



## Editor's Comments

This month marks the beginning of the United States' third military intervention of the new millennium. This month's Journal covers issues from Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya. Additionally, we conclude with a book review that describes a theory on how the weak win wars. We continue to receive unparalleled contributions from the field, and we are grateful for your support and readership.

-- SWJ



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## Countering Extremism in Yemen: Beyond Interagency Cooperation

by Kaz Kotlow

Published [online](#) 31 March 2011

Extremism, especially violent extremism, is a clear threat to the national security of the United States. It is widely believed that effectively addressing quality of life issues, encouraging peaceful conflict resolution and enhancing political inclusion are critical to neutralizing extremist messaging, helping prevent the development and spread of violent extremism. Traditionally, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and The United States Department of State (DOS) are the primary agencies for development, with Department of Defense (DOD) efforts in support. But traditional "interagency cooperation" has often not resulted in effective programs. The U.S. Government (USG) should maximize integration of effort, bringing all government elements together from inception to planning and assessment, of a single coherent plan. DOD assets, from doctrine to personnel and funding, can be of

great benefit in helping create and execute those integrated efforts.

States which cannot address the basic needs and aspirations of their people, can foster political and social "space" where extremist messaging is more likely to find an accepting audience. Improving the effectiveness of stability, development, and assistance efforts can enhance U.S. national security by addressing the drivers of instability and poverty, which create fertile territory for extremism and radicalization. Five of the seven Strategic Goals for DOS and USAID are clearly aligned with missions that DOD has also identified as critical to defeating extremism.<sup>1</sup> While operations in each country must be tailored to the environment in that country, this work will discuss Yemen in order

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2007-2012: Transformational Diplomacy. Washington, DC, May 2007, 10-11.

to highlight the Country Team's approach in planning, execution, integration and evaluation of what DOD describes as stability operations. Their approach may be seen as a test case for others facing similar challenges worldwide.

In December of 2005 the National Security Council published a directive outlining goals, roles and responsibilities for reconstruction, development and stabilization-type operations. The document identified State Department's office of Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) as the lead agency for those efforts. Unfortunately, as noted in the Project for National Security Reform, in the current system "neither a lead organization nor a lead individual has the de jure or de facto authority to command independent departments and agencies."<sup>2</sup> Consequently, motivated individuals at ground level continue to be the primary driving force for effective integration of effort.

USAID clearly addressed impediments to integration in its recently published policy on Civil-Military Cooperation. This policy recognizes the expertise and even funding that DOD can bring to bear, while noting that USAID retains primacy for overall USG assistance, development and stabilization efforts.<sup>3</sup> The current Chief of the USAID mission in Yemen, Dr. Jeffrey Ashley, has worked closely with DOD on numerous occasions, most recently in Iraq. A number of other USAID officers and representatives from the Office of Transition Initiatives also previously worked closely alongside DOD counterparts. Dr. Ashley drew from those experiences to create a development/stability program that fully integrates all agencies of the U.S. Government (USG) into a continuous planning, execution, and assessment cycle.

Most sectors in Yemen, including internal politics, security and the economy, have been on a downward trend for many years. Consequently it is difficult to determine just where to start "stabilization operations". DOD typically assists USAID in its mid to long-term goals for development and assistance. But recent high-profile operations by Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), sharpened the immediate focus of U.S. goals in Yemen. Two specific events highlighted the reach of AQAP outside of Yemen; the August 2009 attempted assassination of Prince Mohammad Bin-Naif, head of counterterrorism for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the failed suicide bombing attempt on North-

west Airlines flight 253, in December of 2009. Those attacks underlined the need for Yemeni counterterrorism forces to take direct action against AQAP. Concurrently, both the U.S. Embassy Country Team and Washington DC recognized the need for a more holistic, integrated approach to effectively address the near and long term threat of AQAP's extremist messaging and recruiting efforts.

Counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine may provide a useful perspective for countering extremism, with its primacy on non-military, non-kinetic means to positively effect the population. Tightly focused military action against identified targets is usually necessary, and improving the sense of security for the population is critical to setting the stage for successful development, but they are the means to an end. Indeed, effective counterinsurgency is at heart a socio-political mission. Counterinsurgency is dynamic, not strapped to a single set-piece plan. The focus on the population is in essence the strategic offensive of COIN, with the goal of nullifying the traction of extremist arguments and recruiting. Kinetic operations are more tactical, addressing immediate threats. A coherent counterinsurgency strategy recognizes the need to tailor the approach to the circumstances and highlights the need to constantly monitor, assess and adjust. Consequently, maximum integration of effort across the Department of State, USAID and the Department of Defense is essential to create and execute an agile and successful program. The paradigm of counterinsurgency can foster that holistic, whole of government approach.<sup>4</sup>

An approved overarching strategy is crucial to developing a coherent plan of action. In the most recent Mission Strategic and Resource Plan, the Chief of Mission notes that the Country Team in Yemen will act as a laboratory for creating whole of government approaches for the wide variety of problems facing Yemen. Most importantly, the Ambassador detailed common USG goals for Yemen with the following statement.

The long-term vision for Yemen is a nation at peace with itself, able to provide basic services and economic opportunity to its citizens so that the multiple, competing centers of gravity (tribes, opposition political parties, regional players) begin to see their interests served by an inclusive political process, and terrorist organizations no longer find an environment receptive to in-

<sup>2</sup> The Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Shield*, Washington, DC, Nov 2008, vii.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Agency for International Development, *Civilian-Military Cooperation Policy*, Washington, DC, July 2008.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3-24: Counterinsurgency Operations*, Washington, DC, October 2009, p. x.

tolerance and violence. This environment will contribute materially to the achievement of our priorities in Yemen: prevent attacks on America's homeland, its citizens or economic interests abroad, as well as attacks on our allies.<sup>5</sup>

The USAID mission in Yemen used the common goals and strategy from national policy to guide its efforts. USAID initiated the program by trying to identify the primary drivers of instability and poverty. All DOD elements with representatives in country; The Office of Military Cooperation (OMC), Special Operations Command Forward, Yemen (SFY) personnel, and the Defense Attaché Office (DAO) participated in the process from its inception. The interagency group identified the following as likely primary drivers of instability and conflict; large youth bulge and rapidly growing population, growing natural resource scarcity, lack of economic opportunities, declining government revenues, corruption, limited state presence, violent Islamist extremism, unequal development and marginalized political representation. The group determined where USG programs could have the most impact with regards to both benefit to the population and ability to forward USG policy.<sup>6</sup>

The Embassy interagency group also studied the areas in question with regard to the ability of the USG to effectively deliver goods or services on the ground, with emphasis on the role of local tribal dynamics. U.S. military elements referred to their training experiences in various areas to help provide a more complete picture of the overall security situation and accessibility. The U.S. military elements also factored stability and development efforts into training plans with the Yemeni military. For example, SFY provided training, advice and assistance to facilitate the Yemeni Special Operations Forces (YSOF) in their delivery of medical assistance to Marib province.<sup>7</sup> This mission had the dual benefit of improving the image of YSOFF while enhancing security in an area identified as a high priority for USAID's development plans.

USAID also worked diligently to marry-up their Office of Transition Initiatives with the Civil-Military Support Element (CMSE) of SFY, enhanc-

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Mission to Yemen, FY 2012 Mission Strategic and Resource Plan, Washington DC, April 2010, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> USAID Yemen, Overview of USAID/Yemen Country Strategy 2010-2012, Sana'a Yemen, September 2010.

<sup>7</sup> From personal interviews with personnel at U.S. Central Command and U.S. Special Operations Command, December 2010.



Watch for Robert Haddick's weekly editorial, This Week at War. Friday evenings at Foreign Policy.

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ing overall integration of effort. This combined structure ensured seamless planning and execution of the Community Livelihoods and Responsive Governance initiative, which actively addresses a number of the key drivers of instability and violence.<sup>8</sup> In areas considered too dangerous for a direct official US presence, the Embassy operates through a variety of U.S. or international contractors and non-governmental organizations. Counterinsurgency recognizes the critical importance of shaping the information battlespace. In Yemen,

<sup>8</sup> USAID Yemen, Transition Initiatives, Sana'a, Yemen, June 2010.

the Military Information Support Team (MIST) from SFY works directly with the Embassy Public Affairs Office (PAO), developing effective messaging to support all missions. When possible, it is important for the local population to be aware of U.S. efforts, to help mitigate extremist negative messaging. All of these efforts will be subject to periodic, independent evaluation to help determine effectiveness and guide future stability operations.

Integrated stability operations in Yemen are in their early stages, so it is difficult to gauge their impact on support for AQAP. But the Country Team has created a mutually supportive, whole of government approach that maximizes the opportunities for success. This kind of integrated approach can be used worldwide. Agencies can, and should, expect their representatives to work directly with, and in support, of their interagency part-

ners in a seamless manner. That expectation can help make this approach more systemic and less personality dependent.

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## Shaping Coalition Forces' Strategic Narrative in Support of Village Stability Operations

by Scott Mann

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This article is designed to provide strategists and tacticians with comprehensive recommendations for weaving a strategic narrative and supporting plans to achieve a tipping point in the Afghan Counterinsurgency Campaign by leveraging the power of information to amplify the bottom up effects of Village Stability Operations (VSO) and Afghan Local Police (ALP).

(VSO and ALP are growing in scope and scale within the Afghanistan Civil Military Campaign. Village Stability Operations have the potential to reverse the Afghan insurgency's political momentum, but VSO requires an accompanying strategic narrative to coalesce and coherently amplify the numerous localized victories Afghans have achieved, and continue to achieve against insurgents. While Coalition Forces (CF) and GIRoA strategy has evolved to support local Afghans through VSO and ALP, advancing the CF strategic narrative in line with VSO and ALP has not been given equal weight. As a result, VSO and ALP successes are difficult to reconcile with the current narrative of GIRoA being the sole entity responsible for providing security, development, and governance for Afghans. Indeed, VSO and ALP victories may even result in highlighting GIRoA's gov-

ernance gaps when local Afghans defeat insurgents on their own initiative.

CF and GIRoA can recapture the political momentum by building a strategic narrative that amplifies the cumulative effects of VSO and that better aligns GIRoA's intent and capabilities with the successes of its citizens and villages. A VSO strategic narrative emphasizes three key points: (1) Afghans standing up for themselves, (2) against a criminal insurgency, and (3) with support from GIRoA and CF. Tangible evidence of Afghans standing up for themselves with GIRoA support can, when cumulatively captured and broadcast as part of a broader narrative, render the insurgency irrelevant to the people. The combined effect of this strategy is to reduce insurgent actions to the behavior of criminals and thieves, and ultimately irrelevant to the Afghan people. This formulation, then, has strategic impact on the three key audiences of Afghan citizens, the insurgency, and the key COIN stakeholders with the intent of generating momentum through a narrative that is linked to on-the-ground actions and deeds.

Despite the potentially momentum changing effects of a strategic bottom up narrative, current

VSO activities are still largely unrecognized by many key audience segments. Indeed, most VSO successes remain localized in nature and are not amplified beyond the District Level. Although a strong case can be made for closely protecting VSO activities across the country, this article makes the argument that a positive shift in COIN momentum through the use of a Strategic Narrative is worth the risk to force and mission as long as responsible measures are employed to mitigate these risks.

### The Afghan Strategic Narrative Gap

Perception in Afghan politics is often more important than objective fact. The insurgency has momentum in the battle of perceptions because its narratives and actions are more closely aligned than those of Coalition Forces (CF) and the Afghan national government (GIROA). Creating perceptions of success and translating them into political momentum are critical for GIROA's ability to establish legitimacy and restore the population's confidence and trust.<sup>1</sup> CF narratives are based upon GIROA actions to meet the security, development, and governance needs of its population across its entire territory, actions that GIROA has had difficulty fulfilling. The insurgency's narratives, on the other hand, are based upon actions of swift and severe punishment against individuals who assist CF and GIROA.

Since the insurgency's narratives are based on local actions as opposed to national actions, it can credibly support them with threats, kidnappings, beatings, IED attacks, and murder. These actions intend to portray GIROA as being unable to fulfill its own narrative. Conversely, CF and GIROA continue to support a narrative structure that places the burden for meeting Afghan security and governance objectives entirely on a young, developing, centralized government. In other words, a CF and GIROA counterinsurgency narrative that places impractical expectations on the national government will consistently undermine its performance in the eyes of target audiences.

CF and GIROA now have the opportunity to recast their narrative through the implementation of Village Stability Operations (VSO). The VSO program can help shift the narrative from GIROA bearing the entire burden for local security, development, and governance to GIROA playing a support-

ing role. Backed by a VSO operational design that focuses efforts on building village economic and governance structures, the VSO narrative can quickly demonstrate meaningful actions aligned with the narrative. CF and GIROA will benefit from the strategic fact that the insurgency is not the preferred governing entity. Rather, a credible, responsive GIROA that supports local participation is preferred far more than insurgent rule. A new strategic narrative rooted in the principles of, "Afghans standing up for themselves against a criminal insurgency, closely supported by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Coalition," more appropriately sets popular expectations and successfully aligns words and deeds.

The purpose of this paper is to outline a strategic plan that allows GIROA and CF to truly harness the collective power of local actions and events characteristic of VSO and amplify them within a coherent narrative to achieve strategic effects. Projecting local actions and events consistently into this narrative will achieve effects that (1) shift perceptions of key audiences favorably toward CF and GIROA political momentum in the campaign, (2) help expand stability to other areas of Afghanistan, (3) render the current insurgency an irrelevant and unattractive choice to the Afghan people, and (4) convince the Afghan people that Americans and CF will continue to assist the Afghan people at least through 2014 in standing up to the insurgency and in developing formal and informal governance capability and capacity.

### Why Narratives are Critical in Counterinsurgency Operations

A narrative is the central mechanism through which ideologies or worldviews are expressed and facts are interpreted. It is a cognitive organizational scheme expressed in story form and is central to representing identity, particularly the collective identity of ethnic or religious sects. A narrative about a community's reality generates models of how actions and consequences are linked. These stories are often the basis for strategies and actions.<sup>2</sup> The ability to craft a coherent narrative and similarly frame subsequent events in ways that resonate with specific audiences can play a tremendous role in shaping perceptions of momentum in an insurgency.

For a narrative to be effective, it must resonate with the target audience and compel belief in the

<sup>1</sup> Identified in the March-April 2008 *Military Review* article "Anbar Awakens: The Tipping Point" [http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/MarApr08/Smith\\_AnbarEngMarApr08.pdf](http://usacac.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/MarApr08/Smith_AnbarEngMarApr08.pdf) by the author and COL(P) Sean MacFarland. Borrowed from a concept outlined by COL (ret) Rick Everett

<sup>2</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counter Insurgency, December, 2006, 1-76

desired perception. For example, “Osama bin Laden depicts himself as a man purified in the mountains of Afghanistan who is gathering and inspiring followers and punishing infidels. In the collective imagination of Bin Laden and his followers, they are agents of Islamic history who will reverse the decline of the *umma* [Muslim community] and bring about its inevitable triumph over Western imperialism.”<sup>1</sup> The story telling aspect of a narrative seeks to activate symbols that inspire members of the community to tacitly or directly support the effort. In bin Laden’s narrative, the symbols of purity against corruption, Islamic glory versus subjugation, and the struggle against apostasy seek to animate frustrated Muslims across countries and unite them in a common cause.

The perceptions of key audience segments can drastically shape the outcome of an insurgency. In fact, several recent studies of Information Operations within insurgencies assert that “perceptions often matter more than truth.”<sup>2</sup> In a country like Afghanistan, information flow is extremely limited due to the rural isolation of the populace, overt insurgent intimidation, and limited media options. Playing on these limitations, the Taliban have recently constructed a narrative that consistently tells rural Afghans the Americans will abandon them in the summer of 2011.<sup>3</sup> Despite the fact that this is untrue, the dearth of communications options and confusing narratives emanating from both Washington D.C. and CF in Afghanistan combine to confuse the Afghan population and cause many to hedge their bets when working with CF. As a result, the recently announced CF commitment to Afghanistan through 2014 has not had much impact on Afghan perceptions. The best way to counter and shape the Afghan perception of CF and GIRoA commitment to them is through a central, unified narrative that empowers Afghans through CF and GIRoA efforts.

### A Strategic Narrative for Village Stability Operations

A CF and GIRoA VSO narrative must resonate with three key audience segments. These three key audiences consist of (a) the Afghan public, (b) the insurgents, and (c) the U.S. and NATO Domestic Audience. The narrative emerging from the VSO experience is, “Afghans standing up for themselves

against a criminal insurgency, closely supported by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Coalition.” Interestingly, this narrative is playing out through the efforts of Village Stability Platforms all over Afghanistan in a variety of ways that could greatly contribute to a perceived momentum shift in the war against the insurgency. A closer look at this simple, three-part narrative and how it can favorably shape the perceptions of the key audiences is in order.

First, “Afghans standing up for themselves” is the central component of the narrative. The concept of fostering “bottom up” conditions that allow local villages, tribes, or *qawms* to achieve stability at the local level is not only popular within Pashtun rural villages, it is also rooted in Afghan history.<sup>4</sup> The manner in which many rural Afghan residents have taken up arms against the insurgents is representative of a range of self-organizing uprisings against the insurgency that have occurred and continue to occur in numerous rural pockets throughout Afghanistan. The notion of “Afghans standing up” within the villages is a very strong narrative component that has significant untapped potential.

Most importantly, this aspect of the narrative fundamentally alters the Afghan individual’s role in the politics of the state. The current CF and GIRoA narrative relegates the individual to a passive role in society. The national government is expected to *provide* security, development, and governance; the individual is a *recipient* of the effort, not an active participant. The individual is not empowered by this narrative to take control of his future or to build up his community, the government is supposed to take on this responsibility. Under the proposed VSO narrative, the individual becomes an *active* participant in securing his community and building his family’s future. Instead of depending on the government for everything, the *individual becomes an active participant* and is empowered by government and Coalition assistance. This narrative structure makes the Afghan individual the central change agent in the country to complement the government. This localizes security, politics, and development, so that *the government no longer has to provide everything all the time*; the individuals taking responsibility for their own villages accomplish the common objectives of security, development, and governance. Amplifying individual successes reinforces the alignment of words with deeds, especially if GIRoA and CF effectively provide resources and support to the villages.

<sup>1</sup>Headquarters, Department of the Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 Counter Insurgency, December, 2006, 1-76

<sup>2</sup> Major Niel Smith, “Sisyphus and Counterinsurgency”, [www.smallwarsjournal.com](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com)

<sup>3</sup>Author Spotlight, “the Diplomat hears from David Kilcullen”, *The Diplomat*, September 9, 2010

<sup>4</sup> Tribal Analysis Center, “Simultaneously clearing, holding, and building-A Rural development team program” (Copyright 2009)

The second part of the narrative, a “criminal insurgency,” establishes the adversary against which “Afghans stand up for themselves.” In Day Kundi Province, for example, the oppressive tactics employed by the Taliban against the local population became intolerable and incited them to rise up against the insurgents. Once the insurgents were ousted by the locals, the insurgents employed heavy handed tactics in an attempt to regain lost physical and human terrain. This only served to further galvanize the local population’s resolve to continue standing up to the Taliban and render them irrelevant in the area. This natural de-selection of the insurgents occurred because the insurgents could no longer compete in the realm of ideas.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to understand the relationship between the terms “criminal” and “insurgent.” An insurgent’s behavior is infused with purpose and meaning. When an insurgent commits acts of violence or appropriates resources for his fight, his actions are in part interpreted as a political expression. If the insurgent’s purpose becomes irrelevant to the population, his political identity is lost and his acts of violence lose their intended meaning. Stripped of this identity and serving no purpose to the population, the insurgent’s violence becomes nothing more than criminal behavior. Assassination and appropriation become murder and theft. In the competition between the insurgency and GIRoA over providing services to the population, GIRoA has the advantage. A properly designed strategic narrative with actions supporting both the narrative and the people can render the insurgency irrelevant to the people. The insurgency, therefore, becomes criminal, which opens new options to the population, such as working with the police to eliminate the criminal threat.

The third component to this narrative establishes the role of GIRoA in supporting the population. Since the beginning of OEF, the coalition and GIRoA have attempted to force a “top-down” approach of GIRoA providing support to the outlying areas only to fall short or overreach on almost eve-

ry occasion.<sup>2</sup> The VSO narrative establishes more realistic expectations of village and state responsibilities and eases the burden on GIRoA to be everywhere and all things to all people.

The inability to deliver security, development, and governance at the local level has eroded the credibility of the national government in the eyes of the Afghan people. It has also damaged the relationship between the Afghan Government and its people. What is needed is balance reminiscent of the Musahiban Dynasty, when rulers like King Zahir Sha helped local Afghans stand up for themselves with support from the national government. This balanced approach between formal and informal governance was, and still is, widely accepted in Afghan culture and is a narrative component that, if amplified and demonstrated regularly to the population, could quickly enhance GIRoA’s favor with its people in a way that is consistent with Afghan history.<sup>3</sup>

A complementary fourth component could be added to the proposed narrative. Currently, the insurgent narrative convincingly asserts that Americans will leave Afghanistan in the summer of 2011 and that any effort to support CF in the meantime will result in heavy handed retribution. Many Afghans as a result approach programs or initiatives put forward by CF with a high degree of skepticism and very little personal investment. This makes it difficult to separate the populous from the insurgents. GIRoA and CF must counter the insurgent narrative with one that announces a commitment to the *people* of Afghanistan through 2014, and GIRoA and CF must implement COIN actions that give the narrative credence. The proposed VSO narrative structure empowers Afghans to stand up for themselves with the support of GIRoA, which reduces their dependence on CF. By adding a narrative that the CF commitment will persist until GIRoA capacity to support them is in place, CF can neutralize a key element of the insurgent narrative. The combination of narrative themes, reinforced by tangible actions to build Afghan individual and village capacity, will likely have a devastating impact on the insurgency, making it desperate and oppressive, and thus, irrelevant and criminal in the eyes of the Afghan people.

The strategic narrative is meant to impact the insurgency and CF populations. It marginalizes the insurgency in the lives of the Afghan popula-

<sup>1</sup> We have seen recent evidence of this “de-selection” of Insurgent ideals and messages by locals in areas where Village Stability and Afghan Local Police programs are taking root, such as Arghandab District, Kandahar Province, Deh Rawood District Oruzgan Province, and Shindand District, Heart Province. This “de-selection” by the Afghan people often comes not through security lines, but when bottom up economic development or traditional governance are re-empowered in areas where the Insurgent narrative offered only murder, intimidation, taxation, oppression, exploitation by malign actors of economic development, or at best a return to Sharia Law under the old Taliban Order.

<sup>2</sup> Tribal Analysis Center, “Starfish, Spiders, and the Jellyfish: Pashtun Cultural Factors Limiting Warlord Development” (Copyright 2009) Pg. 8  
<sup>3</sup> Jones, Seth, Dr. The Graveyard of Empires, New York, New York, 2009, WW Norton and Company Inc, Pg. 319

tion and forces the insurgency to demonstrate that it is still relevant. In the competition of development and governance activities, the insurgency will be hard pressed to exhibit utility to the population, especially if villages and individuals are empowered by CF and GIRoA to stand up for themselves. Under such circumstances, the insurgency will likely turn to intimidation and oppression in an attempt to retain control over the population, further separating insurgents from the people. At the same time, the VSO narrative establishes a better relationship between CF populations and the Afghan people, from the bottom up. CF populations can understand the value of assisting the Afghan people standing up for themselves regardless of their opinions about the capabilities and capacity of GIRoA. It will be easier to demonstrate local individuals and villages achieving success than the national government doing so since the threshold for success is lower in the VSO narrative. Nevertheless, discrete, localized successes can be amplified to generate a cumulative effect that can result in a strategic shift in political momentum both domestically and internationally.

### **Amplifying Tactical VSO Successes for Strategic Impact**

In the early spring of 2009, a group of rural Afghans ejected local Taliban insurgents from their village deep in a Taliban safe haven in Central Afghanistan. Residents of this rural area, tired of insurgent oppression and taxation, crossed over the historically tension-filled Hazara and Pashtun ethnic lines to combine forces against the Taliban. Shortly after removing insurgents from the area, the fear of potential retribution began to set in. Local residents called the Provincial Governor and U.S. Special Forces to request assistance in protecting their new won freedom. Both the governor and Special Forces arrived within hours.<sup>1</sup> As of November 2010, six months after the expulsion of the insurgents, Afghan Local Police (ALP) and GIRoA retain control of this contentious area.

While the tactical military value of this local, grassroots movement should not be underestimated, the larger significance of this event lies in the non-kinetic effects achieved through information operations and strategic communications relative to key audience segments both inside and outside of Afghanistan. The previously unthinkable narrative of successful, bottom-up resistance to the Tali-

ban quickly spread to surrounding valleys, and other villages soon took up arms against the Taliban. This local movement resulted in expanding security into Southern Day Kundi Province and even Northern Oruzgan Province.

More importantly, this event directly affected the insurgency from the local through strategic levels. This audacious move by local Afghans displaced Taliban fighters from what they for years considered an untouchable inner sanctuary. Losing a safe haven area sent shockwaves throughout Taliban circles. The Taliban carefully crafted a veneer of invincibility in the area and understood the potentially crippling strategic impact of losing this perception. Orders were given by the insurgents to retake the area immediately, lest more grassroots movements expand to other safe haven areas. At the writing of this article, all insurgent efforts to retake this area have failed.

The narrative of Afghans standing up to the insurgency resonated with audiences in the United States and was even carried as a story in *The Washington Post*. Although Afghan led, this uprising against the Taliban was made possible by the persistent engagement of Special Operations Forces conducting (VSO). The American public was provided a clear logic of American military involvement with a tangible benefit to the Afghan people. In both cases, the proposed VSO narrative will bolster public sentiment in favor of the counterinsurgency campaign.

This seemingly isolated event in a rural Afghan district was simmering below the surface for several months prior to the precipitating event. It also hints at the tremendous resonance a narrative reinforcing Afghan village self-sufficiency, supported by GIRoA and CF support, could enjoy with much of the population. Even more significant is the strategic potential this type of event can have in swinging key audience member perceptions of political momentum in favor of CF and GIRoA efforts. But this can only happen in the context of a central narrative that properly frames the events.

Under the existing narrative that prioritizes GIRoA extending security, this is an aberrant anecdote, not symbolic of a broader movement. Indeed, the very fact that the village had to expel the Taliban itself, with SOF support, perversely serves to demonstrate national GIRoA's security gaps! In other words, VSO successes cannot bolster GIRoA given the existing narrative structure; it can only be a neutral factor at best. At worst, stories of Afghans helping themselves can be further manipulated to make GIRoA appear ineffective and unre-

<sup>1</sup> Summary of events from the Day Kundi "Uprising" in Day Kundi Province, Afghanistan 2010 based on unclassified reporting while I was working as the CFSOCC-A J35 Local Defense Initiative and Village Stability Lead Planner.



sponsive. This situation cannot persist if CF and GIRoA hope to capture the political initiative based on cumulative village-level events.

Of note, the village uprising described is not as isolated as it may seem. In fact, this type of event occurs regularly throughout Afghanistan as SOF work with Afghan and Coalition partners to expand VSO in rural areas. However, these events lack a narrative that weaves them together as part of a larger strategic story of CF and GIRoA success. CF and GIRoA require a simple, comprehensive narrative where bottom-up actions and deeds can be properly interpreted and amplified. To fully realize the stabilizing potential of VSO and ALP expansion during the winter fighting lull, CF and GIRoA must better exploit the strategic narrative component of counterinsurgency than they have in the past.

### Key Audiences for the Strategic Narrative

While the three key audiences already identified will be relevant throughout the counterinsurgency campaign, they can be further categorized according to important audience segments.<sup>1</sup> Stories should be developed for audience segments whose perceptions are considered most crucial to the counterinsurgency effort. Although the identified segments will continue to matter, counterinsurgents must constantly ask, “What are the various audiences, and how will this action be perceived by each one?” They must then ask, “What can we do to shape that perception to our advantage?”<sup>2</sup> The key audiences can at a minimum be segmented as described below.

(1) The Afghan people. The fate of this insurgency, and ultimately Afghanistan will be decided by the Afghan people. This audience can be broken down into urban and rural categories, age groups, gender, regional groups, ethnic groups, and even tribes. Regardless of how Afghans are organized for communication purposes, it is imperative that CF and GIRoA place the Afghan people at the forefront as a key audience segment and conduct actions that are consistent with the narratives they put forward.

<sup>1</sup> These audience segment nominations were first nominated in an Information Operations and Strategic Communications working group hosted by Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command in Kabul, Afghanistan March 2010. These audience nominations were continuously socialized with ISAF Staff members, the SOF community, ANSF Leadership and Staff Members, Line Ministries, Civilian and Interagency Leadership, and of course Afghans in GIRoA as well as local villagers across rural Afghanistan at VSO sites.

<sup>2</sup> Major Niel Smith, “Sisyphus and Counterinsurgency”, [www.smallwarsjournal.com](http://www.smallwarsjournal.com)

(2) The Insurgency. This audience includes Taliban, HIG, Haqqani fighters and facilitators, and their bases. Degrading the will and capacity of the insurgency to continue its struggle should be a continued focus of CF and GIRoA efforts, and this can be facilitated with a narrative that seeks to render insurgents irrelevant to the Afghan people. In other words, CF and GIRoA should not chase the insurgent narrative; rather, they should create an alternative narrative that resonates even more with the people. Insurgent audience segments include the entire spectrum of insurgent network members, from low level fighters and facilitators at the tactical level all the way up to Senior Shura Leaders at the strategic level. Also, by targeting this audience for a well-crafted narrative, GIRoA and the Coalition will be well-postured to influence the reconciliation and reintegration of insurgent members at all levels.

(3) COIN Stakeholders. The final audience segment is the Domestic Audience that includes US and NATO countries, donor nations, and of course, their constituents. This audience segment represents any member nation that offers external resources or support to the COIN effort in Afghanistan and whose will to win must be secured, maintained, and enhanced throughout the campaign. Given variations in political will and historical sensitivities, targeted narratives should be considered for production.

In order for the VSO strategic narrative to be effective, it must resonate strongly within each audience segment. Each of these audiences is distinct, which requires framing VSO events in different, though complementary, ways. Nine years into this campaign, key audience members are far beyond mere words. The narrative must be joined with actions and deeds consistent with the narrative. Moreover, the strategic narrative must be introduced in concert with an operational design that rebuilds CF and GIRoA political credibility and political capital with key audiences. This necessitates careful planning at all levels of operation.

### Rolling Out the Strategic Narrative

For the VSO strategic narrative to be successful, it must be adopted by all COIN stakeholders, especially GIRoA. The steps below seek to ensure widespread input and adoption of a VSO strategic narrative.

- **Select a narrative that resonates with key audience segments.** It will be necessary to create a GIRoA and Coalition/Interagency Working Group that develops

a coherent narrative along the lines of “Afghans standing up for themselves against a criminal insurgency, supported by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Coalition.”

- **Leverage Senior Leaders to roll out the narrative.** Once the narrative is determined, it must be endorsed by the most senior members of GIRoA and CF. This sets the tone for shaping the perceptions of key audience members by first explaining the story to all concerned in the words of senior leaders. Doing so lays the foundation for unveiling the operational design and must be done before any other steps begin.
- **Expanding stability and taking physical and human terrain away from the insurgency.** Every effort should be made during the winter months to take advantage of the decline in violence. This is the time period when intimidation is much lower since many insurgents return to Pakistan. By focusing efforts on amplifying actions and events in support of the strategic narrative, CF and GIRoA can expand stability across wider areas of Afghanistan, bolster popular support for nascent grassroots efforts, and take human and physical terrain away from the insurgency before insurgents return following the early Summer Poppy Harvest and onset of the next fighting season.
- **Capture actions and deeds at the local level.** This step involves continuously identifying and amplifying local actions and deeds that provide tangible evidence in support of the strategic narrative. The term “actions and deeds” is very important here because most Afghans view CF and GIRoA words as “hollow” and meaningless after 9 years of ISAF presence in this country. Actions and deeds, focused on Afghans, reported from the village level that give credence to the narrative are the most influential elements of information on the battlefield. The ability to identify these actions and deeds will involve a range of actions involving PAO, Media, PSYOP, IO, and Strategic Communications. Gathering this information at the

<sup>1</sup> This can be demonstrated through a range of IO and SC activities that include embedding media

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<sup>1</sup> This point was made clear to me while I was serving as the Village Stability Coordination Center Director. Every Congressional Delegation Visit that came to RC South during VSO battlefield circulation visits to various Village Stability sites, emphasized their support of any effort to identify and implement Afghan solutions to local governance and stability challenges to allow America to transition out of Afghanistan. During discussions, the concept of Afghans standing up for themselves closely

community level through Village Stability Platforms and the Village Stability Coordination Center will allow CF and GIRoA to overcome the historical challenge of amplifying local events that usually go unnoticed or unexploited.

- **Amplify actions and deeds.** This involves taking the collected actions and deeds and “feeding” them into the strategic narrative in a continuous fashion so that these seemingly local and isolated events are amplified continuously into strategic effects that favorably influence the perceptions of the various audience segments. Over time, this gives the enduring perception that the key components of the narrative are occurring throughout Afghanistan in an overwhelming fashion.

A coherent IO and SC plan should contain the objectives below.

**-Influence the perceptions of Afghans:**

The act of Afghans standing up for themselves has a long and proud history across the country, especially in Pashtun areas where the insurgency is prevalent. By amplifying the actions and deeds of Afghans standing up for their own villages, otherwise isolated activities can serve to bolster the resolve of other villages and foster a grassroots movement similar to the one that occurred in Day Kundi Province. Afghans can be influenced locally through word of mouth, radio, or even more creative techniques, such as a local movie night facilitated by CF.

**-Influence the perceptions of COIN Stakeholders.** Domestic Audience Members from the U.S. and other NATO Countries will likely be favorably influenced by the perception of Afghans standing up for themselves, as well as an Afghan government that is supporting them in this action. A government that is supportive of this type of activity instead of one that is expected to be all things to all people is much more achievable and quantifiable to the audience in the U.S. and other NATO countries who are looking for Afghan transition solutions.

members in Village Stability sites, focusing media stories on Afghans standing up for themselves along with a government that supports them, and video content that highlights this reality.

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supported by their Government was very favorably received by all visiting CODELs.

**-Influence the insurgency.** Insurgents who can be influenced through this approach range from the most senior member of the Taliban Inner Shura down to the low-level fighter at the village level who takes up arms against the government for reasons that have more to do with grievances suffered from the GIRoA than Islamic ideology. Afghans who stand up for themselves can most powerfully influence local insurgents because they are often from the very villages where Village Stability Operations are conducted. Additionally, the ability of GIRoA to support local Afghans in this endeavor improves the chances of the population electing to align with the government over an irrelevant insurgency that cannot compete in providing services. Finally, the combination of the previous elements in concert with a narrative that demonstrates the Coalition's resolve to continue supporting Afghans until they can do so independently will likely overwhelm the current Taliban narrative that the U.S. will abandon Afghanistan in summer 2011.

**-Utilize Village Stability sites and Afghan Local Police locations as “platforms” to “mine” key information opportunities.** The Afghan village is where most influential actions in support of the narrative will occur. Roughly eighty percent of the Afghan population lives in rural areas and villages. It is the area where the insurgents normally thrive and operate, and it is the focal point for day to day activities in rural Afghanistan. Security challenges have long confounded CF and GIRoA efforts to exploit, or even recognize IO and SC opportunities in many of these villages. However, with the expansion of VSO and ALP in numerous villages, continued CF presence within village communities postures CF to reduce intimidation by understanding local dynamics on an unprecedented level. Now, CF can effectively “mine” and amplify actions and deeds that include Afghans standing up for themselves; insurgents' criminal and irrelevant actions against the people, including murder and intimidation; and examples of GIRoA supporting the villages through security, development, and governance from the District, Provincial, and National levels. Simply put, the Village Stability Platform offers access to the source of the narrative like never before, so CF should use this new found access to leverage information that informs its narrative.

**-Communicate as a network:** While identifying and “mining” IO and SC opportunities can be very challenging, sharing opportunities across stakeholders and actually amplifying the information can also be extremely challenging. This is due to the inter-relation of local action to strategic

effect, remote isolation of villages where key events occur, insurgent intimidation, CF organizational complexity, and CF's bureaucratic processes for releasing information. All these factors make a compelling case for new ways to effectively and efficiently communicate that transcend bureaucracy, echelons, and seams.

The proposed VSO narrative is a top-down strategic story that must be reinforced by bottom-up actions and events provided by local Afghans and tactical commanders. To do this, CF and GIRoA must empower individuals to communicate top to bottom, bottom to top, and across the numerous and broad Civil-Military community of governments, agencies, and services. Information must move horizontally and with agility if it is to have a chance of telling a story that rings true with the targeted audience segments. Organizational complexity, staff inertia, and even parochialism are all potential pitfalls to this network approach. However, if CF establishes its network architecture, processes, and business rules correctly, it will be able to “mine” information opportunities at the Village Stability Platform level and maximize the data's value for the larger strategic narrative in Kabul, Washington, and beyond.

**-Assess and adjust.** The strategic narrative should succinctly reflect the overall goals of GIRoA, the Afghan People, and the Coalition. The means to achieve these goals are through top-down and bottom-up COIN applications that are amplified through this strategic narrative to shape perceptions of key audience members. To accomplish this effectively, CF must develop measures of effectiveness that evaluate whether the narrative is changing perceptions, causing a momentum shift, and having the desired influence on the collective behavior of the audience segments. CF should also develop measures of effectiveness that determine whether the narrative, the actions, and TTPs informing the narrative are performing appropriately to achieve CF goals and objectives. CF should join the various network members together in this process from Commander's Initiative Groups all the way down to Afghans and SOF elements at the village level. Adopting a network approach has the added benefit of enabling CF to rapidly learn, adapt, and adjust its actions to keep the narrative, and the actions informing it, on point and foremost in the minds of key audience segments.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, a strategic narrative must be formally defined by our Senior Coalition Leadership and then reinforced by actions on the ground. CF

and GIRoA require an operational design that gives tangible evidence to key audience segments that the strategic narrative is not just empty words. We must also reconsider the current IO and SC inaccessibility many VSO sites and activities have to our Afghan Partners and the media, in order to effectively amplify the routinely isolated actions and deeds that portray *Afghans standing up for themselves, closely supported by their government against a criminal insurgency*. A Village Governance and Development operational design is needed to incorporate an Effects Based Narrative structure that is informed by and amplifies the VSO strategic narrative described above. This core group of documents could function as the road map to help synchronize CF and GIRoA deeds on

the ground with IO and SC actions to maximize effects toward favorably shaping perceptions of CF and GIRoA key audience members.

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## The Fallacy of COIN: One Officer's Frustration

by Scott Dempsey

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General Petraeus will be in Washington next week where he will inevitably continue to extol the progress of counterinsurgency (COIN) in southern Afghanistan, the Taliban's heartland -- and where our war to achieve sufficient stability to enable us to leave will be either won or lost. COIN doctrine argues that with the right combination of security, governance, and development, there will be transformational impact that can marginalize insurgents' control over local populations. Combined with multiple external factors mostly beyond our ability to influence, COIN was indeed part of the transformational improvement in Iraq -- and provided sufficient stability for American troops to withdraw in favor of Iraqi government forces. The Afghanistan surge seeks to create similar results -- which would ultimately create conditions for transfer of authority and responsibility to the Afghan government and security forces. A key component to GEN Petraeus's COIN talking points cites the Nawa District of restive Helmand Province as a "proof of concept" for counterinsurgency dogma, and that the "Nawa model" is durable. However, during my year in Helmand Province, including nine months as the U.S. development lead in Nawa District, I saw a variety of factors that led to Nawa's success -- none of which pass this test. Furthermore, to secure even the most basic degree of Afghan government-led stability will require a seem-

ingly endless commitment to continue to fight and finance this effort.

In July 2009, when 1,200 American Marines relieved a tired and battered 40 British soldiers in July 2009, there was a shift in mission from containment to counterinsurgency. These Marines performed admirably -- separating the insurgents from the populace, and carefully listening to the concerns of the local citizens. Almost instantly, there were visible results. Where Taliban and other malevolent actors had previously roamed freely, they instead shied away from combat or took refuge in neighboring Marjah. Soon thereafter, the provincial governor appointed Abdul Manaf, a former mujahedeen commander who had been fired from his two previous posts for corruption, to serve as the district governor.

District Governor Manaf instantly became a strong ally of the Marines -- and my close friend. He saw American military and financial might as a way to consolidate his power to achieve local hegemony, hoping this could calm the district. In an effort to support the Afghan government, U.S. and British development aid was funneled through local Afghan officials, most notably Manaf and a nascent community council. Central to both parties' responsibility was the allocation of American funding -- usually to Manaf and the council's own political and economic ends. From August 2009 to the

present day, approximately \$25 million of development aid has flowed into Nawa via these institutions – over \$300 per Nawa resident – in a country where per capita GDP is about \$1,000 annually. At its peak, in a district with at most 20,000 working age males (census numbers are imprecise in southern Afghanistan, but this is a number both Americans and Afghans agree to be about right), 11,000 were employed via U.S. government funding – each hand-selected by the local government. By channeling U.S. money to local uses, this new government delivered a very basic level of service to its citizens -- all courtesy of Uncle Sam's almighty dollar.

This patronage system was immensely effective. It spurred an economic boom, and allowed the Marines to patrol around the lush farmland relatively safely. For several months, Nawa became the prime destination for visiting American official delegations, where the narrative that American presence leads to Afghan prosperity became the tagline. And, of course, Manaf was a great host, appreciative of Washington's largesse. After spending, at most, a couple of hours in Nawa, these delegations would return to their helicopters resolving that Afghanistan, even Helmand Province, was winnable.

Nawa's role as a showpiece, however, was more Potemkin Village than anyone wanted to admit. These visits and the positive narrative they spurred masked the overriding long-term problem that the Afghan government's success was based almost entirely on American inputs. Similarly, the local government's ability to keep malevolent actors - insurgents and drug barons both - at bay was and is entirely dependent on sustained U.S. military and logistical support. While this approach clearly succeeded tactically, as a strategy it is fatally flawed. As these hefty U.S. inputs of money and military might inevitably evaporate, the power dynamic will shift away from the local government to other interests – most likely the Taliban and those with the financial backing of the province's still-immense opium trade. The Taliban has shown its ability to command significant influence over populations with few resources via intimidation, and drug traders do not need American money to assert their power. These local power brokers will work

against American and Afghan government interests, and will eventually - if not quickly - make Manaf and his nascent government either irrelevant or non-existent.

When praising COIN doctrine, advocates are quick to recite the credo of "clear-hold-build" – the process by which stability is theoretically achieved. Under this criterion, Nawa will continue to be the model district for the foreseeable future, as long as the Western dollars keep coming. However, our current practice of COIN fails to understand that the only meaningful metric for success is a transfer of sustainable sovereignty to the institutions we can easily create, but which the Afghans must learn to run. The U.S. government can quickly and successfully manufacture a misleadingly-robust local government and economy (see Gen. McChrystal's famous "government in a box"). However, without ultimately creating conditions wherein responsible transfer is possible, what we've created shows itself to be illusory. And with every successive input used to build, it further exacerbates this already precarious situation. While a small number of bases have been transferred to the Afghan Army, there are still several hundred U.S. troops in Nawa, thousands more in neighboring Marjah and Garmsir, and millions of dollars flowing – not enough to reverse the inevitable tide.

When I initially arrived in Nawa, Manaf was concerned about our government's commitment to support him. Over time, his fears were allayed as the money flowed and the troops stayed – and as such, he became a powerful leader. With President Obama's July 2011 deadline to begin withdrawing troops and the new Congress' mandate to cut spending – especially in foreign aid, despite accounting for a fraction of the war spending – these inputs will be scaled back. This will directly correlate to his ability to maintain whatever fragile peace has thus far been attained. In retrospect, he was right to be concerned.

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## Building Relationships and Influence in Counterinsurgency: One Officer's Perspective

by Eric von Tersch

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*Editor's Note: The names of most of the Iraqi officers mentioned in the narrative, as well as place names, have been changed since all of the Iraqi officials alluded to are still in positions of authority. Masking the names and locations does not take away from the essential arguments put forward.*

It is well understood that to be successful in counterinsurgency, the real goal must be to influence the local population, not just destroy the enemy combatants. It is also clear that non-military elements of power can be as or more efficacious than guns and planes. The difficulty is how to apply those two maxims. More times than not, the application of these two maxims intersect in the position of the apparent host-nation leader, be it at the village, regional, or national level.

The following vignette explains how a U.S. team of advisors managed their relationship with a Provisional Director of Police (PDOP), MG Khalid, in a northern province of Iraq in order to convince the general to move decisively against terrorists and develop his 27,000-man police force so that it had credibility with the Iraqi population.

When the U.S. Infantry Division deployed to Iraq in October 200x, the Division leadership augmented one of its Brigades with a number of additional officers who the brigade commander tasked to develop the capacity of the Iraqi police force. The Army was employing what it termed a Stabilization and Transition Team (STT). That small group of officers, no more than eleven, worked closely with a number of U.S. civilian police advisors hired under a DoD contract, to train and mentor the Iraqi police force. The STT's focus was primarily on the Provincial-level staff, Provincial-level commander, and the subordinate District commanders, which had responsibility for the 27,000-man police force spread out over an area twice the size of the state of New Jersey.

### Putting a Personal Relationship with a Counterpart in Perspective

A good personal relationship will not get your counterpart to do what you want, but a bad rela-

tionship will erase any constructive influence upon which steps forward will be built. This makes clear the importance of investing the time to have more than just a professional relationship with the host-nation counterpart whose hand will be directing the counterinsurgency. The STT used simple but time-honored practices to develop rapport such as: using Arabic for greetings, terms of endearment and expressions of meaning; following local customs such as observing the Ramadan fasting rules; providing personalized gifts that reflected the interests of the PDOP, his family, and his staff; mirroring the speech and mannerisms of the STT's Iraqi counterparts; always showing respect even when delivering messages of criticism, meeting the demands of the counterpart's schedule rather than the U.S. official's schedule and sense of timeliness. The personal relationship was meant to enhance the professional relationship.

### The Professional Relationship Should Focus on Empowering the Host-Nation Counterpart – Not the American

What utility is there in having the local populace credit the U.S. for their improved standard of living or security? Such action rarely gives the host-nation official more power or influence. In fact, it runs the risk of creating the impression that the U.S. is building up its own base of support so that it can remain in the "host" country.

In Iraq, the STT focused its involvement on strengthening the office of the PDOP and the credibility of the police. An Iraqi official, such as the PDOP, fills a formal position in society, i.e. police director, and an unofficial position, tribal elder. Both roles are important and need to be reinforced by the U.S. counterpart. Many Iraqi officials both in Baghdad and in the Northern Province considered MG Khalid to be a weak individual. Indeed his slight build, diminutive voice, introvert personality, and grandfatherly demeanor created such an impression. What was hidden was his keen sense of political timing, a sharp intellect, and an understanding of the various political factions that need-

ed to be balanced. The STT officers helped the PDOP recognize his strengths and weaknesses so that together his weaknesses could be minimized and his strengths could be capitalized on. Having a good personal relationship allowed these sensitive conversations to take place.

Strengthening the office of the PDOP often meant making him more assertive in his meetings with the Governor and the military leadership in the province. At the beginning of MG Khalid's tenure as the PDOP, he was nervous and uncertain in his meetings. The military leadership would openly criticize or ignore the PDOP during inter-security department meetings. When the PDOP did speak, he was mealy mouthed and apologetic. To counter this condition, the STT would discuss with the PDOP what issues might be tabled at upcoming meetings and rehearse possible responses. The STT functioned as more of sounding board and councilor vice giving the PDOP direction as to how to respond. The only responses that were acceptable were the ones where the PDOP himself was invested intellectually and emotionally in the answer. This gave him the confidence to speak openly and forcefully in a public forum. A concurrent emphasis on the Provincial Police's media section helped improve the public's perception of the PDOP as an assertive leader, and by extension, the police in general. This was not an insignificant development! In Northern Iraq, the average man on the street respects the demonstration of power. If a leader appears strong, he can garner the public's respect. If the leader appears weak, regardless of the reality, the leader will lose public appeal. In a counterinsurgency focused on expanding the public's support for the police, image matters.

Unfortunately, the police in this Northern Province did not have a great deal of public acceptance. In general, the population saw the police as corrupt and ineffectual. There was good cause for that perception because the police were recruited from the local villages and towns. This made it easy for the terrorists and criminals to threaten the police. The military or paramilitary forces, on the other hand, were not from the local area, and thus were relatively free from such pressure.

There were other realities that contributed to the public's lack of confidence in the police. First, the Iraqi central government had put the military in charge of all security in the Northern Province. This was affected thru the creation of a Provincial Operations Center (POC), a military-led headquarters based in the main city in the province that answered to the military in Baghdad, not the governor of province. The POC deployed its military

forces throughout the major cities and districts of the Province and gave those military commanders the authority of policing powers. The PDOP's uniform police could not even move from one part of the main city to another without being stopped, and in most cases, denied movement by the local military commander. This made problematic any collection of evidence, questioning of witnesses, and community policing.

Conditions were especially difficult in those areas in the province under the control of Army General Kabir. He had an established record of arresting police and detaining them. He did so claiming that he had such authority because his area of operations, mostly the main city of the province, was under a state of emergency as declared by the Baghdad government. While all that was true, in fact, General Kabir's authority stemmed from his personal relationship to Prime Minister Maliki. It was readily apparent that General Kabir's power could challenge that of the POC commander, even though the POC commander outranked General Kabir and the Kabir's Army Division was a subordinate unit of the POC. PM Maliki installed General Kabir in Ninewa because the general had no religious or tribal leanings. He would arrest a Sunni, as quickly as he would arrest a Shia, Christian or a Kurd. Since the Northern Province was mostly Sunni, such a general was useful to a Shia PM. General Kabir was also harshly effective. It was well understood that he had used very brutal measures to extract information from his detainees when he was a Brigade commander in the Baghdad area. He was able to play on that understanding as a Division commander when his subordinates conducted interrogations in the Northern Province. To his credit, he also demanded a high level of performance from his subordinates and took the time to effectively supervise all levels of his command. While he was feared by his troops, they also respected him. In one instance, a police colonel fumed to the STT about the time he, the police colonel was stopped by one of General Kabir's privates at a checkpoint. The police colonel demanded the right to continue on, saying he would report the instance to the (Iraqi) Ministry of Interior. The private replied the Minister of Interior may lead the police but he (the private) was led by General Kabir. What made General Kabir's command so problematic for the police was the general's order authorizing the arrest of police officers, detaining the police in a secret prison, then denying the fact that the General Kabir's forces had the missing police officer.

Something had to be done to address the security structure that left the police so emasculated and powerless. The first step was to convince the military leadership in the POC that the police would never improve its performance if the police were not given some measure of responsibility. This meant putting the police in charge of parts of province's major city and pulling out the military from those parts. The STT fashioned the argument that the police must exercise the weight of responsibility if they are to strengthen their institutional muscles. The U.S. commanders in the Northern Province, as well as the head of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, were the primary message bearers to the Iraqi military and the Governor on this point. While the governor embraced the idea as a way of reducing the authority of the military in his province, the military was staunchly against the proposal because it cut into their local base of power.

In early 200x, the Iraqi Government ordered the POC to transfer one of its brigades to another province in response to an increase in violence in that region. The POC commander initially resisted losing some of his combat power, but was forced to comply. The POC commander attempted to make a purse out of a sow's ear. Grasping at the U.S. request to give the police more authority, he assigned the police to the part of the main city that had originally been under the command of the military brigade that was to be transferred to another province. While the POC commander was publicly saying he was giving the police a chance to take charge, privately he was telling his staff that he had every confidence the police would fail. He was sure that the police would fail because he was giving the police responsibility for one of the most violent parts of the main city when 3 months earlier he was not willing to give the police the most pacific section of the same town, the police were undermanned for the new command, and the POC commander gave the police less than a day from the time the police were notified to the time they had to be on the street replacing the military that was leaving as the police arrived. The POC commander welcomed the transfer of authority to the police. Not only would that end the bothersome requests from the Americans for police primacy, but when the police failed, the POC commander could then report to Baghdad that the Iraqi ground Forces Command had made a mistake in taking his brigade from him.

To the surprise of the POC commander, the police did not fail. The PDOP transferred police from the western part of the province at some cost to

himself politically. He also placed one of his best brigade commanders in charge and told the brigade commander to work closely with the STT. The U.S. brigade commander in the area also made a strong commitment of his resources, primarily engineer and public affairs, in support of the police. As a result, the number of armed attacks in the police-held area fell significantly below what had been the norm when the military was in charge of security in the same area.

While the image of the police was improving both in the POC and with the public, the General Kabir's arrest and secret detention of police continued to undermine: police morale, arguments to improve police performance, and the police's capability to do their duty. The U.S. field commanders, both at the Brigade commander level and the general officer level discussed with General Kabir about the need to work with the police. However, the army commander was not responsive. The STT recommended to the PDOP that he had to personally speak with the General Kabir about the situation. The STT argued that the police on the street could not be expected to show courage against the terrorists if they did not see it modeled by their commander in confronting the Iraqi military. The PDOP demurred claiming that the offending army commander was young and brash and would not listen. In truth, the PDOP was afraid to confront General Kabir because of the latter's connections in Baghdad.

Without success from the U.S. leadership or from the PDOP, the STT took a separate approach with the General Kabir. In a private meeting with the army commander, the STT discussed the problems that his secret detention of police was causing for the STT's efforts to improve the police. The commander initially denied that he was holding police in his jail then agreed to look into the issue when the STT explained when and how General Kabir's officers arrested the police. That short discussion was followed by what started out as a pleasant exchange about life in Cairo. At the time, General Kabir's family had a residence in Cairo. The STT member pointed out how unusual it was for a non-Egyptian in his official position to have a place in Egypt and not be approached by the Egyptian intelligence service. General Kabir took umbrage at the insinuation and ended the conversation. However, within a week, the PDOP went to see the General Kabir at his HQ. When the PDOP left General Kabir's office, he (PDOP) had a pledge for the release all detained police. Two days later, 12 police returned to their police stations and General Kabir issued instructions to his Brigade com-



manders to develop greater cooperation with the police.

### **The U.S. Assistance, Channeled Thru the Police Was Not For Building a Better Life for the Iraqi Citizens, But To Empower Those Iraqi Officials Who Would Build a Better Life for Iraqi Citizen**

The effectiveness of the police was also hampered by a lack of good intelligence. The Ministry of Interior's (MoI) intelligence organization, called the National Intelligence and Information Agency (NIIA), had agents in the northern province whose job it was to collect information on criminal and terrorist groups and report that information to the police for action. Instead, the intelligence agents focused on the Provincial-level governmental bodies supporting the Provincial governor, a Sunni in a Shia-led national government. There were also concerns that the head of this intelligence group in the Northern Province was himself corrupt. In any case, his organization produced very little actionable intelligence for the police. In this case, the PDOP had no authority over the NIIA chief in the Northern Province. Therefore, the STT had to rely on the U.S. Forces-Iraq (USF-I) staff in Baghdad to convey concerns to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior about the mal-performing provincial head of the NIIA. This is exemplar of a pattern of communications and USF-I/STT staff coordination repeated many times whether the issue was pay for new recruits, new boats for the river police, obtaining fo-

rensics equipment, etc. When the PDOP could not get resources or actions from Baghdad thru his established channels, the STT would work as an informal channel, being mindful that the PDOP received the credit for any resources from Baghdad, not the U.S. back channel. This is a critical point because, culturally, Iraqi formal and informal leaders rise in importance and effectiveness based on their ability to provide resources to their business, province, tribe, etc.

A similar approach was attempted for humanitarian assistance, whether the aid was controlled by the U.S. combat brigade in the area or directed by larger U.S. Government institutions. The expansive U.S. assistance projects for the police, such as the construction and rebuilding of police stations, was welcome but not immediately beneficial in reducing the influence of the terrorists because counterinsurgency demands a commitment of reconstruction resources at a level where the line connecting the beneficiary of the U.S. development aid and the local official who can take credit for providing the aid is very clear.

In conclusion, the unstated warrant throughout this narrative is the idea that effective counterinsurgency requires committed local leaders. Building a constructive partnership relationship is, in reality, an exercise in building up the capability of the host-nation partner by the judicious application of U.S. military resources and influence.

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## **Libya's Rebel Leaders and Western Assistance**

by Jamsheed K. Choksy and Carol E. B. Choksy

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Libya's interim National Transitional Committee (NTC), the coordinating organization for a wide range of anti-Qadhafi factions, was established on March 5, 2011, at the rebel city of Benghazi. Swiftly recognized by France as the government for the whole country, a few NTC leaders subsequently met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and also with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Paris on the sidelines of the G8 meeting there.

The White House already contemplates releasing frozen Libyan assets worth around U.S. \$30 billion to the NTC, and arming its forces as well.

E.U. nations are thinking along the same lines. But U.S. ambassador to Libya, Gene Cretz, like his European counterparts, cautions, "We're still trying to find out who the rebels are and if they are 100 percent kosher." For now the U.S., Britain, and France are defending – through a no-fly zone and by aerial bombardments on pro-Qadhafi forces – not just civilians but relatively unknown revolutionaries, at a cost of over U.S. \$100 million each day.

So can Libya's rebellion be successful at home, turn into a constructive model for the Arab upris-

ings across the Middle East, and provide a positive contribution to the world as a whole?

## The Rebels' Goals

Savvy in gaining international attention, the NTC set up its own website, with Arabic and English versions, “to connect with our people at home and abroad, and to deliver our voice to the outside world.” Via its website, the NTC claims to derive its legitimacy “from the decisions of local councils set up by the revolutionary people of Libya.” Video clips posted there depict high-ranking officials from cities and tribes declaring allegiance to the Council and the superpowers' militaries assisting its fighters.

The NTC's stated goals are to: “Steer Libya during the interim period that will come after ... the destruction of Qadhafi's oppressive regime. It will guide the country to free elections and the establishment of a constitution.” Yet the NTC does not mince words on how the near-term could pan out: “Either we achieve freedom and race to catch up with humanity and world developments, or we are shackled and enslaved under the feet of the tyrant Muammar Qadhafi.”

## Who are the Rebel Leaders?

The cast of opposition leaders that may determine Libya's future contains many individuals once close to Qadhafi:

- Mustafa Mohammed Abdul Jalil Fudail, who used to serve Qadhafi in many capacities including most recently as the Minister of Justice, now acts as Chairman of the NTC.
- Mahmoud Jibril, who obtained a PhD from the University of Pittsburgh and went on to work for Qadhafi as a management and planning expert, has been appointed the rebel's Prime Minister.
- Ali Al-Issawi, whose PhD is from the University of Bucharest and acted as Qadhafi's Minister of Economy, Trade, and Investment and subsequently as Ambassador to India, will be the new Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- Abdul Faten Younis, a general, longtime ally of Qadhafi, and former Interior Minister, has become the NTC military's Chief of Staff.

Others however have been opposed to Qadhafi for quite a while, including:

- General Omar al-Hariri, who participated in the 1969 coup against King Mohammad Idris al-Mahdi, fell out of favor in 1975 when he organized a failed attempt to oust Qadhafi and so

was imprisoned for fifteen years, will guide the NTC's military affairs.

- Fathi Tirbil Salwa, an attorney and anti-Qadhafi activist, will function as the NTC's liaison to Libya's youth who make up 30 percent of the population.
- Ali Al-Tarhouni, a prominent student opponent of Qadhafi's who fled Libya in 1973, obtained a PhD from Michigan State University, and became a senior lecturer in economics at the University of Washington, will become Minister of Finance.
- Mustafa Gheriani, another Benghazi-based activist, will serve as the NTC's official spokesman.

## What are their Motives?

Despite the younger talent, several of Qadhafi's old cronies are lining up with the populist uprising hoping to at least save their hides and at most to profit politically and financially. So, for Libyans' aspirations of freedom and representative government to succeed, removing Qadhafi from power is a first step. If the rebels gain control of Libya, they will then have to grapple with those individuals within the NTC linked to 42 years of repression. How events play out in Libya will set an example for the rest of the Arab world.

When introduced to the press at Benghazi, Dr. Tarhouni admitted lack of cohesion among the rebels could lead to the current despot being replaced by his former allies: “There was a total vacuum [of power]. I think it was reflected in the makeup of the Council. We will clean it up, I promise you.” Tarhouni's words bode ill for an orderly transition, hinting at a struggle between former cronies of Qadhafi, long-term opponents of his, and younger activists and fighters who are paying the struggle's bloody price.

On a positive note, no one in the NTC leadership has links to Al-Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood, or hard-line mullahs in Iran. But this too could change if leadership struggles break out and factions need external support to prevail. Islamists among the Sunnis and Shi'ites are keen to help steer Libya's political future toward fundamentalism and militancy.

So if the NTC and its “Mad Max” style rebel forces do crush Qadhafi, the rebellion may not bring appropriate change but could represent the political survival of an old guard linked to the Middle East's mad dog or even the rise of Islamism. Moreover, it is unclear if the NTC has the skills and resources to effectively address socioeconomic

problems such 30 percent unemployment in addition to bringing about national reconciliation after the bloody civil war.

### The West's Roles

The NTC established its own Central Bank of Libya based at Benghazi. But fiscal resources in rebel-held cities are modest. Qadhafi is likely to use up all the assets in Tripoli – estimated by the IMF at U.S. \$ 100 billion in cash and U.S \$ 6 billion in gold – before he goes down. So the rebels have requested Britain deliver to them approximately 1.4 billion Libyan dinars (equivalent to U.S. \$1.1 billion) printed in London for, but as yet not handed over to, Qadhafi's Ministry of Finance, on top of the funds held by Washington.

The NTC even set up its own Libyan Oil Company to channel petroleum revenues to the rebels. Before the rebellion broke out, Libya was producing 1.6 million barrels of sweet crude oil per day. However, with oil production in Libya at a standstill, it is only a matter of time before any new government in Tripoli will turn to the West for reconstruction aid. Leaders in Washington, London, and Paris speak of billing a new Libyan government for the cost of military and other assistance, but if past foreign interventions are a roadmap then collecting those expenses is a longshot.

Yet there can be a silver lining to all this turmoil and sacrifice. Libya's inevitable financial needs can serve as a means for effecting long-term good among its people. Before the West provides such aid, it would be most prudent to ensure the funds will indeed assist most Libyans through reconstruction of social, political, and economic institutions. If not, as often happens in such endeavors,

the foreign funds will flow into the private coffers of opportunistic turncoats. Likewise the U.S. and its global partners can provide constitutional advice and bureaucratic guidance to help steer a nascent Libyan administration toward the goals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in a free, stable, and transparent society. If not, instability will lead once more to a whimsical autocracy in Libya that could become anti-Western like Qadhafi's regime.

The rebels' only realistic hope of success is through foreign assistance. So if the U.S. and its E.U. partners help bring the NTC to power, they should utilize their influence to steer Libya's new powerbrokers into a constitutional and fully-representational system of nation government. Then Libya will no longer be a global threat through weapons of mass destruction or sponsorship of terrorism like under Qadhafi. It could resume being a major supplier of petroleum to energy-hungry Europe and Asia. Through all those ways, Libya would rejoin the community of nations as a valuable and valued partner.

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## Book Review: How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict

by Timothy Richardson

Ivan, Arreguin-Toft. *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*. Cambridge studies in International Relations, 99. New York: Cambridge University Press, 250 pages, 2005. ISBN: 0521548691 Paperback \$41.00

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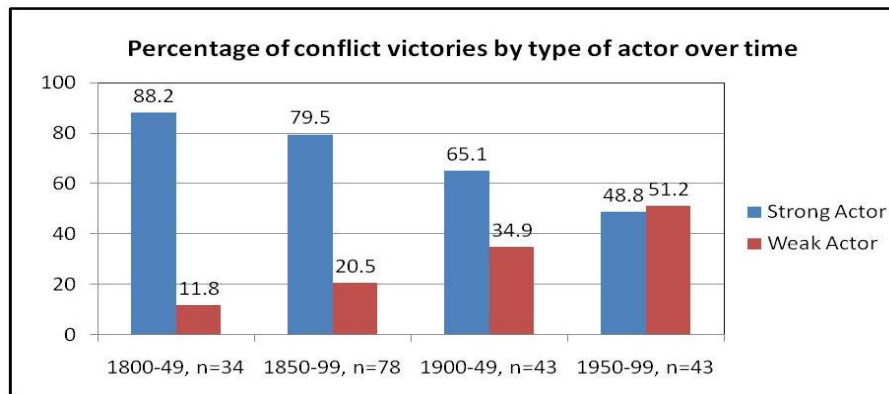
The military prowess of the United States would seem to be unrivalled in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Yet a decade into the new century, the United States is still engaged in the longest war of its history in Afghanistan against a weaker, non-state actor, with

no end in sight. Why? In his 2005 book, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Ivan Arreguin-Toft offers insight into the reasons why strong actors, such as the United States, often lose to weak actors in an asymmetric conflict.

He not only provides sound logic detailing his Strategic Interaction (STRATINT) theory to explain why weak actors defeat strong actors, but he also outlines the growing post-World War II trend marking the increased winning percentage of weak actors in asymmetric conflicts. Given the United States' efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq this past decade, few would argue against the prediction that the United States will continue to be engaged in small, asymmetric wars against militarily inferior adversaries for the foreseeable future. More importantly, one could perceive that because the United States has such an overwhelming military superiority that it did not plan for, or was not prepared for, the strategy of its adversary. As such, Arreguin-Toft's STRATINT theory is relevant, compelling, and well-supported. Moreover, it is a great follow-on to other prominent asymmetric

conflict theories proposed by Andrew Mack and Gil Merom, and is an essential read for defense planners, as well as IR scholars and students.

Arreguin-Toft opens the book by outlining the importance of studying asymmetric conflict and demonstrates the trend that strong actors have been losing asymmetric conflicts at a greater rate over time. In addition, he reviews and challenges other prominent theories attempting to explain asymmetric conflict outcomes. These theories include political vulnerability based on regime type and conflict length, arms diffusion, and interest asymmetry. Arreguin-Toft does a great job detailing why these theories may be necessary conditions, but they are not sufficient conditions to explain asymmetric conflict outcomes. Furthermore, they fall short in explaining the growing trend of strong actor losses (depicted below).



The chart above is represented as Figure 2 in *How the Weak Win Wars*.

Arreguin-Toft then outlines his STRATINT theory, which simply states that victory and defeat in asymmetric conflict depends on the military strategy used by both the strong and weak actors. If the strong actor employs the correct (or same) strategy as the weaker opponent, then the realism theory of relative power holds, and the strong actor wins over 75 percent of the time. However, if the strong actor chooses the wrong (or opposite) strategy in relation to its opponent, then the weak actor wins over 60 percent of the conflict engagements contrary to the theory of relative power. Arreguin-Toft breaks down the STRATINT possibilities into four

scenarios with each actor controlling what strategy it employs. In simple terms, the strong actor can either employ a direct or indirect strategy, and the weak actor can choose either a direct or indirect strategy. He further defines direct versus indirect for each actor based on the following typology. In a direct-direct engagement, strong actors use a conventional attack and the weak actor uses a conventional defense. In an indirect-indirect engagement, the strong actor uses a strategy of barbarism and the weak actor employs a guerilla warfare strategy.

**Weak Actor Strategic Approach**

		<b>Direct</b>	<b>Indirect</b>
<b>Strong Actor Strategic Approach</b>	<b>Direct</b>	Strong Actor	Weak Actor
	<b>Indirect</b>	Weak Actor	Strong Actor

**The table above outlines the four possible strategic interactions and the expected conflict outcomes. This table is listed as Figure 3 in How the Weak Win Wars.**

Arreguin-Toft’s choice of the terms “barbarism” and “guerilla warfare” to describe respective indirect strategies are problematic; however, they do not detract from his intent or argument. Certainly barbaric methods are not limited to strong actors when one considers acts of terrorism, which are typically employed by weak actors often with the sole intent of intimidating and harming non-combatants. Similarly, guerilla warfare tactics are not limited to just weak actors. A generic term such as unconventional for both actors would have been more appropriate.

From a statistical analysis standpoint, Arreguin-Toft’s results are compelling. To arrive at these numbers Arreguin-Toft conducted a Large-N study using the *Correlates of War* data set and he coded 202 asymmetric conflicts fought between 1816 and 2003. To determine asymmetry, “[a] conflict was coded asymmetric if the halved product of one actor’s armed forces and population exceeded the simple product of its adversary’s armed forces and population by 5:1 or more.” Critics may challenge the method Arreguin-Toft used to code the data; however, even if a more precise method is determined it is unlikely to change the results in determining the outcome of strong versus weak actor conflicts. One could further analyze the number of forces employed (vice available) by a strong actor in relation a weak actor. In addition to Arreguin-Toft’s STRATINT theory, the weight of effort used by the strong actor may be an additional variable to examine.

The strength of Arreguin-Toft’s STRATINT argument lies in his case study analysis in which he was not only able to test his hypothesis, but also examine competing explanations of asymmetric conflict results. Arreguin-Toft devotes a chapter to analyzing each of the following five historical case studies: the Murid War 1830-1859; the South African War 1899-1902; the Italo-Ethiopian War 1935-1940; the Vietnam War 1965-1973; and the Afghan

Civil War 1965-1973. In each of the case studies, Arreguin-Toft judiciously applied the competing theories of asymmetric conflict outcome against his own argument. He identified each theory’s strengths and weaknesses as they applied to each case, and soundly demonstrated the completeness of his STRATINT reasoning to explain asymmetric conflict outcomes. For example, in the South African War (aka Boer War), which pitted the British (strong actor) against a significantly weaker Orange Free State and Transvaal (weak actor), the British simply steamrolled the Boer Army in a direct-direct (conventional-conventional) conflict. However, Arreguin-Toft points out that in 1900 the Boers shifted their strategy to an indirect/guerilla warfare approach, which caused a delay in the war’s end, because it took the British time to shift to an indirect/barbarism strategy. Once the British did switch strategies that resulted in an indirect-indirect STRATINT, the strong actor prevailed and the war quickly ended. Arreguin-Toft goes on to acknowledge this is almost the exact scenario that has played out following the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, and therefore the relevance of STRATINT to policy makers in today’s conflicts.

Arreguin-Toft is also prudent to identify the limits of STRATINT and to acknowledge where the other prominent theories can help fill the gaps. For example, in his analysis of the Afghan civil war, Arreguin-Toft detailed the strength of the weapons diffusion argument. He highlighted that by 1986, the Soviet Union had shifted its direct/conventional strategy to combat the Mujahideen’s indirect/guerilla warfare approach. The Soviet change brought initial success as they began employing special operations forces to conduct helicopter assaults, and used blocking forces to minimize enemy escape routes. However, the Mujahideen were able to quickly overcome the Soviet tactical advantage through the use of US shoulder-fired Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. Therefore, Arreguin-Toft acknowledged that while STRATINT

theory explains the Soviet failure during the initial phase of the war when it used a direct/conventional strategy against the Mujahideen indirect/guerilla warfare approach, it fails to explain the Soviet defeat and subsequent withdrawal even when the conflict was indirect-indirect.

In the final section, Arreguin-Toft outlines policy implications for his STRATINT theory and argues the need for the United States to build two militaries: one to fight conventional wars (direct), and one to defend America's interests in small wars and against terrorism (indirect). Moreover, he provides candid feedback to US policy makers such that the nature of current and future conflicts will increasingly pit the US against weak actors using indirect methods. The bottom-line is terrorists and insurgents are difficult to defeat, even when employing the right strategy. Therefore, Arreguin-Toft contends the US must use discriminate force and adopt political and economic reforms that isolate weak actors from their support base. Arreguin-Toft writes: "If the United States wants to win wars it must build two different militaries. If it wants to win the peace—a far more ambitious goal—it must support its resort to arms by eliminating foreign policy double standards and by in-

creasing its capacity and willingness to use methods other than violence to resolve or deter conflicts around the world." (p. 227)

The combination of empirical and qualitative analysis, coupled with his direct challenge of competing theories makes Arreguin-Toft's STRATINT theory a compelling argument. In the social science realm, any theory that can explain a complex phenomenon such as asymmetric conflict outcome over 75% of the time is tremendous. Yet, the nature of warfare is unique in that the gap between theory and reality is often filled by the lives of brave young men and women sent to fight its nation's wars. In short, 75% is not good enough. As such, Arreguin-Toft's work is an excellent launch point to conduct further analysis on asymmetric conflict.

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