

Radically Rethinking Counterinsurgency Strategy in Afghanistan

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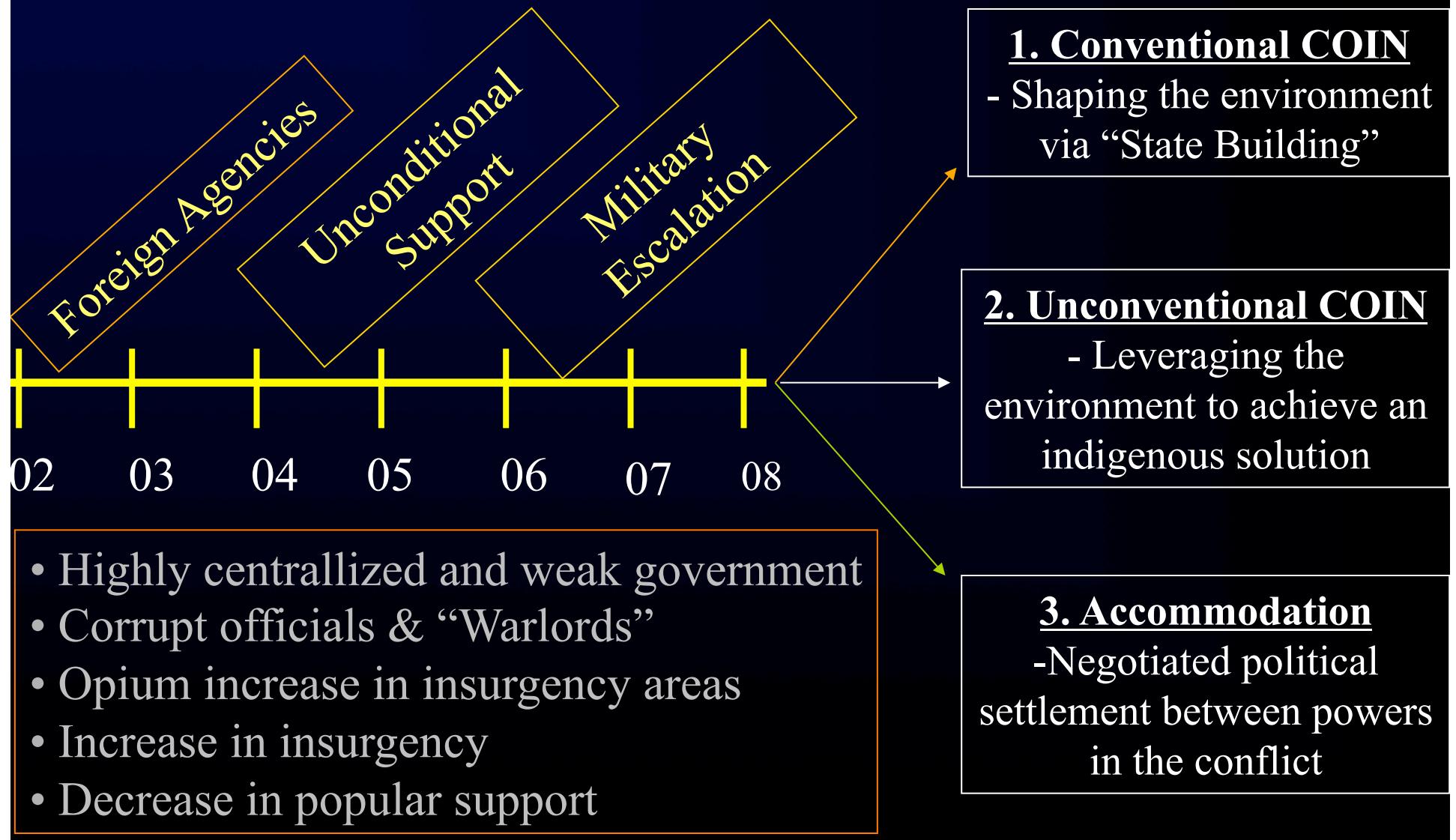
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- This briefing represents personal experience of the author in ISAF between November 2006 and April 2007.

Agenda

1. Three Competing Strategies
2. Exploring Counterinsurgency
3. Nature of the Afghan Problem
4. Rethinking COIN Strategy in Afghanistan
5. Conclusion



1. Three Competing Strategies



Back to Basics: Strategy

- Strategy is the calculating of relationships among ends, means, ways and will.
- 3 dimensions of war:
 - Physical, Kinetic, Direct, Material.
 - Psychological, Non-kinetic, Indirect, Moral, Will.
 - Temporal

Three Competing Strategies

	Conventional COIN (state building)	Unconventional COIN	Accommodation
Ends	Stable centralized nation-state	Stable indigenous security partnerships	Cauterization & Insulation
Ways	Top-down Build GoA into strong state and socio-political transformation	Bottom-up Leveraging the tribes by empowering them Political architecture aligned with political culture	Flexible Political reconciliation through negotiation
Means	Surge in foreign troops, build up AFG forces, bureaucracy, infrastructure & economy	Empower, arm and supervise the tribes with local results-based partnerships	Coercion & inducements Diplomacy
Will / Time	Extensive / Long-term & Open-ended	Results-based / Medium-term & Timeline	Limited / Short-term & Exit-overwatch

2. Exploring Counterinsurgency



Conventional Counterinsurgency - Basic tenets

1. Address root causes of insurgency
 - Vulnerable population, lack of leadership & effective governance
 - Political, ideological, social, security, economic
2. Decrease sources of internal and external support
 - Human, financial, ideological, moral, military, logistical, sanctuary, informational, etc.
3. Secure the population
 - Population control measures
 - Density of security forces
 - Ratio of Security forces vs population / enemy
 - ~ 10-20 for 1000 population

Conventional Counterinsurgency - Methods

1. “Oil Spot” (“tache d’huile”)
 - Spread the secure areas incrementally.
 - “Clear, Hold, Build”
2. Grid system (“quadrillage”)
3. “Draining the Water”
 - Relocating and securing of the local populace to expose insurgents.

Doctrinal Force Ratios

	Kandahar	RC (S)	Afghanistan
Population	1,000,000	2,500,000	30,000,000
Forces Required	10-20,000	25-50,000	300-600,000
Total Forces	6,000	?	211,000
ISAF/OEF	3,000	12,000	59,000
ANA	1,000?	?	40,000 (70,000)
ANP	2,000?	?	72,000 (82,000)

3. Nature of the Afghan Problem

Human and Physical Geography



Geography



A Fractured Society (1/2)

- Traditional tribal structures and customs weakened by decades of war
- Rise in warlordism and criminal gangs
- Conservative socio-religious fundamentalist movement in ascendance
- Modern vs Traditional vs Fundamentalist
 - Generational opposition
 - Urban-rural divide
- Post-Taliban winners and losers feeding tribal disaffection

A Fractured Society (2/2)

- Barren economy and nonexistent infrastructure
- History of decentralized governance
- History of resistance to modernization
- Current government centralization, inability, corruption and partiality
 - Lack of available indigenous skills
 - Alien to Afghan political culture
- Meddling neighbours

Spectrum of Loyalties

Educated, Employed, Literate, Access to Media, Urban.

Age, Foreign Influenced, Poor, Unemployed, Rural.

The Problem...

Difficult to Reach (Traditional)
Violent and Armed
Non-Critical and Simple
Available (Unemployed)

Easy to Reach (Media Savvy)
Non-violent and Un-Armed
Critical of Propaganda
Busy (Employed)

vs

Pro-Insurgent

Pro-ISAF

Afghan Insurgency



Un groupe de talibans se rend. Ils sont juchés sur un pick-up. C'est ce type de véhicule lancé à pleine vitesse qui contribua aux succès des talibans dans la phase initiale de leur occupation de l'Afghanistan. Notez le nombre de lanceurs RPG-7 et la provision de roquettes.

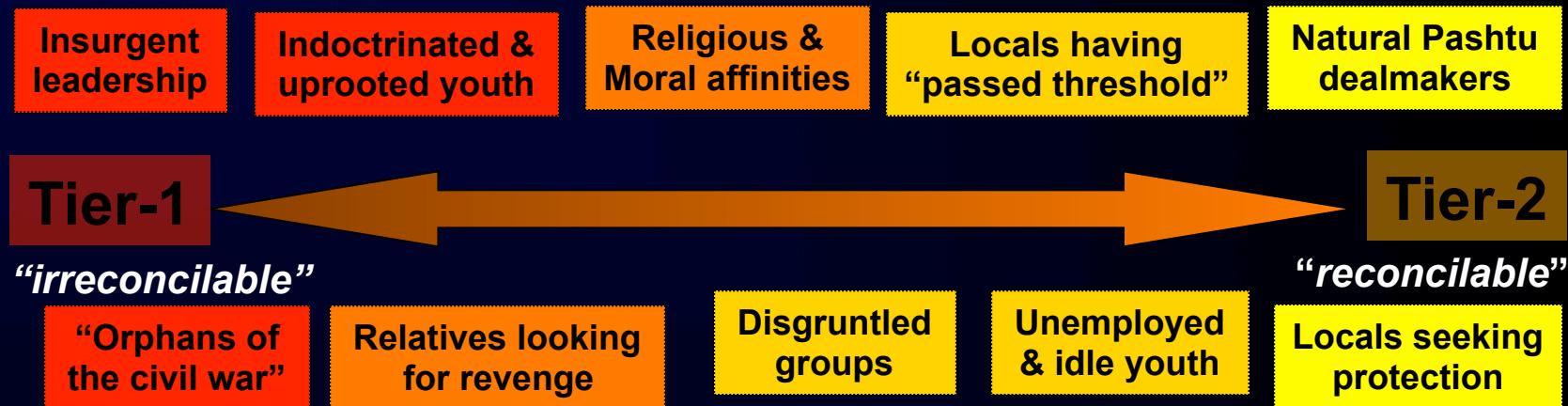
The COIN Problem – The Pashtuns

- Inter-group competition
- Pashtu Nationalism
 - Durand Line
- Religious-cultural conservatism
- Traditional Way of life
 - Tribute (transport mafia)
 - Subsidy-Patronage
 - Poppy cultivation
- Political culture
 - Personalized and competitive
 - Unstable and transitory
- Al-Qaeda mix



Insurgent Constellation

TIER-1 “irreconcilable” versus TIER-2 “reconcilable” insurgents:



Typology of the insurgency:

1. Hardcore extremists
2. Cross-border fighters
3. Internal fighters
4. Alienated Tribal and Religious Groups

Complex Insurgent Motives

- Constant shifting of allegiance based on players involved or and interest.
- The environment can not simply be divided between friendly, neutral and hostile.



4. Rethinking Strategy



Assumptions for all strategies

- Afghan stabilization will require support from neighbouring states, to suppress deleterious external support and sanctuaries.
- Abandon hope of early poppy eradication until security and governance is established, as well as adequate alternative livelihoods perspectives are ensured.

Strategic End State Redefined?

- “Anything that will help us get us out faster of Afghanistan, while still achieving stability?”
- “When the Afghans will be able to take care of their country themselves?”
- Realistic End-state:
 - Containment of international terrorism
 - “Relative” regional stability
 - Ultimately an Afghan solution to internal instability

Conventional COIN

	Conventional COIN	Pros	Cons
Ends	Stable centralized nation-state	-In line with avowed coalition objectives and Western values	-Large expenditure of resources
Ways	Top-down Build GoA into strong state and socio-political transformation	-Answers the call from Afghan Govt for more support -Potential long-term transformation into a stable state	-Efforts to deprive traditional elites have ended in rebellion -Do not have adequate military resources -Do not have the adequate civilian expertise
Means	Surge in foreign troops, build up AFG forces, bureaucracy, infrastructure & economy		
Will / Time	Extensive / Long-term & Open-ended		-Long term commitment -Further intractability of insurgency

Unconventional COIN

	Unconventional COIN	Pros	Cons
Ends	Stable indigenous security partnerships	-Recognition of local power dynamics and political culture	-Tribal structure weakened by years of civil wars
Ways	Bottom-up Leveraging the tribes by empowering them Political architecture aligned with political culture	-Traditional tribal power is natural counterweight to religious power -Grassroots empowerment and security	-Factionalism and internal competition -Less support among Afghans for fear of warlords
Means	Empower, arm and supervise the tribes with local results-based partnerships	-GoA in favour -Less expenditure of resources	-Complex to map and manage
Will / Time	Results-based / Medium-term & Timeline	-Tribal expectations of state as an honest but distant broker	

Accommodation

	Accommodation	Pros	Cons
Ends	Cauterization & Insulation	-Recognition of local and regional power dynamics -Negotiations supported by majority of Afghans	-Current power dynamics in favour of insurgency -Taleban has bad track record of respecting deals -Incentive for PAK to continue support of Afghan Taleban as proxy
Ways	Flexible Political reconciliation through negotiation	-Potential decoupling of transnational and national fundamentalist movements -Potentially less expenditure of resources	-Enforcement of dissociation with AQ difficult
Means	Coercion & inducements Diplomacy		
Will / Time	Limited / Short-term & Exit-overwatch		

Conclusion



Conclusion (1/3)

- Strategy must take account of the character of conflict and the enemy
 - War is a duel and counterinsurgency is about control of the population
- We must stop conflating COIN with State Building
- We must start leveraging the environment rather than trying to shape it
- We should not be in the way of the “Retraditionalization” of Afghan society by Afghans.
 - Political cohesion of the Afghans is the most important aspect of this war – “Grassroots”

Conclusion (2/3)

- State building should be based on surviving Afghan political culture rather than on an imported artificial ready-made model
- Addressing state failure is different than attacking the threat
 - Terrorism is the result of grievances, not poverty
- We must have a realistic strategy
 - Solutions make sense only at the local level – where the people see and live it – when they own their destiny.

Conclusion (3/3)

- An Unconventional COIN Approach will require a different mindset:
 - Change our kinetic focus to an unconventional mindset – do less ourselves
 - Language skills and socio-cultural intelligence
 - Limit our footprint with the ability to work in small teams by, way, and through and for the local Afghans
 - Capability to ensure temporal continuity and integrate locally all our lines of effort
 - Be ready to let go at one point – no foreigner is required to do what Afghans themselves are no mobilized to do
 - Nobody is required to do the impossible, beyond honest efforts

Questions?

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