Mission,” *USA Today*, April 26, 2010.

⁶⁸ Marie Colvin, “Special Forces Assassins Infiltrate Taliban Stronghold,” *The Sunday Times* (London), February 7, 2010.

⁶⁹ This cordoning was called Operation HELMAND SPIDER, and was led by units from the U.S. Army 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division. The nearby bases are Camp Leatherneck, the primary base for the U.S. Marines in Helmand, and Camp Bastion, containing troops of the American and British armies. Dennis Steele, “Returning to the Offensive in Afghanistan,” *Army*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (April 2010). Canadian mentors and 250 Afghans they instructed in Matthew Fisher, “Canadians, Afghans Beat Back Taliban In ‘Crazy’ Fighting: Soldier,” *Canwest News Service*, March 10, 2010.

soldiers.”⁷⁰ The main assault force was comprised of soldiers from the Afghan National Army coupled with two battalions of U.S. Marines, the 3rd and 1st battalions from the 6th Marine Regiment.⁷¹

The main assault force, three companies attached with Afghan troops at the squad level, were inserted by helicopter into key areas of Marjah during the night of February 13, 2010, and the forces began to secure key transit routes and targets in the insurgent strongholds of the Loy Chareh and Koru Chareh bazaars.⁷² Troops then “attacked from the center out, aiming to link up with two battalions moving in from the northwest and the east.”⁷³ Marine units fighting in the town seized intersections and buildings, and established outposts as they moved.⁷⁴ Additionally, a Special Operations task force was paired with a 400-man Afghan battalion to advise and conduct joint patrols in the southern third of Marjah.⁷⁵ Overall, fighting was intense but with straightforward objectives: search buildings, demine roads, and destroy bunkers. As insurgent fighters retreated from Marjah, they planted “innumerable IEDs – in fields, on roads, even plastered into the walls of homes.”⁷⁶

After the main assault, ISAF and Afghan forces consolidated pockets of control in Marjah. Troops continued to establish positions and assert influence over key roads and areas, and established patrol bases for spreading protective bubbles of security.⁷⁷ During late February 2010, attacks by insurgents were limited to attritional tactics against resupply convoys moving in and out of Marjah and counterinsurgent forces used this space to establish bases and smaller combat outposts within the area.⁷⁸ As troops attempted to force a separation between insurgents and the local populace, government actors were ushered in to provide new authority and basic services.⁷⁹

But in late February 2010, large sections of Marjah’s populace remained unconvinced that the new ISAF and Afghan actors had the means, ability, and will to defeat insurgent forces and deliver a trusted alternative to Taliban governance. Abdul Zahir Aryan—known as Haji Zahir—was appointed to be the

⁷⁰ Dressler, “Operation Moshtarak: Taking and Holding Marjah,” 1. Dressler cites Associated Foreign Press, “Afghan Police Deploy to Taliban Bastion,” February 19, 2010; C.J. Chivers and Rod Nordland, “Errant Rocket Kills Civilians In Afghanistan,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2010.

⁷¹ 3/6 and 1/6 are accompanied by 2/2 and 1/3 to form Regimental Combat Team 7, commanded by USMC Colonel Randy Newman. RCT-7 is headquartered at Camp Dwyer in Garmsir, and is responsible for central and southern Helmand province. 1/6 was the first unit deployed under the “surge” plan announced in December 2009, and arrived later that month. 3/6 deployed in January 2010. Both of these units deploy for a seven-month duration. 3/6 is commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Brian Christmas, and 1/6 by Lt.Col. Cal Worth. 2/2 operates in Garmsir under the command of Lt.Col. James McDonough, while 1/3 operates in Nawa under Lt.Col. Matt Baker. RCT-7 falls under the command of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade (2 MEB), commanded by Brigadier General Larry Nicholson. Wesley Morgan, “Coalition Combat Forces in Afghanistan: Afghanistan Order of Battle,” Institute for the Study of War, March 2010.

⁷² Jeffrey Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” Institute for the Study of War, July 9, 2010, p. 1

⁷³ Bing West, “The Battle of Marja—A Report, with Recommendations, from the Front Lines,” *National Review*, May 3, 2010; Alfred de Montesquiou and Deb Riechmann, “Troops Clear Last Pockets of Resistance In Marjah,” The Associated Press, February 27, 2010.

⁷⁴ Dressler, “Operation Moshtarak: Taking and Holding Marjah,” 4.

⁷⁵ Task Force Commando consisted of the nine soldiers from U.S. Army Special Forces Team Operational Detachment Alpha 3121, four marines for calling air attacks, and a 30-man platoon of engineers that established outposts, identified IEDs, and provided supporting firepower. West, “The Battle of Marja.” See also Laura King and Tony Perry, “U.S. Begins Key Assault on Taliban; Marines and Allies Troops Launch A Major Offensive to Take a Militants Stronghold in Southern Afghanistan,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 2010.

⁷⁶ Agence France Presse—English, “Mines, Bombs Injure More Afghan Civilians: ICRC,” April 15, 2010.

⁷⁷ Chandrasekaran, “As Marja Assault Progresses.”

⁷⁸ Alfred de Montesquiou, “Marines, Afghan Troops to Stay Months in Marjah,” The Associated Press, February 28, 2010; U.S. Fed News, “Uneasy Quiet, Then Taliban Ambush,” March 24, 2010.

⁷⁹ Michael Phillips, “Afghan Flag Marks A Turning Point in Marjah,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2010.

district governor of Marjah, and he entered the area on February 23, 2010.⁸⁰ But Zahir and other local officials faced challenging governance tasks. Not only was it required that governance efforts convinced people that the new regime and political structure delivered a legitimate authority in Marjah; policies also needed to be coordinated among ISAF and other Afghan organizations.⁸¹

The issue of ISAF and Afghan security force commitment was especially tricky. Some in Marjah feared long-term American occupation and imposition of foreign values.⁸² Many others did not trust ISAF and Afghan forces after past commitments were ineffective at establishing security and preventing the Taliban's return. Others feared a return to the exploitative government behavior that led to the Taliban's rise. In early March 2010, this concern was voiced by NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan, Mark Sedwill: "People are deeply suspicious of the police going in because they have had such a bad experience [with] the police before."⁸³ Police in the past were "abusing their power, they were brutal, [and] there are allegations of murder, certainly beatings and intimidation, predatory when it came to corruption."⁸⁴ The next stages of battle would see ISAF and Afghan forces competing to gain the acceptance of this populace as the legitimate authority over Marjah by providing security, order, and basic governance. Enemy forces responded with efforts to thwart counterinsurgent goals by promoting disorder and discontent.

March 2010 Balance of Forces

Approximately 2,000 U.S. Marines, 1,000 Afghan National Army soldiers, and 900 Afghan police were operating in Marjah by March 1, 2010.⁸⁵ 3rd Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment was positioned in north Marjah, creating company command posts, forward operating bases, and smaller outposts for patrolling. A command outpost was established at the five-way intersection northeast of Marjah as they continued to secure Route 608, the vital dirt highway running east.⁸⁶ 1st Battalion of the 6th Marine Regiment created a battalion headquarters in the district center near Loy Chareh bazaar in south-central Marjah, and built outposts similar to those of 3/6 Marines for operating inside the main body of the town and "to live

⁸⁰ Chandrasekaran, "Afghan Official Who Will Govern Marja Pays First Visit, to Residents"; Phillips, "Afghan Flag Marks A Turning Point in Marjah." It remains unclear when Marjah became administered as a separate district within Helmand province, rather than a city within Nad Ali district. Reports initially referred to Zahir as a mayor, but Marjah is now governed as a district. Chandrasekaran, "Afghan Official Who Will Govern Marja Pays First Visit, to Residents"; Joshua Partlow, "Eight U.S. Service Members Killed in Series of Attacks in Southern Afghanistan," *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2010; Phillips, "Afghan Flag."

⁸¹ Haji Zahir was replaced as lead official in Marjah on July 12, 2010, but the circumstances surrounding this event remain unclear. Karen DeYoung, "Sen. Levin Urges State Department to Put Afghan Taliban on List of Terror Groups," *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2010.

⁸² C.J. Chivers, Carlotta Gall, and Taimoor Shah, "Farmers Flee Area Taken by U.S., Saying Taliban Hold Sway," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

⁸³ Agence France Presse—English, "Security, Justice Key to Afghan Success: Top NATO Official," March 7, 2010.

⁸⁴ AFP, "Security, Justice Key to Afghan Success."

⁸⁵ For force structure and locations on March 1, see Alfred Montesquiou, "Marines, Afghan Troops to Stay Months in Marjah," Associated Press Worldstream, March 1, 2010. On April 12, authority of all U.S. Marine operations in southern Afghanistan transferred from the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, to the First Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward), commanded by Major General Richard Mills. See Heidi E. Agostini, I MEF, "2 MEB Transfer Authority of Southern Afghanistan," USMC Press Release, April 12, 2010; States News Service, "Combat-Tested 2nd MEB Changes Hands," May 21, 2010.

⁸⁶ Command post established by Company K of 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. C.J. Chivers, "With Marja Largely Won, Marines Try To Win Trust," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2010; U.S. Fed News, "Marines Face Continued Ambushes Around Marjah," June 9, 2010.

among the local nationals.”⁸⁷ In southern Marjah, Special Forces continued to operate with Afghan forces.

Counterinsurgent forces in Marjah significantly outnumbered the estimated number of enemies in the area. ISAF leaders estimated that between two and three-hundred insurgent fighters remained in the Marjah area.⁸⁸ Approximately four hundred insurgents were estimated to be in the area before Moshtarak II.⁸⁹ This reduction of one hundred fighters is consistent with reports of enemy casualties during the assault.⁹⁰ This estimated number of insurgents has remained relatively consistent through July 2010, despite reports and fears of possible infiltration by outsiders.⁹¹

Clearing Operations in Marjah

In Marjah, an ISAF and Afghan coalition combined military and political means to challenge an insurgency. Their objective was to provide security and order so that new local governance could be considered the legitimate local authority rather than the insurgents.

In early March 2010, ISAF and Afghan forces in Marjah used several tactics to undermine insurgents’ capabilities and support. They aimed to improve security with joint patrols to gather intelligence, to create and maintain order, and to foster positive perceptions. Additionally, targeted searches and raids were used to remove insurgents and their resources. Insurgents responded by violently challenging the new government authority and security forces in Marjah. Enemy fighters applied three fundamental tactics with varying effectiveness. Direct attacks on ISAF and Afghan forces by small groups of fighters slowed and harassed patrols, while IEDs restricted the movement of political, civil, military, and local actors within Marjah. Yet neither of these were the most effective insurgent methods.

The most effective insurgent tactic was targeted intimidation of the local populace. Targeted intimidation coerced and deterred people from cooperating with ISAF or government personnel, and prevented the acceptance of new government leaders as representing legitimate authority. To reduce insurgent movement and influence, Afghan police and local forces were incorporated to consolidate gains by maintaining pockets of security while other regions were addressed. Parallel with these security measures, government and civil affairs programs were initiated and pursued.

Improvised Explosive Devices

Improvised explosive devices posed the greatest threat of immediate physical harm in Marjah due to the high frequency of their use; however, the overall utility of IEDs decreased from March to July 2010 due to two factors. First, insurgent IED resources were eroded by ISAF and Afghan forces through raids, searches, and patrols. Second, insurgents appear to have acknowledged that IEDs are a costly tool that can only supplement their other methods for achieving their objectives, and do not deliver the same utility of force as other tactics. Direct fire attacks on patrols and, most importantly, targeted intimidation of the local populace have been more effective due to their purposeful, targeted application of force specifically tailored to achieve desired goals. The combination of higher costs for using IEDs and their lower relative

⁸⁷ Marine spokesman Captain Abe Sipe quoted in Montesquiou, “Marines, Afghan Troops to Stay Months in Marjah.”

⁸⁸ Tini Tran, “Afghan Complaints Show Obstacles Ahead In War,” Associated Press, March 1, 2010.

⁸⁹ C.J. Chivers, Dexter Filkins, and Rod Nordland, “Half of Afghan Town’s Taliban Flee or Are Killed, Allies Say,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 2010; Kristen Chick, “Civilian Deaths Mounting In Marjah Offensive,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 16, 2010.

⁹⁰ Dexter Filkins, “Half of Town’s Taliban Flee or Are Killed, Allies Say,” *The New York Times*, February 15, 2010.

⁹¹ Chivers, Gall, and Shah, “Farmers Flee Area Taken by U.S.”

utility in relation to other methods of insurgent violence have reduced the overall influence of IEDs in Marjah.

Insurgents implemented limited changes in the nature of individual explosive devices and their specific uses. The overall method of IED application displayed reduced initiative, limited capabilities, and a reactionary nature that has declined in tactical utility during the time period under consideration. Insurgents will not defeat ISAF and Afghan counterinsurgents in Marjah with an IED campaign—and the insurgents appear to fully comprehend this tactical reality. The result has been IED use in a general and gradual harassment of Afghan and ISAF forces.

IEDs restricted access to the physical terrain of Marjah and the social terrain of its people. By planting large numbers of explosives, insurgents limited movement, physically impeding forces and local government actors from reaching civilians. Local activity has also been hampered due to the danger of buried explosives. The counterinsurgents' goals of delivering order and creating governance now included the need to physically separate the people from locations with explosives as well as psychologically separate them from the threat of danger.

Initial movements in Marjah were “hampered by thousands of buried explosives” and freedom of movement remained limited in April.⁹² IEDs presented “the greatest threat” to ISAF units and addressing this threat consumed the majority of their time.⁹³ Hidden along roads and irrigation canals, most IEDs were relatively unsophisticated and used in a consistent manner.⁹⁴ In Marjah, the use of IEDs was rarely combined with other explosives or additional methods of attack.⁹⁵

Insurgents observed operational patterns of counterinsurgent forces and placed IEDs in locations that troops recently visited.⁹⁶ As U.S. forces conducted more dismounted patrols to reduce the IED threat, these foot patrols were increasingly targeted near places that dismounted troops were likely to walk.⁹⁷ Larger devices decreased in overall frequency, as smaller explosives were more frequently used. These

⁹² Noor Khan, “Attacks Kill 6 NATO Troops Around Afghanistan,” Associated Press Online, March 1, 2010. See also Agence France Presse—English, “Mines, Bombs Injure More Afghan Civilians: ICRC,” April 15, 2010; Agence France Presse—English, “Red Cross Condemns Taliban Use of Booby Trap Bombs,” March 6, 2010; International Committee of the Red Cross Press Release, “Afghanistan: Homemade Bombs and Improvised Mines Kill and Maim Civilians in South,” April 14, 2010; Tony Perry and Laura King, “Afghan District Not Secure Despite Offensive,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2010.

⁹³ This sentiment was echoed by members of both Marine Corps battalions operating in Marjah. Quote is from Captain Bill Hefty, commander of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, in U.S. Fed News, “Taliban Flees Marjah, Threat Remains for Marines,” March 2, 2010. See also 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, in Heidi Vogt, “Taliban Adjust, Wage Bomb Attacks in Afghan Town,” The Associated Press, March 20, 2010.

⁹⁴ Agence France Presse—English, “Taliban Bombs Still A Problem For US-Led Troops In Marjah,” March 4, 2010; Javed Hamim Kakar, “Roadside Blast Kills Two ANA Soldiers In Marja,” Pajhwok Afghan News, March 6, 2010; Ahmad Omaid Khpalwak and Zainullah Stanikzai, “Blasts Leave Two Civilians, Cop Dead,” Pajhwok Afghan News, April 4, 2010; Zainullah Stanikzai, “Blast Kills Three Farmers In Marja,” Pajhwok Afghan News, March 10, 2010; U.S. Fed News, “Taliban Flees Marjah, Threat Remains for Marines”; U.S. Fed News, “Jump Platoon: Taking Knocks for Colonel,” March 17, 2010; U.S. Marine Corps press release, “On The Ground: The Taliban’s Changing, Deadly, Tactics,” July 1, 2010.

⁹⁵ Although some reports have claimed IEDs are used in combination with other methods of attack, much more frequently the explosives are used as an independent weapon. For one of the few claims of IED attacks in combination with other methods, see Vogt, “Taliban Adjust, Wage Bomb Attacks in Afghan Town.”

⁹⁶ Vogt, “Taliban Adjust, Wage Bomb Attacks in Afghan Town.”

⁹⁷ Company intelligence officer Captain Michael Woodie, Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, in Vogt, “Taliban Adjust, Wage Bomb Attacks in Afghan Town.”

changes, however, represent minor tweaks in the application of IEDs and were not a fundamental change in their use or purpose.⁹⁸

Targeted Searches and Raids

Targeted searches and raids aim to kill or capture enemy fighters and facilitators, seize resources, and convince insurgents that it is too costly to continue fighting in hopes of encouraging a political resolution. These actions do not address underlying causes of violence; they target a product of the insurgent struggle. Disrupting networks and removing resources are not expected to defeat the insurgency in Marjah. Targeted searches and raids are designed to supplement other counterinsurgent methods, and are insufficient to achieving desired political ends solely by the success of individual missions.

Raids and searches conducted along the rural outskirts of Marjah attacked suspected insurgent facilitators and suppliers.⁹⁹ Since late February 2010, combined teams of ISAF, Afghan military, and special police frequently conducted operations targeting suspected IED resources and collaborators.¹⁰⁰ During these operations, compounds were surrounded, inhabitants were called to come out, and a search or raid was conducted depending on insurgent complicity with the request. Sometimes targeted people surrendered.¹⁰¹ If there was no reply, Afghan special police often led a combined force into the buildings.¹⁰² Firefights sometimes broke out,¹⁰³ while on other occasions people surrendered without resistance.¹⁰⁴ The primary goals were removal of human capital of attack facilitators, while secondary objectives were seizing of physical resources like weapons, IED materials, or drugs.¹⁰⁵

While targeted raids and searches were generally military operations outside of Marjah, inside the city, many have been conducted as police actions under a framework of domestic law.¹⁰⁶ Drug Enforcement

⁹⁸ Reports of attempted increasing IED sophistication have presented the changes as unremarkable. Wiring apparently arranged to deceive has been obvious, while other IED locations have been indicated by visible markers. Overall configurations of explosives do not synergistically combine the effects of multiple IEDs. U.S. Fed News, "Jump Platoon: Taking Knocks for Colonel," March 17, 2010; U.S. Fed News, "Taliban Flees Marjah, Threat Remains for Marines," March 2, 2010; Vogt, "Taliban Adjust, Wage Bomb Attacks in Afghan Town."

⁹⁹ International Security Assistance Force Joint Command news release "Afghan, International Forces Capture, Kill Militants," April 5, 2010; International Security Assistance Force Joint Command news release "Afghan, International Forces Kill Roadside Bomber"; U.S. Fed News, "IJC Operational Update on March 31"; U.S. Fed News "IJC Operational Update on April 4," April 5, 2010; U.S. Fed News, "IJC Operational Update on April 6," April 7, 2010; U.S. State News, "Afghan-International Security Assistance Force Operations in Helmand, Khost, Uruzgan," April 6, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Marie Colvin and Christina Lamb, "Swift and Bloody: The Taliban's Revenge," *The Sunday Times* (London), May 9, 2010; Defense Department Documents and Publications, "Forces Detain Suspected Insurgents, Find Weapons," April 21, 2010; ISAF Press Release, "Afghan-ISAF Operations in Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul," April 16, 2010; States News Service, "Afghan, Coalition Forces Conduct Numerous Operations," May 14, 2010; U.S. Fed News, "IJC Operational Update on April 16," April 17, 2010.

¹⁰¹ ISAF Press Release, "Afghan-ISAF Operations in Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Kabul," April 16, 2010.

¹⁰² CQ Federal Department and Agency Documents, "Forces Capture Militants, Evacuate Civilians, Seize Weapons," April 16, 2010.

¹⁰³ CQ Federal Department and Agency Documents, "Forces Capture Militants, Evacuate Civilians, Seize Weapons," April 16, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Fed News, "IJC Operational Update on April 16," April 17, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ CQ Federal Department and Agency Documents, "Forces Detain Suspects, Seize Drugs, Weapons," April 28, 2010; Defense Department Documents and Publications, "Forces Detain Suspected Insurgents, Find Weapons," April 21, 2010.

¹⁰⁶ U.S. Fed News, "Drug Enforcement Administration, Marines, Afghan Police Nab Drug Kingpin in Early Morning Raid," May 29, 2010.

Agency special agents have combined with ISAF military forces and the Afghan narcotics police to build criminal cases in Marjah.¹⁰⁷ While some forces concentrate on illegal drugs, others are more concerned with weapons and resources.¹⁰⁸ Collaborators may be considered confidential informants, and surveillance has been used to “secure evidence to arrest and indict” alleged narco-terrorists.¹⁰⁹ Overlapping military and police missions reflects the regular combination of government and military methods in counterinsurgent tactics.

Crosscutting uses of surveillance and intelligence between military and civil authorities assisted military commanders by gathering information on IED locations, local insurgent leaders, and areas of insurgent operations. Still, many insurgent areas of operations were undetected. Some were only discovered by accident, as when several bomb-makers were killed in an apparent mistake.¹¹⁰ Isolating insurgents from their areas of operations, and removing their ability to function through the active or tacit support of Marjah’s populace requires intense patrolling by counterinsurgent security forces, a tactic applied since late February 2010.

Patrolling to Gather Intelligence and Persuade Citizens to Trust New Authority

Joint ISAF and Afghan patrols aimed to implement population security COIN by immediately responding to violence, fostering perceptions of safety, and gathering intelligence about insurgent forces and operations. Initially, security improvements lagged during Moshtarak II. In March and early April 2010, residents remained “hemmed in by insurgents and their homemade bombs,” with limited freedom of movement and frequent injuries.¹¹¹

While attacks were conducted by insurgents, the liability for preventing attacks rested with the counterinsurgents whose aim was to provide security and order. Persuading Marjah’s populace to view the new governing authority as legitimate required providing security. ISAF and Afghan forces had the responsibility to deny insurgents freedom of movement and to impose and maintain security. In Marjah, freely-moving insurgents could access the population and evade security forces—a vital capability for undermining counterinsurgent methods and goals. In response, ISAF and Afghan units cordoned off areas and patrolled within them.

Despite the larger objective of fostering safety and gathering intelligence, and the increased number of troops on the ground, Coalition forces in Marjah were still stretched thin. Counterinsurgents with limited resources in Marjah had to find a compromise between establishing pockets of protection, conducting expeditionary patrols, and preventing insurgents from entering the area. Marine units began by establishing checkpoints near or on the bridges accessing Marjah over its surrounding canals.¹¹² Later, U.S. Marines negotiated to destroy bridges crossing the canals along the western edge of Marjah that

¹⁰⁷ Afghan Ministry of Interior's Counter Narcotic Police Sensitive Investigative Unit. U.S. Fed News, “Drug Enforcement Administration.”

¹⁰⁸ While Afghan forces seized their primary target of one man and six others, along with over five thousand pounds of illegal drugs, other forces focused on the five hundred pounds of homemade explosives seized. U.S. Fed News, “Drug Enforcement Administration.”

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Fed News, “Drug Enforcement Administration.”

¹¹⁰ Three bomb-makers were killed inside their house by an apparent explosive mishap. Zainullah Stanakzai, “Taliban Commander, 2 Fighters Die In Bomb Blast,” Pajhwok Afghan News, April 8, 2010.

¹¹¹ Laura King and Tony Perry, “Afghan District Not Secure Despite Offensive,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2010; Agence France Presse- English, “Mines, Bombs Injure More Afghan Civilians: ICRC,” April 15, 2010.

¹¹² U.S. Fed News, “Marines Face Continued Ambushes Around Marjah,” June 9, 2010.

provided easy movement into the nearby desert.¹¹³ Local villagers now had to pass through additional security checkpoints. Operating these checkpoints also used limited security force resources.

Consolidating security gains required troops and resources, and counterinsurgent forces responded to this limitation by patrolling in smaller units at a higher frequency.¹¹⁴ Securing the six-miles of roadway east of Marjah to a critical intersection¹¹⁵ used multiple observation posts and constant searches.¹¹⁶ Platoons took turns operating out of each outpost and conducted multiple patrols in various formations.¹¹⁷ In southern Marjah, U.S. Special Forces patrolled for several weeks as they attempted to gather intelligence and develop situational awareness by talking frequently with the local population.¹¹⁸ In some units, platoons increased the number of daily patrols by using groups of four to six men reinforced with Afghan forces.¹¹⁹ Small groups would maintain security in immediate areas, while slightly larger additional patrols pushed further outward at less frequent intervals.¹²⁰ By early May 2010, Afghan soldiers and police officers supervised by ISAF searched vehicles driving on the bridges leading into Marjah, freeing some ISAF troops to perform other duties.¹²¹ Part of the balance between applying resources to maintain security in certain areas or pursue its implementation in others entails knowing where forces cannot or should not be used. Some areas were simply ceded to local control.¹²² Yet overall, patrolling began to deliver intelligence.

Local intelligence is required to identify and locate insurgent fighters and resources, and to isolate insurgents from the active and tacit support of Marjah's populace. Local intelligence is deeply intertwined in a positive feedback loop with security and order: greater information produces opportunities to weaken

¹¹³ Negotiated and conducted by 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines. U.S. Fed News, "Marines Brave Sniper Fire In Marjah," May 27, 2010.

¹¹⁴ U.S. Fed News, "Marines Face Continued Ambushes."

¹¹⁵ In March, marines began searching the six miles of road east of Marjah along route 608 to the intersection where several major roads combine at Five Points.

¹¹⁶ COP Reilly was established in February by 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines, who attacked east of Marjah during the main assault. They fall under Regimental Combat Team 7, the same command as 3/6 and 1/6 in February. 1/3 is commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Matt Baker, and primarily operates out of COP Geronimo in Nawa. 1/3 relieved 1/5 in November 2009. Wesley Morgan, "Coalition Combat Forces in Afghanistan: Afghanistan Order of Battle," Institute for the Study of War, March 2010. Command of COP Reilly was transferred to 3/6 in March. U.S. Fed News, "Marines Face Continued Ambushes Around Marjah," June 9, 2010.

¹¹⁷ One platoon is always held at COP Reilly to maintain security and patrol the immediate area, along with bi- and tri-weekly patrols conducted in two-squad teams in the Trek Nawa desert east of Marjah. U.S. Fed News, "Marines Face Continued Ambushes." Other units split their squads into reinforced fire teams for patrols, supplementing the groups with Afghan soldiers and an interpreter. Units in 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines used this technique by early May. US Fed News, "Marines Brave Sniper Fire In Marjah," May 27, 2010.

¹¹⁸ Special Forces captain in charge of a 12-man detachment operating in southern Marjah, quoted in Julius Cavendish, "NATO's Grand Experiment Leaves Marjah Scrabbling for a Future," *The Independent* (London), June 30, 2010.

¹¹⁹ 2nd Platoon, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Description of tactical action from US Fed News, "Marines Brave Sniper Fire In Marjah," May 27, 2010.

¹²⁰ For example, one platoon is held at COP Reilly to maintain security and patrol the immediate area, while also conducting bi- and tri-weekly patrols in two-squad teams in the Trek Nawa desert east of Marjah. U.S. Fed News, "Marines Face Continued Ambushes."

¹²¹ C.J. Chivers and Alissa J. Rubin, "In Afghan Fields, A Challenge to Opium's Luster," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2010.

¹²² The village of Sistani in the peninsula west of Marjah is ceded to local control at the request of village elders, despite reports that the area is used as an insurgent sanctuary and to infiltrate Marjah. ISAF proposed a reciprocal arrangement where they would hire locals to build wells, schools, and mosques. In return, locals would cooperate with intelligence operations by accepting checkpoints, identity cards, and prevent IED operators from using the area. The situation remains unresolved. Agence France Presse—English, "US Marines Offer War or Peace to Afghan Elders," April 2, 2010.

the insurgency, and if people feel safe they will voluntarily deliver more accurate information than if fearing violent repercussions.¹²³ Voluntarily reported intelligence is both an invaluable resource and an indicator of progress. From March 2010 through June 2010, examples of cooperation in intelligence gathering existed between counterinsurgents and Marjah's locals, but there were also many challenges in generating volunteer tips.

Initially, people in Marjah were highly reluctant to cooperate with ISAF or Afghan forces by identifying insurgent fighters, collaborators, resources, or supply routes. Large portions of the population appeared unconvinced that they should cooperate with the new authority when the repercussions and punishments from the insurgents could be deadly. One Marine assessed that people in Marjah were reluctant to cooperate since "they [were] scared to death."¹²⁴ Local residents would deny witnessing insurgent acts, including overt direct fire ambushes that resulted in sustained firefights over several hours.¹²⁵ Even if a firefight occurred immediately outside of a home or had fighters run through it, people would often deny seeing any insurgents in the area.¹²⁶ Others would insist that all fighters had already left the area weeks before, and refused to identify insurgent locations.¹²⁷ Yet, there were some signs of progress.

Although reluctant to cooperate after an incident occurred, civilians would gesture during firefights to indicate the location of insurgents firing on ISAF and Afghan forces.¹²⁸ The immediacy of counterinsurgent responses may have been a key element in determining whether people cooperated. In Marjah, the time between delivering information and an expected counterinsurgent response can be extremely dangerous. Most insurgent fighters attack and then "put down their weapons and sit down with ordinary people."¹²⁹ Without immediate counterinsurgent presence or a quick response, locals feared unfair retribution for speaking out, since the insurgency was so intertwined and insurgents were familiar to the local populace. One response to this problem of discreetly communicating intelligence to counterinsurgent forces when they are not nearby was to introduce new mediums for information delivery.

Cell phone towers were built in early March 2010 and a confidential tip hotline was established, but problems existed with its function, utility, and acceptance among the population.¹³⁰ The service initially did not function during evenings since insurgents bribed and coerced the operators to shut off the network.¹³¹ Some incoming calls eventually occurred, but problems remained.¹³²

It should not be surprising that people were reluctant to cooperate, afraid of trusting the government despite their hate for the Taliban. Nonetheless, some of the population opened up to the idea as COIN

¹²³ David Kilcullen argues that voluntary reporting and percentage of reported IEDs that are found are two useful population-centric indicators of counterinsurgency success. In Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 59.

¹²⁴ U.S. Marine Corps Sergeant Robert Kayse, quoted in AFP, "Invisible Taliban."

¹²⁵ U.S. Fed News, "Uneasy Quiet, Then Taliban Ambush," March 24, 2010.

¹²⁶ Agence France Presse—English, "Invisible Taliban Harass US Marines," March 28, 2010.

¹²⁷ AFP, "Invisible Taliban."

¹²⁸ "Through a small hole in a wall a family gestures at Taliban fighters firing slightly further along, from a house near a mosque." AFP, "Invisible Taliban."

¹²⁹ Muhammad Ismail, a 35-year old farmer from Loy Chareh. Quoted in Carlotta Gall, C.J. Chivers, and Taimoor Shah, "Farmers Flee Area Taken by U.S., Saying Taliban Hold Sway," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

¹³⁰ U.S. Fed News, "Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah," March 18, 2010; U.S. State News, "UK: Confidence Amongst Locals Slowly Building in Helmand Despite Taliban Intimidation," April 1, 2010.

¹³¹ U.S. Fed News, "Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah."

¹³² In March, the hotline was receiving fifty to eighty calls a week. U.S. State News, "UK: Confidence Amongst Locals Slowly Building in Helmand Despite Taliban Intimidation," April 1, 2010.

operations continued.¹³³ Although officials asserted that ISAF and Afghan forces were “not getting enough tips from the villagers or spending enough time with local leaders,”¹³⁴ as early as late March 2010 some residents began “cautiously providing more information.”¹³⁵ An increasing number of residents agreed to accept U.S.-issued identification cards that require fingerprinting, photographs, and retinal scans.¹³⁶ The number of tips to ISAF forces increased through April 2010, and transit routes became more secure.¹³⁷ ISAF next attempted to increase intelligence by engaging with groups that were previously inaccessible.

In May 2010, Female Engagement Teams of two or three women U.S. Marines began accompanying foot patrols in Marjah.¹³⁸ Since women in Afghanistan are largely inaccessible to male outsiders, these small teams were designed to incrementally gain the confidence and cooperation of local women. Collaboration occurred directly with information or indirectly through the women’s ability to influence others. Yet, Female Engagement Teams were small, with just forty women spread across sixteen outposts in Helmand province.

Insurgent Direct Fire Engagements

After Moshtarak II, insurgents increasingly engaged counterinsurgent forces with small arms direct fire.¹³⁹ The enemy’s objective was not to overrun the position of ISAF or Afghan forces, but to harass units and cause casualties. As counterinsurgent troops increasingly patrolled on foot instead of in vehicles, they became more vulnerable to small arms fire, and insurgents exploited this change in operational pattern.¹⁴⁰ Most insurgent fighters were very familiar with the terrain—both geographically and demographically. They were able to move in small groups on foot or motorbike, firing several shots before retreating into familiar territory.¹⁴¹ Teams of three or four men “commonly fire[d] from different positions at the same time” during ambushes.¹⁴²

Direct fire attacks continued in and around Marjah since early March 2010, with a high frequency along the edges of town. Small groups of insurgent fighters used small arms fire to harass counterinsurgent troops, but retreated after the firefights. Patrols were attacked by small arms from fighting positions and bunkers, with insurgents firing and quickly moving to another area.¹⁴³ ISAF patrols that had stopped at

¹³³ Anne Flaherty and Anne Gearan, “Battle For Kandahar May Be Tougher Than Expected,” *The Associated Press*, April 27, 2010.

¹³⁴ Flaherty and Gearan, “Battle For Kandahar.”

¹³⁵ Dion Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market is Battleground for Afghans’ Trust,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, April 1, 2010.

¹³⁶ Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market is Battleground.”

¹³⁷ Richard Norton-Taylor, “Taliban Attacks Fall As Fighters Concentrate On Poppy Harvest,” *The Guardian* (London), April 24, 2010.

¹³⁸ Elisabeth Bumiller, “In Camouflage Or Afghan Veil, A Fragile Bond,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 2010.

¹³⁹ Small arms are “man portable, individual, and crew-served weapon systems used mainly against personnel and lightly armored or unarmored vehicles.” Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary and Associated Terms* (Amended through April 2010), p. 432.

¹⁴⁰ Terri Judd, “Sharp Rise In Army Deaths From Small Arms Fire Prompts Inquiry Into Taliban Snipers,” *The Independent* (London), June 21, 2010.

¹⁴¹ Carlotta Gall, C.J. Chivers, and Taimoor Shah, “Farmers Flee Area Taken by U.S., Saying Taliban Hold Sway,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

¹⁴² Observation by 3/6, in U.S. Fed News, “Marines Brave Sniper Fire In Marjah,” May 27, 2010.

¹⁴³ Platoon from Company L, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Corps Regiment. Company L is commanded by Captain Josh Winfrey. 3/6 operates in northern Marjah and is commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Brian Christmas. 3/6 is a component of Regimental Combat Team 7 headquartered in Camp Dwyer in Garmsir, led by Colonel Randy Newman (USMC), responsible for southern Helmand province. Unit information from U.S. Fed News, “Uneasy Quiet, Then Taliban Ambush,” March 24, 2010, and Wesley Morgan, *Disposition of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan*:

buildings or at command operating bases were attacked with short, intense barrages by fighters that disappear into the local population.¹⁴⁴ Some insurgent sharpshooters fired on patrols from several hundred yards across open terrain to limit their movement and ability to move toward their attackers.¹⁴⁵ But overall, insurgent attacks displayed limited-capabilities. Insurgent fighters were not aiming to capture the physical terrain controlled by counterinsurgents or to kill a large number of forces

Fighting revealed unimpressive marksmanship by insurgent attackers, due in large part low quality weaponry and poor maintenance, old ammunition of poor quality, and limited technical skills required for accurate shooting.¹⁴⁶ While the commonly-used AK-47 is easy to operate and useful in harsh conditions with limited maintenance, the weapon has limited range and accuracy inherent to its design. Insurgent ammunition in Marjah displayed a mix of manufacturers and quality.¹⁴⁷ Some ammunition found in northern Marjah was old, in poor condition, and stored in ways that did not maintain its effectiveness.

Insurgent forces adapted in several ways. When given time to prepare, insurgent attackers introduced entrenched fighting positions in advantageous terrain against joint ISAF/Afghan patrols. Insurgents created fighting holes in the ridgelines overlooking Marjah, with clear fields of fire for attacking forces patrolling below and easy access to escape into the surrounding desert.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, insurgents altered the number of attackers and the physical distance for engaging their enemy. By early May 2010, several U.S. Marine units had spread their squad formation to limit injury in a potential IED blast, while other platoons split their squads into smaller reinforced fire teams and increased the number of daily patrols.¹⁴⁹ In response, insurgents organized single attackers firing at short distances instead of small teams firing

Afghanistan Order of Battle, Institute for the Study of War (April 2010), available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/>. Summary of events from the tactical action on May 10 relies on U.S. Fed News, “Uneasy Quiet.”

¹⁴⁴ For attacks on patrols while moving and halted, see U.S. Fed News, “Uneasy Quiet.” For attacks on company operating, see States News Service, “Mortarmen Bring 81s to Fight,” March 29, 2010. Company I, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Corps Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 7. Mortar teams were attached to India Company from 1st Section, 81mm Mortars Platoon. See also Agence France Presse—English, “Invisible Taliban Harass US Marines,” March 28, 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Company K, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Corps Regiment. Description of events from C.J. Chivers, “A Firsthand Look at Firefights in Marja,” New York Times weblog At War: Notes from the Front Lines, entry posted April 19, 2010, <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/19/a-firsthand-look-at-firefights-in-marja/>, accessed June 23, 2010.

¹⁴⁶ For insurgents’ marksmanship, see C.J. Chivers, “A Firsthand Look at Firefights in Marja,” New York Times weblog At War: Notes from the Front Lines, entry posted April 19, 2010, <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/>; “Afghan Marksmen—Forget the Fables,” March 26, 2010; “Arming Both Sides: The Perils of Ammunition Leakage in the Afghan War,” February 22, 2010; “Putting Taliban Sniper Fire in Context,” April 20, 2010; “Reading (Rifle) Magazines,” February 1, 2010; “The Weakness of Taliban Marksmanship,” April 2, 2010. All were accessed June 23, 2010.

¹⁴⁷ For example, on February 18, 2010, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment inspected an area where fighters had been killed with a hellfire missile, revealing ammunition stamped with factory markings from WOLF Ammunition Company. WOLF is an American company hired by the Department of Defense to provide Russian-made small arms ammunition to Afghan soldiers and police. See Chivers, “Arming Both Sides: The Perils of Ammunition Leakage in the Afghan War.” Poor ammunition quality from Chivers, “The Weakness of Taliban Marksmanship.”

¹⁴⁸ US Fed News, “Marines Brave Sniper Fire.”

¹⁴⁹ 2nd Platoon, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Description of tactical action from US Fed News, “Marines Brave Sniper Fire In Marjah,” May 27, 2010.

from afar.¹⁵⁰ Once fighting began, ISAF forces repeatedly used their superior fire and maneuver to improve positions and close-in on their enemy.¹⁵¹

Targeted Intimidation and Violence to Coerce and Deter

The most effective tactic of insurgent forces has been a targeted campaign of intimidation to deter local citizens from cooperating with ISAF or Afghan actors, and to coerce collaborators into changing their behavior. Two weeks after the conclusion of the initial assault phase, insurgents began intimidating members of the Marjah populace with violence and the threat of violence. The result has been widespread fear and hesitation to cooperate with ISAF, Afghan forces, or the new local government.

Victims are not randomly chosen, nor have there been widespread attacks on the general populace. Rather, intimidation has been efficiently applied for general and specific deterrence. Broadly, these acts serve to deter the larger population from collaborating with ISAF or elements of the new local government. Specifically, cooperating individuals have been attacked to halt their individual collaboration and to coerce them to act differently in the future. This intimidation campaign displays degrees of insurgent capability and credibility: the capability to hurt people or deny people from attaining desired objectives, as well as a credibility that they will indeed act on their threat of retaliation.

Two key strengths of insurgent intimidation tactics are their limited requirements for effectiveness and the ease of communicating their intent. It does not appear that enemy forces in Marjah need to provide a viable alternative to local governance to persuade the local population not to cooperate with counterinsurgent forces or local leaders. They must only convey that future punishments will occur if locals choose to collaborate. All they must do is prevent the majority of Marjah's populace from accepting the new local government, largely by displaying how counterinsurgents cannot maintain order or security.

Additionally, the desire for non-collaboration is easy to convey. Locals know that to avoid reprisals, they must avoid cooperation. Additionally, they are aware of what punishments are enacted for actual or suspected collaboration. Counterinsurgent forces have a more difficult task in assuring locals that they will be protected from retributive violence. Part of this challenge arises from the efficient and effective use of insurgent intimidation in Marjah, as displayed in multiple incidents between March and July 2010.

Select acts of violence and intimidation undermined counterinsurgent authority and legitimacy. By early March 2010, insurgents used targeted, efficient applications of violence and threats to intimidate and harass members of the population. Two weeks after major kinetic operations concluded, insurgents were alleged to be "menacing, beating and even beheading local residents who cooperate with the emerging Afghan government."¹⁵² Others claimed that "the Taliban have begun to fight back, launching a campaign of assassination and intimidation to frighten people from supporting the U.S. and its Afghan allies."¹⁵³ Yet contrary to the presentation of violence and threats as constantly constant occurrence within a state of chaos, these acts were not randomly applied or conducted in a continuous barrage of violence.

¹⁵⁰ Forty yards away in an example from 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. See Marie Colvin and Christina Lamb, "Swift and Bloody: The Taliban's Revenge," *The Sunday Times* (London), May 9, 2010.

¹⁵¹ First Platoon, Company K, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment. Description of May 18 events from C.J. Chivers, "In Taliban Ambush, Marine Patrol Glimpse Long, Hot Summer," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2010.

¹⁵² Dion Nissenbaum, "Knocked Out Of Power In Afghan Town, Taliban Turn to Intimidation," McClatchy Newspapers, Washington Bureau, March 14, 2010.

¹⁵³ U.S. Fed News, "Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah," March 18, 2010.

Insurgents pointedly used lethal violence against select targets to publicly indicate punishments for collaboration with Afghan or ISAF personnel. A twenty-five-year old resident was taken from his home and beheaded in mid-March, and his dead body was placed next to “the main local school, where residents would be certain to see it in the morning.”¹⁵⁴ In northern Marjah, a senior elder was shot and most of the 200 people in his district fled.¹⁵⁵ A tribal leader was killed along with his nephew and three others,¹⁵⁶ and the body of a young man was left on his father’s doorstep after being abducted from home and beaten to death.¹⁵⁷ One young man accused of collaboration was killed “in broad daylight.”¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, lethal force was applied with far less frequency than other forms of intimidation.

Use of non-lethal force significantly increased insurgent influence in Marjah, and some locals claimed that the intimidation worsened after February 2010.¹⁵⁹ A local supervisor for several work programs was beaten and stopped working with ISAF.¹⁶⁰ Others were attacked after receiving compensation for work performed with local government programs.¹⁶¹ Many were contacted and threatened by “night letters” warning against collaboration, which were posted in public areas such as mosques and utility poles.¹⁶² Locals caught with ISAF-issued identification cards were also threatened,¹⁶³ as were workers employed by the new government to clear canals in the area.¹⁶⁴ Shopkeepers were threatened with injury or damage to their property.¹⁶⁵ Others were kidnapped and threatened with death if they “spied for the Americans.”¹⁶⁶ Overall, the goal of the campaign was not to threaten violence but to persuade locals into believing that ISAF and the new Afghan government would be incapable of delivering security and order.

The utility of insurgent intimidation was increased by their capability to move freely inside of Marjah. This ability ensured that almost anyone could be located—and that the population knew it. Thus, all were affected either directly by violence and threats or indirectly by the potential use of violence. In early March 2010, “militants had complete freedom of movement after dark” in some areas.¹⁶⁷ More

¹⁵⁴ Rod Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 18, 2010; U.S. Fed News, “Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah”; Heidi Vogt, “Taliban Fight In Afghan Town With Fear Campaign,” *The Associated Press*, March 18, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Agence France Presse—English, “US Fight Taliban With Heavy Metal and Rock Music,” April 6, 2010; Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains.”

¹⁵⁶ Amir Shah and Christopher Bodeen, “Afghan Police: 5 Suicide Bombers Arrested In Kabul,” *The Associated Press*, April 8, 2010.

¹⁵⁷ Marie Colvin and Christina Lamb, “Swift and Bloody: The Taliban’s Revenge,” *The Sunday Times* (London), May 9, 2010.

¹⁵⁸ Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains.”

¹⁵⁹ Tribal leader Haji Abdul Rehman Jan claimed in June 2010 that “the situation has gotten worse since the operation” in February. Quoted in Paul Wiseman, “Fighting Terror, Bit by Bit; Despite U.S. Gains, Taliban Still Intimidates in Marjah,” *USA Today*, June 10, 2010. For non-lethal intimidation, see also Carlotta Gall, C.J. Chivers, and Taimoor Shah, “Farmers Flee Area Taken by U.S., Saying Taliban Hold Sway,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2010; Paul Wiseman, “Fighting Terror, Bit by Bit; Despite U.S. Gains, Taliban Still Intimidates in Marjah,” *USA Today*, June 10, 2010.

¹⁶⁰ Richard Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2010.

¹⁶¹ Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains.”

¹⁶² Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja”; U.S. Fed News, “Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah,” March 18, 2010; Shah and Bodeen, “Afghan Police: 5 Suicide Bombers Arrested In Kabul”; Heidi Vogt, “Taliban Fight In Afghan Town With Fear Campaign.”

¹⁶³ Dion Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market Is Battleground For Afghans’ Trust,” *McClatchy Newspapers*, April 1, 2010.

¹⁶⁴ U.S. Fed News, “Taliban Using Fear Campaign In Marjah,” March 18, 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Rod Nordland and Sangar Rahimi, “Taliban Hit Back with a Campaign of Intimidation,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2010; Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja.”

¹⁶⁶ Agence France Presse—English, “US Fight Taliban With Heavy Metal and Rock Music.”

¹⁶⁷ Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja.”

importantly, local citizens “believed that was true in many other parts of the city as well.”¹⁶⁸ The most important element of this claim was not simply its factual reality, but in its popular perception.

When competing for people’s trust it matters less that militants can move freely but more that people believe they can. For example, in early March, a tribal elder from northern Marjah shared rumors of killing and intimidation: “Every day we are hearing that they kill people, and we are finding their dead bodies.”¹⁶⁹ Another tribal elder declared: “after dark the city is like the kingdom of the Taliban” and that “the government and international forces cannot defend anyone, even one kilometer from their bases.”¹⁷⁰ Even the governor of Marjah alleged that insurgents were holding near-nightly meetings which included the gathering of residents and demands that information on any possible local collaborators be provided.¹⁷¹ These meetings appeared to be held even in densely populated areas of the city.¹⁷²

Insurgents capably displayed their ability to carry out violence against collaborators, but did not perform acts of violence and intimidation in order to inspire a blowback of popular revolt against the counterinsurgents. In most cases, the threat of violence was enough to compel compliance with insurgent demands and avoid collaboration with ISAF and Afghan forces. Overall, it was reported that “all told, there have been about a dozen cases of retaliatory killings of civilians,” while there were “many more incidents of people being assaulted or receiving threatening letters.”¹⁷³ Insurgents did not kill a large amount of people because it was unnecessary for achieving their goals and it would have undermined their ability to be viewed as a competitor for governance in Marjah.

The threat of force was more effective and efficient than the use of force, and directly challenged a fundamental weakness of counterinsurgents—the high costs of delivering security and order versus the relative ease and low cost of disrupting it. The ability of insurgents to directly threaten and indirectly intimidate people in Marjah indicated a lack of order and stability in many places since late February, the precise objective of this tactic. Counterinsurgents responded by introducing new police forces in Marjah.

Afghan Police and Local Defense Forces

Afghan police had not operated in Marjah since their September 2008 expulsion by insurgent fighters. When they were previously in the area, police conduct alienated the local populace. Poor past performance in Marjah fueled skepticism and distrust of police capabilities, credibility, and commitment in early 2010—elements vital for counterinsurgent success.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja.” Italics added.

¹⁶⁹ Opper, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains.”

¹⁷⁰ “A tribal elder living in Marja, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of the Taliban, declared that in his area, Block 5, the militants had complete freedom of movement after dark. He said he believed that was true in many other parts of the city as well... ‘After dark the city is like the kingdom of the Taliban,’ the elder said, adding that he had heard of several other beheadings. ‘The government and international forces cannot defend anyone, even one kilometer from their bases.’” In Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja.” *International Herald Tribune*, March 18, 2010. Portions also in Rod Nordland and Sangar Rahimi, “Taliban Hit Back With A Campaign of Intimidation,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2010.

¹⁷¹ Nordland, “Taliban Turn to Intimidation In Marja.”

¹⁷² Rod Nordland and Sangar Rahimi, “Taliban Hit Back with a Campaign of Intimidation,” *The New York Times*, March 18, 2010.

¹⁷³ Chandrasekaran, “Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja.”

¹⁷⁴ C.J. Chivers, “With Marja Largely Won, Marines Try to Win Trust,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2010; Tom Coghlan, “Taliban Advance in the Shifting Sands of Anarchy and Tribal Feuds,” *The Times* (London), September 29, 2008; Dressler, *Securing Helmand*, 18; Lynne O’Donnel, “Security, Justice Key to Afghan Success: NATO, Agence France Presse—English, March 6, 2010; Christopher Torchia, “Afghan Opium Farmers Shoot At Drug

Capable and legitimate Afghan police are necessary to convince the Marjah populace that its own government can provide security, and to backfill ISAF troops to expand their pockets of influence. Afghan police forces have not yet fulfilled this goal. Failures in policing Marjah resulted from a lack of capabilities in Afghan police and unrealistic expectations by ISAF. In response, local forces are being sanctioned to provide community defense.

Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) and Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) are designed to fulfill different roles and missions than their ISAF and Afghan National Army (ANA) partners. These police units are not designed to conduct military-style operations. In Marjah, the ANA was the lead Afghan security force to conduct tactical operations, partnered with ISAF troops.¹⁷⁵ Neither ANCOP nor the AUP is a paramilitary police force—they do not impose order.¹⁷⁶ ANCOP and AUP enforce order after it has been established.¹⁷⁷ Across Afghanistan, ANCOP serves as a temporary replacement for local police as they undergo off-site training.¹⁷⁸ In high threat areas—like Marjah—ANCOP is assigned as the primary police force responsible for enforcing order after it has been established.¹⁷⁹ By late February 2010 in Marjah, more than 300 ANCOP were tasked with replacing ISAF and ANA forces that were attempting to impose and expand security by destroying, capturing, or forcing the withdrawal of insurgent forces.¹⁸⁰ Yet even as the ANCOP force increased to approximately 600 members, it struggled to perform expected duties.¹⁸¹

Afghan police in Marjah did not perform the mission desired by ISAF planners. The failures in Marjah lay in both the operational application of police and their performance. ANCOP were used before security had been established, forcing them to perform paramilitary operations they were not designed or prepared to execute. This role “exceeded the capability of this force” since the early utilization of ANCOP forced them to “perform functions for which they were not trained, equipped, or prepared to do.”¹⁸² Yet even if used in their appropriate mission with greater resources, one may conclude that ANCOP personnel would still have faltered based on several shortcomings displayed in Marjah.

Eradication Team, Killing One Member,” The Associated Press, April 8, 2002; Christopher Torchia, “Under Armed Guard, Afghan Poppy Eradication Program Gets Under Way,” The Associated Press, April 10, 2002.

¹⁷⁵ One ANA battalion operated independently during early February, but the rest of ANA forces in Marjah were partnered with ISAF and “remained in a supporting role.” Anthony Cordesman, *Afghan National Security Forces: What Will It Take to Implement the ISAF Strategy* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 12, 2010), p. 163.

¹⁷⁶ Although ANCOP is certainly a more elite force than the AUP. ANCOP has higher recruiting standards and better training than other forces in the ANP. For example, applicants must be literate, they attend longer and specialized training, start at a higher rank, and receive a higher salary. See C.J. Chivers, “Top Afghan Police Unit Earns Poor Grade For Mission In Marjah,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2010; Cordesman, *Afghan National Security Forces*.

¹⁷⁷ For comparison of paramilitary police that impose order and local police that enforce order, see James M. Dubik, *Accelerating Combat Power in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, December 2009).

¹⁷⁸ John J. Kruzal, “Afghan Police Culture Evolves Through ‘Focused District Development,’” American Forces Press Service, May 19, 2008.

¹⁷⁹ For roles of ANCOP and AUP within the ANP design for counterinsurgency campaigns, see Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Interior Affairs, “Police Plan for SY 1389,” March 2010, p. A-3.

¹⁸⁰ See Chivers, “Top Afghan Police Unit Earns Poor Grade”; Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar”; Dressler, “Operation Moshtarak: Taking and Holding Marjah.” For the guidelines to impose security by clearing an area, see *Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 175-177.

¹⁸¹ Transcript of U.S. Department of Defense News Briefing with Brigadier General Nicholson from Afghanistan, March 4, 2010, available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4575>, accessed August 13, 2010.

¹⁸² Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” 4.

ANCOP struggled to manage security and conduct basic intelligence functions.¹⁸³ In theory, “few military units can match a good police unit in developing an accurate human intelligence picture of their [area of operations].”¹⁸⁴ One challenge was language. Many ANCOP did not speak Pashto, the dominant language of Marjah and the rest of southern Afghanistan.¹⁸⁵ This hindered their ability to develop situational awareness, intelligence, and ties with the local population.

More broadly, ANCOP duties were undermined by a lack of sufficiently trained and equipped police who were “confident and capable enough to do what is expected of them relative to the enemy they face and the conditions in which they must succeed.”¹⁸⁶ Several groups of ANCOP reportedly established checkpoints “designed to do little more than shake down Afghans,” and others were taken out of duty for drug use.¹⁸⁷ Differing interpretations of ANCOP tasks also undermined their relations with ISAF, as some members did not adhere to the same standards of diligence and commitment as on guard duties or patrols. Some units were accused of looting.¹⁸⁸ By May 2010, some ANCOP were still establishing false checkpoints, and many were sent for remedial training.¹⁸⁹ This need for additional training may also reflect a larger challenge produced by the method in which ANCOP was deployed. Initially, ISAF policy was to deploy first and then train on-the-job, with only about fifty percent receiving formal training by June 2010.¹⁹⁰ This model has been adjusted to a process of training before deployment, but it remains unclear how the method will affect Marjah. Other problems existed with the Afghan Uniform Police.

Local Afghan Uniformed Police were recruited and trained for use in Marjah throughout the spring of 2010, but progress was slow. By late July 2010, there were only 185 AUP in Marjah.¹⁹¹ In March 2010, Marines at Camp Leatherneck began conducting eight-week training programs for new AUP, a pilot program of accelerated police instruction with additional military training.¹⁹² The Joint Security Academy graduated fifty in the first class and eighty-four in the second, aiming to create groups of instructors from the local area to quickly expand security forces.¹⁹³ But recruitment in Marjah remained slow—only eleven people volunteered for the first official recruitment, sixty-nine short of the desired number.¹⁹⁴ Several members of the area voiced reservations about joining the organization, telling U.S. Marines that “they were too scared or too intimidated by the Taliban to risk allying themselves with foreign forces.”¹⁹⁵ Others may have been deterred by the prerequisites for entering the force: being at least eighteen years old, presenting signatures of endorsement from two local elders, and not being registered in the local

¹⁸³ Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” 4-5. For U.S.-designated required skills for host nation security forces, see *Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 221.

¹⁸⁴ *Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 229.

¹⁸⁵ C.J. Chivers, “Top Afghan Police Unit Earns Poor Grade.”

¹⁸⁶ Dubik, 5. General Dubik is describing combat power, but the requirements remain applicable in the present context.

¹⁸⁷ C.J. Chivers, “Top Afghan Police Unit Earns Poor Grade”; Colvin and Lamb, “Swift and Bloody.”

¹⁸⁸ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja; Operation Intended As Model Falters Amid Resistance from Taliban,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2010.

¹⁸⁹ Colvin and Lamb, “Swift and Bloody.”

¹⁹⁰ States News Service, “McChrystal Assesses Past Year, Looks Ahead,” June 10, 2010.

¹⁹¹ Heidi Agostini, “Newly Appointed Marjah Governor Visits ‘Lions of Marjah’ Police Recruits,” I Marine Expeditionary Force press release, July 23, 2010.

¹⁹² U.S. Fed News, “Police Graduates Pledge to Serve,” April 2, 2010.

¹⁹³ U.S. Fed News, “Police Graduates”; U.S. Fed News, “Afghanistan Uniform Police Graduate 84 New Recruits,” April 14, 2010.

¹⁹⁴ Abigail Hauslohner, “Afghanistan: Looking for a Few Good Cops in Marjah,” *Time*, June 7, 2010; U.S. Fed News, “Afghanistan: Looking for a Few Good Cops in Marjah,” June 7, 2010.

¹⁹⁵ U.S. Fed News, “Looking for a Few Good Cops.”

ISAF database for insurgent ties.¹⁹⁶ After two months of training, these men “will be the beginnings of Marjah's first local police force.”¹⁹⁷

On July 14, 2010, President Karzai approved a U.S.-supported plan for creating local defense forces comprising of possibly 10,000 community police officers across Afghanistan.¹⁹⁸ These defense forces operate outside of the authority of either ANCOP or AUP. Initially focused on village defense, members will “carry weapons and be authorized to guard their communities,” and trained by U.S. Special Forces.¹⁹⁹ This policy will supplement steps already taken in Marjah during May and June 2010, when a Special Operations detachment worked with tribal leaders “to organize young men into armed neighborhood-watch patrols.”²⁰⁰ A similar effort was established between U.S. Marines from Command Outpost Turbett and village elder Hajji Bazgool, near the Koru Chareh bazaar in north-central Marjah. By late June 2010, ISAF troops in Daftani village of Marjah had “essentially allowed local residents to form an armed neighborhood watch.”²⁰¹ Fifty-nine men each receive a monthly wage of ninety dollars to patrol the small area's streets and trails with AK-47s, under the loose guidance of a small group of Marines living nearby. The area appears secure—the market nearby, Koru Chareh, “has not had a major incident, not even a shot fired, in four months.”²⁰² But using this program as an example or metric for others may be premature, as it was one of the few areas receiving sustained, concentrated resources, effort, and attention by ISAF. This high level of counterinsurgent strength may not be applied to the same degree and commitment in other places.

Counterinsurgent Governance

Competing for acceptance as the legitimate political authority in Marjah requires more than providing security operations; the counterinsurgents must also govern. Naturally, convincing the population to support new leaders and policies requires political operations to work in tandem with security operations. Counterinsurgency doctrine states that military actions “cannot by themselves achieve the political settlement needed to resolve the situation.”²⁰³ Political actions must address the underlying structural grievances that produce insurgent violence. To be successful, this requires a detailed understanding of what elements are actually driving the conflict. In Marjah, ISAF and Afghan actions pursued dual goals: to understand the environment and to implement policies to redress local grievances that gave legitimacy to insurgent claims of government shortcomings.

The basic elements for good governance were often pursued simultaneously, either through parallel policies or by tasks that addressed several elements concurrently. An early policy offered five dollars a day for clearing roads and irrigation canals—a policy that addressed unemployment, assisted with basic sanitation, and exercised administrative direction and control.²⁰⁴ Although many desires were made clear

¹⁹⁶ U.S. Fed News, “Looking for a Few Good Cops.”

¹⁹⁷ U.S. Fed News, “Looking for a Few Good Cops.”

¹⁹⁸ Rajiv Chandrasekaran and Karen DeYoung, “Afghan President Karzai Approves Plan for Local Defense Forces,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2010; Jim Garamone, “Karzai Approves Plan to Keep Taliban Out of Villages,” American Forces Press Service; Alissa Rubin, “Afghans to Form Local Forces to Fight Taliban,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 2010.

¹⁹⁹ David S. Cloud, “Afghanistan OKs Creation of Security Forces for Remote Areas,” *The Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2010; Chandrasekaran and DeYoung, “Afghan President Karzai Approves Plan.”

²⁰⁰ Chandrasekaran, “Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja.”

²⁰¹ United States Marine Corps press release, “In Afghanistan, No Direct Route to Success,” July 1, 2010.

²⁰² Miguel Marquez, “In Afghanistan, No Direct Route to Success,” ABC News, July 1, 2010, available at <http://abcnews.go.com>.

²⁰³ *Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, 152.

²⁰⁴ Michael M. Phillips, “Government Administrator Arrives in Marjah,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 2010.

by the people of Marjah—notably for schools, paved roads, and improved irrigation—creating schools and paving roads are not quick-impact projects.²⁰⁵ They take time. Although several schools were eventually reopened,²⁰⁶ ISAF and their Afghan partners instead focused on implementing smaller projects to deliver limited results immediately. Ideally, these small projects sought to address multiple deficiencies in governance. An initial policy was to compensate members of the Marjah populace that suffered during the February assault.

Residents met with ISAF and Afghan officials to voice complaints about relatives killed and damages from the operation, and many received conciliatory cash payments over the next several months.²⁰⁷ By March 1, 2010, ISAF was paying for damages and holding meetings to discuss development plans, as well as starting “quick impact projects” to show immediate, tangible improvements.²⁰⁸ Marines near Koru market delivered money to pay recovering merchants and hire workers to clean the area, clear irrigation canals, build wells, bridges, and restore mosques.²⁰⁹

Compensation payments were supplemented by smaller projects for economic development and to build services, experiencing both successes and setbacks. In early April 2010 approximately 2,000 men had been employed by 1/6 Marines, delivering \$150,000 a week in central Marjah.²¹⁰ By June 2010, civil affairs officers were dispensing \$125,000 a week on public works projects and five- to ten-thousand dollars a week in “battle damage” claims.²¹¹ Cash payments were then made to store owners intended to facilitate reopening of stores, but success was limited due to insurgent intimidation.²¹² Claims were supposed to be verified by ISAF and then given payments at the district center, but problems arose over the verification and dispersion of the funds.²¹³ By June 2010, USAID had funding to hire 10,000 Marjah residents to clean irrigation canals.²¹⁴ Yet, the project was undermined by a lack of equipment and security.²¹⁵

ISAF delivered “tens of thousands of dollars to store owners, canal cleaners, litter patrols and families that lost relatives.”²¹⁶ Distribution was tied with methods for additional cooperation. The same people delivering money and services were also issued identification cards, which people increasingly began accepting during late spring.²¹⁷ Yet many items more publicly visible than ID cards were avoided—like the water pumps for use in local neighborhoods. Of the 1,000 water pumps offered, only eighty-six were

²⁰⁵ U.S. Fed News, “Persuading Wary People,” April 3, 2010.

²⁰⁶ Mirwais Himmat and Zainullah Stanikzai, “15 Schools Reopened In South After Years,” Pajhwok Afghan News, April 8, 2010.

²⁰⁷ Tini Tran, “Afghan Complaints Show Obstacles Ahead In War,” The Associated Press, March 1, 2010.

²⁰⁸ C.J. Chivers, “With Marja Largely Won, Marines Try To Win Trust,” *The New York Times*, March 1, 2010; States News Service, “Stabilization in Musa Qa’Lah Points Way Forward For OP Moshtarak,” March 5, 2010; Marie Colvin and Christina Lamb, “Swift and Bloody: The Taliban’s Revenge,” *The Sunday Times* (London), May 9, 2010.

²⁰⁹ Dion Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market is Battleground for Afghans’ Trust,” McClatchy Newspapers, April 1, 2010; Colvin and Lamb, “Swift and Bloody.”

²¹⁰ Richard Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains,” *The New York Times*, April 4, 2010.

²¹¹ Paul Wiseman, “Fighting Terror, Bit by Bit; Despite U.S. Gains, Taliban Still Intimidates in Marjah,” *USA Today*, June 10, 2010.

²¹² Opiel, “Violence Helps Taliban Undo Afghan Gains.”

²¹³ Wiseman, “Fighting Terror, Bit by Bit.”

²¹⁴ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja; Operation Intended As Model Falters Amid Resistance from Taliban,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 2010.

²¹⁵ United States Marine Corps press release, “In Afghanistan, No Direct Route to Success,” July 1, 2010.

²¹⁶ Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market is Battleground.”

²¹⁷ Nissenbaum, “For Marines, Marjah Market is Battleground.”

taken by early May, and the plan to distribute 4,000 was scaled down seventy-five percent as people voiced concerns over being targeted by insurgents.²¹⁸

Overall, counterinsurgent attempts to establish and maintain a legitimate political authority suffered from two broad challenges: policy implementation and underlying assumptions about time. Attention has been focused on the shortcomings of the first element—the difficulty in delivering governance and whether an insertion of political and civil leaders is an appropriate policy as opposed to trying to build upon local structures or relationships.²¹⁹ But the expectations of a quick delivery may be the greater flaw. Unrealistic expectations concerning the time required to create effective and legitimate governance in Marjah contradicted the central tenet of counterinsurgency’s temporal dimension. Convincing people that they should trust a new local authority cannot occur by swift, dramatic military action alone. Skill and patience are required to build and develop effective methods for achieving intermediate objectives that contribute to strategic goals. Impatience has allowed insurgents to use time as a tactical weapon in Marjah, with potential strategic repercussions.

By March 1, 2010, counterinsurgents in Marjah were increasingly pressured to meet expectations of providing new local governance amid “initial exuberance over early success.”²²⁰ These gains fueled unrealistic expectations. The NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan echoed this sentiment, stating “the sheer amount of attention created a sense of expectation that is hard to fulfill.”²²¹ Early March 2010 was considered such a critical period for ISAF and their Afghan partners that they had to “quickly demonstrate what they [could] do for the population.”²²² One limitation on the creation of a local legitimate government authority was “in part because no one who planned the operation realized how hard it would be to convince residents that they could trust representatives of an Afghan government that had sent them corrupt police and inept leaders before they turned to the Taliban.”²²³ The inability to deliver on improbable expectations increased attention on Marjah, as well as pressure to produce greater results in an even quicker time period.²²⁴ These campaign expectations caused friction with tactical methods. Yet time was not the only challenge in Marjah. There were also several problems with the application of counterinsurgent policies in the area.

²¹⁸ Chandrasekaran, “Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja”; United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, “Success In Nad ‘Ali Is Benchmark for Expected Progress in Marjah,” States News Service, May 13, 2010.

²¹⁹ For example, see “‘Government in a Box’ or ‘Government in a Coffin?’” in Anthony Cordesman, *Afghan National Security Forces: What It Will Take to Implement the ISAF Strategy* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 12, 2010), pp. 165-166; Abigail Hauslohner, “As McChrystal Stumbles, the U.S. Campaign in Marjah Struggles,” *Time*, June 22, 2010; Joe Klein, “Barack Obama’s Big Fat Afghan Dilemma,” *Time*, June 17, 2010; Karen DeYoung and Craig Whitlock, “Kandahar Offensive Will Take Months Longer Than Planned, U.S. Says,” *The Washington Post*, June 11, 2010.

²²⁰ Gordon Lubold, “As Marjah Offensive Ends, A Crucial Test for Peace in Afghanistan,” *Christian Science Monitor*, March 3, 2010; Tini Tran, “Afghan Complaints Show Obstacles Ahead In War,” The Associated Press, March 1, 2010.

²²¹ Sengupta, “General Warns.”

²²² Lubold, “As Marjah Offensive Ends.”

²²³ Dion Nissenbaum, “McChrystal Calls Marjah a ‘Bleeding Ulcer’ in Afghan Campaign,” McClatchy Newspapers, May 24, 2010.

²²⁴ John Barry, Ron Moreau, and Sami Yousafzai, “Afghan Endgame,” *Newsweek*, July 4, 2010; James Dobbins, “The Afghanistan Clock,” *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2010; Sahil Kapur, “The Failure of McChrystal’s Afghan Plan,” *The Guardian*, June 23, 2010; Klein, “Barack Obama’s Big Fat Afghan War Dilemma”; Dan Murphy, “McChrystal Rolling Stone Remarks Spotlight Afghanistan Withdrawal Timeline,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 23, 2010.

Building a new local authority required finding policies specifically and appropriately tailored to out-govern insurgent challengers.²²⁵ A key difficulty was to reverse negative perceptions of state actions formed by past experiences.²²⁶ Years of unfavorable interactions with state actors could not be erased overnight. Convincing people that new authorities presented a legitimate political order and can govern better than alternatives required time, effort, and skill. This effort began in Marjah while many among the populace were angry that past promises remained unfulfilled, by small groups of people and limited resources.²²⁷

In early March 2010, only six ISAF civilians were in Marjah implementing civil and political reforms, in coordination with District Governor Haji Zahir and five ministerial representatives.²²⁸ ISAF and Afghan authorities coordinated to have Zahir inserted in the role, and he was brought to Marjah after living in Germany for 15 years.²²⁹ Reforms aimed to redress grievances among “a very skeptical population,” one which Zahir had limited influence.²³⁰ President Hamid Karzai visited Marjah to hear elders’ complaints and frustrations, with many indicating that they were “losing patience with the central government’s inability to provide services.”²³¹ Throughout March there were “far too few honest civil servants and far too few examples of Afghan government programs that actually deliver on their promises.”²³² Not only was there a lack of competent officials in Marjah, confusion existed over who were the desired people to work with and to support.²³³ As a former diplomat discussed: “One of my Afghan friends always says, ‘You want a shura, I can organize one for you in 24 hours’ ... The problem is, do you have the right people? ... you might end up supporting one side in a local conflict—and not realizing that it’s

²²⁵ “The Taliban... were able to outgovern the Karzai government at the local level...in Afghanistan the government is losing to the Taliban, and it’s losing because it’s being outgoverned, not outfought.” Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 157.

²²⁶ Phillips, “Government Administrator Arrives in Marjah.”

²²⁷ Laura King and Tony Perry, “Afghan District Not Secure Despite Offensive,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2010.

²²⁸ Special Representative Richard Holbrooke on March 2: there are “six civilians on the ground in Marja full time... Four are American. Two are British.” Quoted in States News Service, “Briefing by Special Representative Holbrooke on his Recent Trip To Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia, Georgia and Germany,” March 2, 2010; Chandrasekaran, “Afghan Official Who Will Govern Marja Pays First Visit, to Residents”; Phillips, “Afghan Flag Marks A Turning Point in Marjah.” Haji Zahir was replaced as lead official in Marjah on July 12, 2010. Karen DeYoung, “Sen. Levin Urges State Department to Put Afghan Taliban on List of Terror Groups,” *The Washington Post*, July 14, 2010.

²²⁹ The details of Zahir’s selection, path to Marjah, official appointment, remain unclear, as well as his precise authority, jurisdiction, and duties. Joshua Foust, “The Next Battles for Marja,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 2010. See also Julius Cavendish, “Afghan Troops Raise Flag in Key Town but Marjah Battle Not Over Yet,” *The Independent* (London), February 18, 2010; Julius Cavendish, “Marjah Offensive: New Afghan Governor Takes Office as Battle Rages,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 22, 2010; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “New Mayor Delivers a Plea to Marja,” *The Washington Post*, February 23, 2010; Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Troops Try to Secure Vital Areas of Marja,” *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2010; Joshua Partlow, “Offensive in Marja Entering New Phase,” *The Washington Post*, March 2, 2010; Tony Perry, “Afghan Flag is Raised in Marja,” *The Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2010

²³⁰ USMC Brigadier General Larry Nicholson: “We’ve got a very skeptical population here.” Quoted in Agence France Presse—English, “US Troops Face ‘Skeptical’ Afghans In Marjah: General,” March 4, 2010.

²³¹ Heidi Vogt, “Afghan President Visits Town Seized From Taliban,” Associated Press Worldstream, March 7, 2010.

²³² Doyle McManus, “So Far, the ‘Box’ is Mostly Empty,” *The Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2010.

²³³ Anne Flaherty, “US Says Too Few Afghans to Take Control in Marjah,” The Associated Press, May 6, 2010.

roulette.”²³⁴ It was upon this framework that planners attempted to create new, effective district governance—something that remained a “work in progress.”²³⁵

New civil policies in Marjah were channeled through the District Delivery Programme (DDP), a body for coordinating the national governance, reconstruction, and economic development plans of Afghan ministries at the district level once security has been established.²³⁶ The DDP was led by the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) under the leadership of Helmand Governor Gulab Mangal and the Provincial Reconstruction Team.²³⁷ An IDLG field mission to southern Afghanistan found many shortcomings with the DDP,²³⁸ and many agreed with assessments that the concept for delivering new governance in Marjah was disappointing and required significant improvement to deliver on expectations.²³⁹ Many lessons learned reflected challenges in the process of creating new governance. Yet, the problem was not simply the DDP mechanism for delivering governance; good governance is not a template that can be placed upon an area. Deeper structural issues had to be addressed. There are fundamental challenges inherent in creating good governance through economic development, delivering essential services, and forming public administration.

New governance in Marjah had to be established and consolidated, the most long-term task of ISAF and Afghan counterinsurgents. Although several setbacks occurred, the long duration of time required to build good governance and convince people to accept new actors as a legitimate public authority relegates judgments of absolute success or failure as premature. Overall, establishing a new local government in Marjah proved “even more complex than [ISAF] thought.”²⁴⁰ One problem was the new local leader. Although Haji Zahir possessed “a number of strengths that any politician would like to have,” many concluded that he lacked administrative and managerial abilities.²⁴¹ Zahir was fired in July 2010, and replaced by Abdul Mutalab.²⁴²

²³⁴ Alissa J. Rubin, “Afghans’ Distrust of Officials Poses Threat to Military Successes,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 2010.

²³⁵ Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” 5.

²³⁶ DDP is “an inter-ministerial programme under the coordinating leadership of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) in partnership with: The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Justice, The Ministry of Public Education, The Ministry of Justice The Ministry of Public Health, The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, The Supreme Court, The Attorney General’s office, The Ministry of Finance, The Civil Service Commission, The Ministry of Hajj and Endowment, The Ministry of the Interior; and Municipalities.” NATO Allied Command Operations factsheet, “Operation Moshtarak (Phase II), Central Helmand—Nad-e-Ali and Marjah,” Public Diplomacy Division (PDD), Press and Media Section, Media Operations Centre (MOC), NATO HQ Brussels, available at <http://www.aco.nato.int/page20844847.aspx>, under links section, accessed July 22, 2010.

²³⁷ Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” 6; NATO press release, “Press Briefing on Operation Moshtarak,” with Brigadier-General Tremblay, ISAF Spokesperson, General Azimi, Spokesperson for the Afghan Ministry of Defence and Zemerai Bashary, Spokesperson for the Afghan Ministry of the Interior, February 17, 2010; Frank Ruggiero, “The Meaning of Marjah: Developments in Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” prepared statement for testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 6, 2010, pp. 4-5.

²³⁸ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Independent Directorate of Local Governance, District Delivery Plan “Initial Lessons Learned,” available at RONNA-Afghan web portal, available at <https://ronna-afghan.harmonieweb.org/security/default.aspx>, retrieved July 21, 2010.

²³⁹ Dressler, “Marjah’s Lessons for Kandahar,” 7. See also GIRoA, IDLG, DDP “Initial Lessons Learned.”

²⁴⁰ General Stanley McChrystal, quoted in Agence France Presse—English, “Key Kandahar Offensive Faces Delays: US Commander,” June 10, 2010.

²⁴¹ Julius Cavendish, “NATO’s Grand Experiment Leaves Marjah Scrabbling for a Future,” *The Independent* (London), June 30, 2010.

²⁴² The Associated Press, “Afghanistan Replaces Head of Troubles Marjah,” July 14, 2010.

Governance problems cannot simply be blamed on Zahir, as multiple elements of local governance suffered from insurgent setbacks and counterinsurgent shortcomings. Representatives of key Afghan ministries largely avoided Marjah, missing meetings and staying in different cities as late as June.²⁴³ While the Minister of Rural Development moved into Marjah, others largely remained in Lashkar Gah. Without civil leaders, effectively no civil servants could be recruited for basic administration. One prosecutor was available, but had almost no cases since people were too intimidated to register criminal complaints.²⁴⁴ Even if available, insecurity limited the reach of governance as it naturally lagged behind military and police operations.²⁴⁵ One response has been intermediary steps between security forces and formal governance through community meetings.

Elder meetings were developed in May and June. These bi-monthly elder meetings began in May, and by the third gathering roughly 200 men attended, compared with sixty the previous meeting.²⁴⁶ Ideally, these community leaders form a representative council linking the Marjah populace with official district governance. The meetings in June were only an interim step to indirectly link Afghan and ISAF authorities with people in Marjah, aimed to gradually increase representation and confidence.²⁴⁷

Notable Changes

There were three notable developments in the military command, the rotation of Marine units, and the political leadership in Marjah during the summer of 2010. First, ISAF regional commands were restructured on June 14, 2010, when Regional Command South (RC-S) was divided into Regional Command South and Regional Command Southwest (RC-SW).²⁴⁸ Helmand and Nimroz provinces were separated from RC-S and placed into RC-SW under the command of U.S. Marine Corps Major General Richard Mills, who leads more than 27,000 personnel.²⁴⁹ RC-S now includes only the provinces of Kandahar, Zabul, and Uruzgan, and the 30,000 ISAF members in this area fall under the command of Major General Nick Carter of Great Britain.²⁵⁰

Second, new fighters have arrived in Marjah. In northern Marjah, 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment replaced 3/6 on August 9, 2010, and in central Marjah, 2/6 replaced 1/6.²⁵¹ It is unclear if or how their tactics, techniques, and procedures will change from their predecessor units over the next seven months. Currently, ISAF forces have continued to patrol and conduct targeted searches and raids.²⁵²

Additional reconnaissance Marines are now operating to the west and east of Marjah, but information on these movements are also limited.²⁵³ These Force Reconnaissance Marines are intended to supplement the

²⁴³ Chandrasekaran, "Commanders Fear Time Is Running Out in Marja."

²⁴⁴ Wiseman, "Fighting Terror, Bit by Bit."

²⁴⁵ UKMoD, "Success In Nad 'Ali Is Benchmark."

²⁴⁶ James Clark, "Elder Shuras May Herald Time of Renewal for Marjah," USMC Press Release, June 16.

²⁴⁷ Federal News Service, "Special Defense Department Briefing with Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command," July 7, 2010.

²⁴⁸ "Regional Command Southwest Stands Up in Afghanistan," International Security Assistance Force Joint Command-Afghanistan press release 2010-06-CA-042.

²⁴⁹ ISAF release 2010-06-CA-042.

²⁵⁰ ISAF release 2010-06-CA-042.

²⁵¹ 2/9 is led by Lieutenant Colonel James Fullwood, while 2/6 is led by Lieutenant Colonel Kyle Ellison. Hope Hodge, "2/9 Replaces 3/6 in Afghanistan," *The Daily News* (Jacksonville, North Carolina), Distribute by McClatchy, July 20, 2010; U.S. Fed News, "2/9 Assumes Control of Northern Marjah from 3/6," August 10, 2010.

²⁵² U.S. State News, "Two Suspected Insurgents Detained in Helmand Province," July 17, 2010.

²⁵³ United States Marine Corps press release, "Summer Plan For 'Stan," July 6, 2010.

two battalions currently in Marjah.²⁵⁴ First Reconnaissance Battalion is now operating to the west of Marjah in the Sistani desert and east in Trek Nawa, where insurgents are suspected to be coordinating attacks and using the area as a sanctuary.²⁵⁵ The 1,000-strong unit replaced the company-size reconnaissance detachment that had operated out of Camp Leatherneck and primarily conducted raids and support missions.²⁵⁶

Third, as previously mentioned, Marjah district governor Haji Zahir was fired on July 14, 2010, and replaced by Abdul Mutalab.²⁵⁷ The implications of this change are still unfolding. A great deal is unknown about Mutalab, except that he has “served in provincial and district government positions in Helmand”²⁵⁸ and was an “Afghan Army lieutenant colonel.”²⁵⁹ It remains to be seen how this change helps or hinders the establishment of a legitimate government able to address local support of insurgents in Marjah.

Conclusions

Marjah is no longer the hub of Taliban resources and operations that it was less than one year ago, and several signs indicate counterinsurgent gains. The Taliban commander in Marjah “openly acknowledged to his fellow insurgents that the Taliban are losing Marjah and that their chances of winning are poor.”²⁶⁰ Additionally, insurgent methods have continued to increase resentment among the local populace.²⁶¹ Insurgents have been pushed from Marjah and into more remote areas, yet they do maintain the ability to project into Marjah. Moreover, much of the population remains unconvinced as to whom they should support.

Counterinsurgent operations in southern Afghanistan require skill and patience for tactical successes to contribute to operational and strategic goals. Expectations of a quick, decisive victory in Marjah are inaccurate. It should not be surprising that preliminary success has taken more than six months. The current challenge requires more than killing or capturing insurgents; it requires convincing the local populace that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and its security forces are legitimate and worthy of their active support. It also requires a stable government capable of addressing security and cutting off aid and support to insurgents. These tasks will not be easy in a region with a history of fluctuating insecurity, an assortment of political leaders with varying loyalties, and many negative interactions with Afghan officials.

Marjah stands as one of the final obstacles for consolidating hard-fought security gains in central and southern Helmand province over the past several years. A consolidation of gains aims to deliver the population with freedom of movement along the southern and central Helmand valley, access to markets

²⁵⁴ 1/6 is scheduled to be replaced by 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment during late July, while 3/6 is scheduled for relief by 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment later in the summer. United States Marine Corps press release, “Summer Plan For ‘Stan,” July 6, 2010.

²⁵⁵ Wesley Morgan, “Afghanistan Order of Battle,” Institute for the Study of War, August 2010; U.S. Fed News, “One-Star: 1st Recon to Aid in Marjah Fight,” June 3, 2010; USMC release, “Summer Plan.”

²⁵⁶ From 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion out of Okinawa. U.S. Fed News, “One-Star.”

²⁵⁷ Abdul Zahir Aryan is known as Haji Zahir. Mutalab has also been spelled Mutalib. Joshua Partlow, “Eight U.S. Service Members Killed in Series of Attacks in Southern Afghanistan,” *The Washington Post*, July 15, 2010; The Associated Press, “Afghanistan Replaces Head of Troubled Marjah,” July 14, 2010.

²⁵⁸ Partlow, “Eight U.S. Service Members Killed.”

²⁵⁹ Heidi Agostini, “Newly Appointed Marjah Governor Visits ‘Lions of Marjah’ Police Recruits,” I Marine Expeditionary Force press release, July 23, 2010.

²⁶⁰ International Security Assistance Force News Release, “Officials Note Low Insurgent Morale In Afghanistan,” August 25, 2010, available at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=60579>.

²⁶¹ ISAF, “Officials Note Low Insurgent Morale.”

for commerce and trade, and to build entitlements and obligations in a mutually rewarding relationship with their government. Yet Helmand is only one province in southern Afghanistan, and operations in this area must be judged within the larger operational and strategic goals.

Ultimately, ISAF and Afghan strategic planners aim to create a zone of security stretching eastward from the Helmand River Valley to Kandahar and Zabul provinces, providing stability throughout the majority of the populated areas of southern Afghanistan. Delivering these campaign objectives and their strategic ends is designed to build upon an essential foundation of counterinsurgency operations similar to those in Marjah. Although ultimate success or failure for ISAF and Afghan forces in Afghanistan does not rely solely on Marjah, it is a vital node in the zone of security that counterinsurgents aim to establish in control in essential terrain in southern Afghanistan.

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