

# WHAT LESSONS FROM ISAF OPERATIONS CAN BE DRAWN FOR UN PKOS?



BY

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*Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina*

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL COMPLETION OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
The Certificate-of-Training in United Nations Peace Support Operations



Peace Operations Training Institute®

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines some of the major “lessons learned” by ISAF while conducting Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Stability Operations in Afghanistan. Focus will be on the following key operational areas: Establishing and maintaining the “legitimacy” of the mission and the operations of ISAF; Insuring an Integrated Mission Approach; Use of Force; Protection of Civilians; Intelligence; Cultural Awareness; Information (Influence) Operations and the use of Female Engagement Teams (FET).

Lessons learned by ISAF in these areas will then be viewed as to their applicability to UN peacekeeping operations by applying them to (1) the “Fundamental Principles of Peacekeeping” and “Critical Factors for Mission Success” as identified in the UN’s capstone peacekeeping doctrinal manual *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines* (March 2008); and (2) *Keys to Operational Success* identified by the “Best Practices Section” of the Military Division in the UN Secretariat’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

The study will show that ISAF “lessons learned” can be used to inform UN peacekeeping operations.

## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AJP – Allied Joint Publication

ANSF – Afghan National Security Forces

ANA – Afghan National Army

ANP – Afghan National Police

ASCOPE – Areas, Structures, Capabilities, Organizations, People, Events

POC – Protection of Civilians

CALL – Center for Army Lesson Learned

CST – Cultural Support Teams

CIMIC – Civil Military Coordination

CIVCAS – Civilian Casualties

COIN – Counterinsurgency

CoIST – Company Intelligence Support Team

COMISAF – Commander International Security Assistance Force

DPKO – UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations

EOF – Escalation of Force

FET – Female Engagement Team

FHET – Female HUMINT Exploitation Team

FST – Female Search Team

FM – Field Manual

FOB – Forward Operating Base

GIRoA – Government Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

HTT – Human Terrain Team

HUMINT – Human Intelligence

IED – Improvised Explosive Device

IMINT – Imagery Intelligence

IO – Influence Operations

ISAF – International Security Assistance Force

KLE – Key Leader Engagement

LEGAD – Legal Adviser

LOAC – Law of Armed Conflict

OEF – Operation Enduring Freedom

OPSEC – Operations Security  
OSINT – Open-source Intelligence  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
NGO – Non-Government Organization  
PA – Public Affairs  
PID – Positive Identification  
PIR – Priority Intelligence Requirements  
PRT – Provincial Reconstruction Team  
PSYOPS – Psychological Operations  
RIAB – Radio in a Box  
ROE – Rules of Engagement  
SASO – Stability and Support Operations  
SIGACT – Significant Activity  
SIGINT – Signals Intelligence  
SOLLIMS – Stability Operations Lessons Learned & Information Management System  
SSR – Security Sector Reform  
TCN – Troop Contributing Nations  
TOC – Tactical Operations Center  
TTP – Tactics, Techniques and Procedures  
UAV – Unmanned Aerial Vehicles  
UNAMA – United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan  
UNSC – United Nations Security Council  
VSO – Village Stability Operations



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Figure 1: Logical lines of operations for a counterinsurgency

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## **Introduction**

Within the last twenty years, United Nations peacekeeping has evolved into a complex, large scale global undertaking.<sup>1</sup> It all started in the late 1940's with unarmed military observers and progressed in the 1950's with deployment of a neutral UN-led military force, interposed between two conventional armies whose states had agreed to a cease-fire. The interposition of a lightly armed UN "peacekeeping" force between the former belligerent forces was to prevent a resumption of fighting while diplomats were negotiating a permanent peace agreement. With the exception of the peacekeeping operation in the Congo in the 1960's, this was the template for UN peacekeeping interventions until the 1990's.

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, UN-led peacekeeping suddenly shifted from interpositional military deployments in inter-state conflicts to intrusive multi-dimensional deployments in intra-state conflicts. These peacekeeping deployments were made with a wide variety of operational components. In addition to the military component there were often police, electoral, development, relief as well as other components. Common characteristic to these intra-state conflicts were: high level of violence to include ethnic violence, radical political polarization, large population dislocations accompanied by humanitarian crises.

As the UN faced these major new challenges to peacekeeping, answers on how to operate in this new peacekeeping environment were found during number of internal reviews, discussions, studies and "lessons learned" during operations. These resulted in new operational organizations and methods in fielded peacekeeping missions as well as reorganization of key departments within the UN responsible for structuring, deploying and supporting these new complex peacekeeping missions. Numerous UN Secretary General's Reports, "Lessons Learned" studies and most notably the "Brahimi Report" of 2000 laid the doctrinal and operational foundations for these major changes in peacekeeping.

However, the world changed again on September 11, 2001; a new global security threat appeared on the horizon, "international terrorism." In contrast to the rapidly emerging "peacekeeping" challenges of the early 1990's, the UN has taken slightly lower profile in regards to this new threat to international security.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. Principles and guidelines - capstone doctrine (2008).

When Afghanistan erupted in 2001 as one of the new conflict areas spawned by international terrorism the UN was ill-prepared to respond. A US-led multi-national military coalition intervened initially in late 2001 and not long thereafter, on the UN's behalf, one of the regional organizations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the form of ISAF, assumed the lead role. In 2003, NATO launched ISAF to support a wide ranging peace process in Afghanistan that was based on five (nationbuilding) pillars: Military Reform, Police Reform, Government Reform, Economic Reform and Drug Growth Eradication. These focused efforts were similar in many respects to mandated operational tasks in multi-dimensional UN-led peacekeeping missions.

Over the course of NATO's lengthy intervention the mission in Afghanistan has proven difficult and operations have been adapted to the changing conditions on the ground. It may be instructive to look back to see what lessons have been learned by ISAF that could possibly be used to inform and instruct both current and future UN peacekeeping missions that may have to operate in a terrorist threat environment.

Even though ISAF is now primarily a counterinsurgency operation, (a recent Mission statement reads: "ISAF conducts population-centric counterinsurgency operations...") there are still a number of important issues that can be analyzed and used to inform the peacekeeping community. These issues will be addressed in no hierarchical order; some of them will overlap. The focus of this thesis is primarily at the tactical level and will draw heavily from the author's service with ISAF in southern Afghanistan as well as his peacekeeping experience in the eastern Congo with MONUC.

The issues will be called "lessons learned" from now on; the term itself implies process of learning even though, after almost 12 years of the ISAF mission, NATO still struggles operationally and a number of what have been identified as "lessons learned" remain "lessons to be learned"!

## **Chapter One: Background to NATO Operations in Afghanistan: The “International Security Assistance Force” (ISAF)**

ISAF is a UN-mandated, NATO-led international military force operating in Afghanistan. Following the successful ousting of the Taliban government of Afghanistan in October-November 2001 by Operation Enduring Freedom, the U.S. led invasion, ISAF was authorized (in concert with the Bonn Conference) by UN Security Council Resolution 1386 on December 2001. Broadly stated, its initial mission was to assist in creating a secure environment and to provide security assistance for the performance of other tasks in support of the Bonn Agreement. When ISAF was initially deployed, it covered only a small area around the Afghan capital Kabul. But in the time, the mission area expanded over the whole of Afghanistan. Since August 2003, NATO has been responsible for the command, coordination and planning of the force, including the provision of a force commander and headquarters on the ground in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

ISAF is NATO’s first major out of area deployment (IFOR in Bosnia was in NATO’s “backyard”) and the first time the Alliance has invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty which states that an attack against one member country is to be considered an attack on all. It has also been viewed by some to be a key test for the relevance of the Alliance in the post-Cold War world. ISAF tests not only NATO’s capabilities but also its relevance in a new geopolitical context.<sup>3</sup> In operating over more than a decade, ISAF grew not only in numbers but also witnessed a number of specific improvements in terms of NATO doctrine development for stability operations and peace support operations. In a study titled “The Decade of War”, U.S. Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis points out that “operations during the first half of the decade were often marked by numerous missteps and challenges as the US government and military applied a strategy and force suited for a different threat and environment. Operations in the second half of the decade often featured successful adaptation to overcome these challenges”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ISAF Homepage, available at: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/history.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent Morelli, Paul Belkin, NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance, available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33627.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis, Decade of War Study, at 1 (2012).

## ***The Mandate***

United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1386 provides the legal basis for the presence of ISAF forces in Afghanistan. This initial 2001 UNSCR, authorized under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, established ISAF to “assist...in the maintenance of security in and around Kabul”. In October 2003, the United Nations extended ISAF’s mandate to cover the whole of Afghanistan (UNSCR 1510), paving the way for an expansion of the mission across the country. So, since 2003, ISAF has been operating with a peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter as an executing hand on behalf of the international community. The ISAF mandate has been reviewed and extended repeatedly by the UN Security Council for periods of 12 months.

## ***Mission***

ISAF’s mission statement: *In support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, ISAF conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth in capacity and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), and facilitate improvements in governance and socio-economic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable stability that is observable to the population.*<sup>5</sup>

On behalf of the international community’s overall effort, ISAF is working to create the conditions whereby the Afghan government is able to exercise its authority throughout the country. To achieve this goal, ISAF conducts security operations to protect the Afghan people, neutralize insurgent’s networks and deny sanctuary in Afghanistan to extremists. ISAF also trains, advises and assists the Afghan national security forces, so that they can take over these security responsibilities. Currently, NATO’s primary objective in Afghanistan is to enable the Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country and ensure that the country can never again be a safe haven for terrorists. The transition to Afghan full security responsibility is due to be completed at the end of 2014, when ISAF’s mission should end. As of October 2012, fifty nations are contributing troops to the mission,

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<sup>5</sup> ISAF Homepage, available at: <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>.

including 22 non-NATO partner nations from around the globe, and 28 NATO Allies.<sup>6</sup> NATO is now deeply into civil–military stabilization tasks, far greater than anyone anticipated 10 years ago when the mission began.

### ***Counterinsurgency***

*“At its heart, a counterinsurgency is an armed struggle for the support of the population”*

*FM 3-24.2, Tactics in Counterinsurgency*

Former ISAF Commanding General, U.S. Army General David McKiernan, stated in November 2008: “The fact is that we are at war in Afghanistan. It’s not peacekeeping. It’s not stability operations. It’s not humanitarian assistance. It’s war.”<sup>7</sup> What has been described as a war by General McKiernan, was in fact counterinsurgency (COIN)<sup>8</sup>. However, for several years, both NATO and the United States, its top troop contributing country, struggled to properly define the “fight” they faced in Afghanistan. Immediately after the first forces were deployed to Afghanistan, operations there were defined as counterterrorism. When the threat from al Qaida and the Taliban was alleviated, some troop contributing countries were of the opinion that operations should be conducted under a UN defined “peace-building” framework. The U.S. however, through their unilateral operation ENDURING FREEDOM, which was conducted alongside but separate from ISAF operations, continued with counterterrorism operations. For a number of years therefore, ISAF troop contributing nations had different doctrinal approaches to conducting operations in Afghanistan.

Only when COIN was adopted as a unified approach, did ISAF begin to make significant progress in Afghanistan. However, ISAF’s transformation from counterterrorism (isolating and killing terrorists: al Qaida and Taliban) to counterinsurgency (protecting the population) has not been easy for a number of reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> NATO webpage, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_69349.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_69349.htm).

<sup>7</sup> Steve Bowman, Catherine Dale, War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress, available at: <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/139352.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Counterinsurgency has been defined in NATO AJP-3.4.4 as: “the set of political, economic, social, military, law enforcement, civil and psychological activities with the aim to defeat insurgency and address any core grievances.” Same source defines insurgency as: “the actions of an organised, often ideologically motivated, group or movement that seeks to effect or prevent political change of a governing authority within a region, focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion.”

In the early period of ISAF's mission, a coherent and accepted Counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine had not been developed. COIN doctrinal publications were not released before late 2006 when the U.S. COIN manual (FM 3-24) was published.<sup>9</sup> This new counterinsurgency doctrine inspired by lessons learned from Iraq began to be used as the basis for operations in the hopes of "stabilizing" Afghanistan. Key to progress in ISAF's use of COIN as the operational basis in Afghanistan occurred after U.S. General Stanley McChrystal assumed command of ISAF in 2009. General McChrystal's initial assessment of the war in Afghanistan in August 2009 defined ISAF's operations as a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign with the requirement to conduct classic counterinsurgency operations in an environment that is uniquely complex.<sup>10</sup> General McChrystal's assessment stressed "the need to change ISAF's operational culture in two key ways: to more closely interact with the population, and to significantly improve internal unity of effort."

The counterinsurgency guidance issued soon after his assessment strongly echoed the counterinsurgency principles employed in Iraq:

1. Legitimacy is the main objective
2. You must understand the environment
3. Unity of effort is essential
4. Intelligence drives operations
5. Prepare for a long-term commitment
6. Political factors are primary
7. Security under the rule of law is essential
8. Insurgents must be separated from their cause and support.<sup>11</sup>

The classic "clear, hold, and build" model of counterinsurgency AKA "oil spots" was adopted and executed in three phases:

- Clear to create a secured environment;
- Hold to establish government control over the populace and areas;
- Build to gain the populace's support.

However, once adopted, the complexities of implementing COIN still generated a number of major challenges for ISAF's campaign in Afghanistan. This was due to reasons such as:

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency doctrine has intellectual roots to the writings of David Galula.

<sup>10</sup> Stanly McChrystal, COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified) -- Searchable Document, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency at 1-20 (2006).

ISAF's complicated command structure; unrealistic expectations and unclear political guidelines regarding the end state; continuing varied interpretations by military coalition members of the operational concept (was it counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, or peace building); national restrictions over use of their forces (national caveats) by troop contributing countries; and, NATO's constant struggle for adequate troop contributions with the appropriate capabilities.



## Chapter Two: ISAF Tactical and Operational Lessons Learned

“The purpose of a Lessons Learned procedure and processes is to learn efficiently from experience and to provide validated justifications for amending the existing way of doing things, in order to improve performance, both during the course of an operation and for subsequent operations.”

*NATO Lessons Learned Policy*

Lessons learned come from experience from which organizations can improve their work or operational practices. A lesson should be specific in nature and contain enough detail to be useful. Lessons learned can be both positive and/or negative experiences and should be articulated as “advice and recommendations” for the activity being assessed. It must be emphasized that a lesson is not deemed to have been learned until an organization has changed operational methods or procedures as a result of a specific lesson. Otherwise, these are only lessons that have been identified; i.e., they remain to be learned. ISAF, claiming to be learning organization, identified number of enduring lessons for NATO operations that present opportunities to learn and improve future operational practices. Different sources such as studies, scholarly articles and reports were reviewed and considered for operational and tactical lessons learned in preparation for this thesis.

Many lessons were learned by ISAF. A number do not fit the purposes of this thesis and therefore will not be discussed. The lessons ISAF learned which are most applicable to multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations are in the following areas. They are not discussed in order of importance. And, it is important to note that they are interrelated as success or failure in one area impacts on the other areas.

- Establishing and maintaining the “legitimacy” of the mission and the operations of ISAF;
- Insuring an Integrated Mission Approach;
- Cultural Awareness;
- Intelligence;
- Influence (Information) Operations;
- Use of Force;
- Protection of Civilians;
- The use of Female Engagement Teams (FET).

## **1. Establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of the mission and the operations of ISAF**

*“In war amongst the people the strategic objective is to capture the will of the people and their leaders, and thereby win the trial of strength.”*

*General Rupert Smith*

“All governments rule through a combination of consent and coercion. Governments described as “*legitimate*” rule primarily with the consent of the governed; those described as “*illegitimate*” tend to rely mainly or entirely on coercion. Citizens of the latter obey the state for fear of the consequences of doing otherwise, rather than because they voluntarily accept its rule. A government that derives its powers from the governed tends to be accepted by its citizens as legitimate.”<sup>12</sup> FM 3-24 is clear that the “primary objective of any COIN operation is to foster development of effective governance by a legitimate government.” There are two aspects of legitimacy at stake here: of the GIRoA and legitimacy of the NATO force and its operations in the eyes of the Afghan people as well as of international authorities and the contributing nations.

In terms of international military operations, legitimacy comes from a UN Security Council Resolution. The Security Council’s decisions are seen to be representative of the will of the international community. But, legitimacy also needs to be sustained on the ground through the intervening force’s conduct and actions, through firmness and fairness in exercising the mandate, appropriate use of force, respect for local customs and respect for national sovereignty. ISAF possesses proper authorization from the UNSC but sustaining this international legal legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people proved to be difficult.

COIN doctrine is rather clear on this issue: the main objective of COIN operations is to develop effective governance through promotion of a legitimate government. Conveying of legitimacy occurs when the government achieves popular acceptance of its authority. Only the population can grant legitimacy so both insurgents and counterinsurgents compete for it. Once legitimacy has been lost by political actor, military action can only address the symptoms of a loss of legitimacy.

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency at 1-21 (2006).

ISAF operates in an environment where the host nation government (GIROA) is weak and not viewed as legitimate by large parts of the population. The problem with this is that ISAF can only address the symptoms of a loss of legitimacy: provide security for the population by eliminating insurgents and support the rule of law to some degree. ISAF will not achieve lasting success unless GIROA establishes its own legitimate claim to Afghan leadership and effectively clear out the current insurgency and prevent new insurgencies from forming.

Consent of the Afghan population is a key component in achieving legitimacy. Failing to keep the Afghan population safe decreases the legitimacy of the GIROA. Legitimacy in the Afghan context is influenced by local perceptions where a mix of national, provincial, district, village and tribal agendas compete for legitimacy with the national government. This creates a huge barrier for the promotion and acceptance of GIROA legitimacy. To overcome this, ISAF and GIROA are trying to demonstrate control over security, provide a basic level of relevant governance and expected essential services in local areas, address the corrosive effects of corruption, and provide swift and fair justice system. However, it was not easy for ISAF to operationally help legitimize GIROA. Main obstacles along the path came from the political level: corruption and nepotism that dominate Afghan politics, inability of GIROA to provide rule of law and good governance.

Another major problem dealt with the Afghan justice system which is based on accepted legal codes that originated in Islam and tribal customary law. Making this compatible with international norms and laws concerning human rights is a huge challenge to the GIROA. The Taliban, so called "*Shadow Governors*" are focused on traditional systems and structures that are the essence of traditional legitimacy in Afghanistan. ISAF was rather late to recognize this within its "Comprehensive Approach" and to include this in the training programs it developed for the judicial system. Rule of law was also late. While the Afghan National Army (ANA) received substantial training in the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) in the first years of ISAF, this was not the case with Afghan National Police (ANP). Lack of training within ANP produced significant problems on the ground for both ISAF and GIROA especially in the areas of corruption and human rights. These issues were eventually addressed with a major reorganization of ANP and greater investments in police training and equipment. Today, training for both ANA and ANP is ISAF's top priority.

Other initiatives that ISAF developed to help legitimize GIRoA were: promoting an “Afghan face” by labeling all positive activities as Afghan-led; ensuring ISAF military actions contributed to reinforcing the GIRoA’s legitimacy; adequately planning security transition from ISAF-led to Afghan-led operations (through ANA/ANP capacity building) to demonstrate to the population the capacity of the GIRoA to provide security; and, to deliver basic essential services (through PRT efforts). To increase public perceptions of legitimacy ISAF executed an extensive Information Campaign targeting the Afghan population.

However, the main effort for ISAF is still focused on establishing a safe and secure environment by defeating the insurgency and enabling the GIRoA to takeover security responsibility throughout the country. Without defeating the insurgency, the legitimacy of the GIRoA will remain in doubt.

## **2. Insuring an Integrated Mission Approach - Comprehensive Approach**

*“NATO experiences in Afghanistan, Kosovo and other operations confirm the complexity of contemporary crises. Complex crises do not lend themselves to simple definition or analysis. Today’s challenges demand a **comprehensive approach** by the international community, including the coordinated action from an appropriate range of civil and military actors, enabled by the orchestration, coordination and de-confliction of NATO’s military and political instruments with the other instruments of power. This needs to be a broader cooperation and planning in accordance with the principles and decisions of relevant senior NATO bodies.”*

*NATO AJP-01(D) Allied Joint Doctrine*

The “comprehensive approach”, defined above in NATO doctrinal publication AJP-01 is a concept that NATO uses in crisis management situations. This approach is sometimes described as a “whole of government approach” while in the UN context it is known as an “Integrated Approach”. The comprehensive approach is a conceptual framework intended to address the need for actors involved in a stabilization mission to work together, from planning to implementation. As a concept, the comprehensive approach was developed out of

the Concerted Planning and Action (CPA) initiative, advocated in alliance discussions by Denmark in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

As stated in AJP-01: “implementing the comprehensive approach requires sensitivity, rapport, respect, trust, patience and tact, as well as determination to collaborate in all actors, military and civilian, at all levels.” Interagency coordination between these actors is exceptionally difficult due to incompatible planning, training, and conduct of operations and differences in organizational culture. The comprehensive approach for ISAF is a key to success since historically an insurgency cannot be defeated by military action alone. The aim of the comprehensive approach in ISAF is to link the military operations with other efforts that are of importance to the population in order to win their support. As stated previously, security is the main objective for ISAF operations, however, to be fully effective security needs to be followed by good governance, justice, the rule of law and then be reinforced by reconstruction and development, all of which cannot be delivered by military.

Former NATO Senior Civilian Representative Mark Sedwill, characterized ISAF as “a civil–military experiment in real time and under conditions of stress that only combat can deliver.” This unique civil–military integration in the difficult security environment of Afghanistan posed serious challenges in the absence of clear doctrinal guidelines on how to conduct joint, combined civil-military efforts, to include governance and developmental programs.

The establishment of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) throughout the country was one solution of how to provide both security and reconstruction in “difficult” security environment. The Afghan National Development Strategy provides the general framework for PRT efforts: security, good governance, rule of law and human rights, and economic and social development. The PRTs were developed as joint civil–military units specifically to implement the comprehensive approach. NATO doctrine defines the PRT as “an interim civil-military organization designed to operate in complex environments.” The ISAF PRT mission statement taken from ISAF’s Operational Plan is as follows: “Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) will assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the

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<sup>13</sup> M. J. Williams, Empire Lite Revisited: NATO, the Comprehensive Approach and State-building in Afghanistan, *International Peacekeeping* 18:1, at 64-78 (Feb. 2011).

identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts.”

The PRT is supposed to improve stability in a given area by building the host nation’s capacity, reinforcing the host nation’s legitimacy and effectiveness and bolstering the view that the host nation can provide security to its citizens and deliver essential government services. In short, the PRT concept was to blend security, governance and development in a joint, integrated military-civilian organization, staffed and supported by ISAF member countries, and operating at the provincial level throughout Afghanistan.

A PRT is operated by a single nation or a coalition of two or more nations. The PRT can vary in size and composition, depending on the needs of the local area and community but also depending on the lead nation for that PRT. In Afghanistan there are three dominant PRT models: U.S., British and German. In the U.S. model, the PRT is led by a military commander. Its focus is on delivering quick impact projects. The British model has a higher percentage of civilians and is led by a civilian. The emphasis is local capacity-building. The German PRT model is rather large, and is run by a joint civilian and military command with a focus on long-term development strategies.<sup>14</sup> Each PRT is answerable to their home country, not to the COMISAF or NATO leadership which has resulted in different approaches throughout the mission. Today, there are 28 PRTs operating across Afghanistan.

Structurally, the PRT has number of elements that are intended to focus on reconstruction and development rather than fighting. These generally include a civil–military relations team, engineers, medical teams, linguists, military observer teams, interpreters, political advisers, development specialists and security personnel. Daily PRT activities range from building roads, schools and health clinics, to digging wells, providing micro-grants for small businesses, training and advising public administrators, and helping farmers grow legal crops.

Some of the challenges that PRTs have faced: lack of clear objectives against which to measure success or from which to identify alternate ways and means for achieving success;

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<sup>14</sup> M. J. Williams, Empire Lite Revisited: NATO, the Comprehensive Approach and State-building in Afghanistan, *International Peacekeeping* 18:1, at 64-78 (Feb. 2011).

lack of clear, unified chain of command to achieve unity of effort; lack of right resources both in terms of funding and in terms of qualified personnel.<sup>15</sup>

Also, NGOs have voiced the complaint that in some cases PRTs have hindered their ability to access the Afghan populace and that they have had difficulty coordinating their work and projects with the PRTs efforts. As noted earlier, even though the massive PRT effort is integral to ISAF's COIN strategy, most of their development partners are beyond the command and control of NATO. Despite this criticism, most observers rate the PRT effort as being successful.

### **3. Cultural Awareness**

*“COIN is about gaining the support of the local population. This is not achievable without understanding the local people.”*

*COMISAF COIN Training Guidance 10 Nov 09*

History has recorded many military failures which can be traced to a lack of cultural understanding by operational forces. Cultural awareness is critical for forces operating in a population centric counterinsurgency campaign as well as in multi-dimensional peacekeeping. In the words of many ISAF veterans, the lack of cultural awareness and understanding was perhaps a single greatest weakness of NATO operations in Afghanistan

Culture refers to everything that makes certain environments unique. This includes: values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, knowledge, experience, beliefs and more. Understanding of the cultural aspects of a specific operational environment begins with local history, religion, culture, customs, and laws. A thorough understanding of the operational environment will also require understanding the roles of all actors in the area of operations. All this combines to create a living body of cultural knowledge which must be updated, increased, and improved over time using both direct and indirect knowledge sources. Direct knowledge is acquired by direct interaction with the people. Indirect knowledge is acquired through research and study. Indirect knowledge is

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. House of Representatives - Committee on Armed Services. [Agency Stovepipes vs Strategic Agility: Lessons We Need to Learn from Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan](#), (2008).

then verified through interaction with and monitoring of the local population. ISAF learned rather late that cultural awareness was absolutely critical. Initially military operations in Afghanistan were conducted without a basic understanding of the country and its culture. When ISAF identified the people of Afghanistan as the principle object for attention, ISAF focused on a better understanding of the people, local cultures and languages.

Cultural and language training to individuals and units is now delivered during pre-deployment preparations and continues throughout the deployment to insure soldiers grow in their knowledge of local customs and cultural norms. Overall responsibility for cultural awareness training rests with unit leaders. U.S. FM 3-24 states: “Effective leaders ensure that Soldiers and Marines are properly trained and educated. Such training includes cultural preparation for the operational environment. In a COIN environment, it is often counterproductive to use troops that are poorly trained or unfamiliar with operating close to the local populace. COIN forces aim to mobilize the good will of the people against the insurgents. Therefore, the populace must feel protected, not threatened, by COIN forces’ actions and operations.”<sup>16</sup>

Some of the broader “lessons learned” by ISAF regarding cultural awareness in planning and conducting military operations are: helps in overall situational awareness and effective decision making; provides a better understanding of how the planned military actions will affect both the population and insurgents; can assist in predicting how the population and individuals will behave; can lead to increased communication and prevent unnecessary tensions; helps in force protection. Furthermore, cultural mistakes or culturally inappropriate actions and behavior in an operation can easily escalate into “bigger problems” and lay the groundwork for increased risk in future operations.

To operationalize lessons learned regarding cultural awareness ISAF instituted several organizational initiatives. These included fielding of Human Terrain Teams (HTTs); Key Leader Engagements (KLE); Female Engagement Teams (FETs) and Company Intelligence Support Teams (CoISTs). Following is a brief description of each.

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<sup>16</sup> U.S. FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency at 7-1 (2006).



Human Terrain Teams (HTT) of 5-6 members, all trained in the social sciences were attached to each U.S. Brigade Combat Team. The teams were responsible for providing a constantly updated, user-friendly ethnographic and socio-cultural database of the brigade's area of operations. This information was then used to advise the commander on all aspects of the "human terrain" when planning and conducting operations.

Key Leader Engagements (KLE) are military leaders meeting with important local officials to cultivate and/or manage the "leaders" in local communities. KLE's were not meant to engage the key civilian leaders during crises only, but to build relationships over time so they can then support the military's interests when a crisis arises.

Female Engagement Teams (FET) consist of female ISAF soldiers assigned to units on patrol who would then deal with Afghan females when necessary during an operation because interaction of ISAF male soldiers with Afghan females was/is not socially acceptable.

Company Intelligence Support Teams (CoIST) are an effort to expedite the flow of information and intelligence gathering from company size units to higher headquarters. One member of each company size unit receives specialized training on information and intelligence gathering and is responsible for submitting a summary of observations and findings through the operational chain as quickly as possible after an operation. (CoIST will be addressed in more detail during the discussion on Intelligence.)

A final tool for enhancing cultural awareness was a concept called "*one family - one soldier.*" The idea was to generate cultural expertise at the lowest level in any given area where each soldier would develop knowledge about a specific family and conduct daily interaction with that local Afghan family.

#### 4. Intelligence<sup>17</sup> - The need to understand the environment

*“In counterinsurgency, killing the enemy is easy. Finding him is often nearly impossible. Intelligence and operations are complementary. Your operations will be intelligence driven, but intelligence will come mostly from your own operations, not as a product” prepared and served up by higher headquarters. So you must organize for intelligence.”*

*David J. Kilcullen, Twenty-Eight Articles*

Intelligence support in COIN operations is focused on gaining a greater understanding of the operational environment. The Operational Environment is defined as “a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander.”<sup>18</sup> Simply put, the operational environment is everything, everybody and every event occurring around us. In planning for conventional operations at the tactical level, the operational environment we focus on is the physical environment (obstacles; avenues of approach; key terrain; observation and fields of fire; and, cover and concealment) and then we describe the enemy. When operating in a COIN environment (as well as in peacekeeping), the focus must shift from “enemy centric” to “population centric” intelligence gathering. The cultural and human environments in the area of operations become key pieces of the operational environment.

In order to include cultural and human aspects of the operational environment, it was necessary for ISAF to use different approach in its intelligence gathering. A key aspect was the strong reliance on human intelligence (HUMINT) gained from the population and then fusing this with other information gathering (intelligence) disciplines to produce intelligence products. As prescribed by the U.S. FM 3-24, the purpose of intelligence in COIN is to facilitate understanding of the operational environment, with focus on the population, host nation, and insurgents. The key “lesson learned” here is that there is no substitute for direct interaction with the local population through means such as patrols, meetings (shuras), and

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<sup>17</sup> The term Intelligence is not used on UN-led operations. UN coined the euphemism of “Information” for Intelligence. Early in peacekeeping the UN avoided using the term “Intelligence” as it did not want to be seen as “spying” on member states. While there is still some bureaucratic lethargy to using an “Intelligence Operating System” in UN-led peacekeeping, this is gradually being overcome. A Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC) is now established at the headquarters of each multi-dimensional peacekeeping mission, working directly for the mission’s Chief of Staff. A primary function of the JMAC is to produce and provide intelligence products in support of planning and the conduct of operations.

<sup>18</sup> US JP 1-02, DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms at 230 (2010).

KLEs. Thus, it is essential to ensure that everyone is prepared to collect information through proper questioning techniques and observation skills. And, every soldier must be trained and conditioned to be a sensor and information gatherer.

Often “intelligence organizations” in Afghanistan were unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which ISAF forces were operating or about the people they were trying to protect and persuade. This was attributed to the fact that ISAF intelligence resources focused mainly on insurgent groups, insurgent attacks, and their use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Key information about the environment and the Afghan people was not making its way to decision-makers. The tendency was to overemphasize the collection and analysis of information about the perceived enemy ("red" information) - at the expense of information about the political, economic, and cultural environment ("white" information).”<sup>19</sup>

Understanding the cultural and societal aspects of a population demands a careful study of:

- Organization of key groups in a society
- Relationships and tensions among groups
- Ideologies and narratives that resonate with groups
- Values of groups (tribes, etc.), interests, and motivations
- Means by which groups communicate
- The society's leadership system

Before ISAF leaders and operational units could begin to understand the cultural and societal aspects of the Afghan population, it was necessary first to focus the intelligence collection effort. Commanders and leaders had to specify and prioritize what information to collect, identify and direct who will collect what information, and then organize and analyze the information collected. A concept/tool known by its acronym “ASCOPE” was used to drive this holistic information gathering effort.

**A** - Area: Where do people live, work, play, meet, worship?

**S** - Structures: Why are structures in the area important? Bridges, mosques, market places, tea houses, internet cafes, hospitals, etc.

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<sup>19</sup> Observation from Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute based on the article "[Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan](#)," by Major General Michael T. Flynn (U.S.A), Captain Matt Pottinger (U.S.M.C.), and Paul D. Batchelor (DIA), Center for a new American Security, (Jan. 2010).

**C** - Capabilities: Who in the community is capable of providing for the people?

**O** - Organizations: What are the different groups of people in the area?

**P** - People: How do the people communicate/interact?

**E** - Events: When are things occurring?

It must be emphasized that collection of information alone is not intelligence. The various information collection disciplines (human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), imagery intelligence (IMINT), open-source intelligence (OSINT), data from imagery platforms: satellite and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV)) must be merged with information about on-going significant activity (SIGACT) in an all-source analysis cell that will then address and answer the commander's Priority Intelligence Requirements (PIR). The key is to have actionable intelligence that is quickly provided to operational units to inform them in planning and executing operations.

As pointed out previously, one intelligence gathering and processing technique mastered in ISAF was the organization of company level intelligence teams called Company Intelligence Support Teams (CoIST). Most of the company level units in ISAF are organized for conventional combat and do not possess an intelligence operations capability. Intelligence for company operations is normally provided by the company's higher headquarters. However this intelligence often arrives late and is not focused enough and therefore may be of little direct value to the company's pending operation. One of CoISTs goals was to provide a company level unit with information on the effects of the weather, enemy, terrain, and local population on the company's operations, to reduce uncertainty and aid the company commander in decision making.<sup>20</sup> CoISTs were also tasked with studying and reporting on the local population in their area of operations. A further goal in using CoISTs was to integrate intelligence from bottom-to-top and from top-to-bottom. For example, the company's squad and platoon patrol reports were to be brought to Company CoIST who would forward these up the chain-of-command as quickly as possible for use in planning and follow on operations. The "hope" was for establishing a more open and responsive two-way information exchange from platoon/company level up to the battalion/brigade level and back down. ISAF recognized that lower unit-level intelligence sections gathered considerable amounts of information on the operational environment and population

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<sup>20</sup> Center for Army Lessons Learned, CALL Handbook Company Intelligence Support Team (2012).

centers/groups/leaders which can be used by higher-level analysts to create comprehensive, periodic narratives - pulling together all aspects of what is occurring in each district. These wide ranging narratives that describe such things as changes in the economy, projects, markets, trade, development, atmospherics, mosque activity, governance, security, crime, corruption, concerns/irritants when provided back down were helpful in planning and conducting company level operations.<sup>21</sup>

## **5. Influence Operations**

*“The effective employment of IO to influence primary target audiences, including the population, local leaders, host nation security forces, government officials, and insurgents, is a key component of counterinsurgency (COIN) operations.”*

*U.S.M.C. Information Operations in Afghanistan Lessons Learned Report*

Influence Operations (IO) are increasingly being recognized as a significant combat force multiplier. In COIN operations they constitute a powerful “non-kinetic” weapon in the commander’s arsenal; however it is a concept whose military application in terms of doctrine is still in development.<sup>22</sup> Influence operations comprise all “non-kinetic/non-lethal” tools available to affect the opposite sides decision-making. Influence Operations or Information Operations in the form of an Information Campaign are a supporting line of operation in the COIN’s operational design. Information Operations should reinforce other COIN lines of operation.

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<sup>21</sup> Observation from Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute based on the article ["Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan,"](#) by Major General Michael T. Flynn (U.S.A), Captain Matt Pottinger (U.S.M.C.), and Paul D. Batchelor (DIA), Center for a new American Security, (Jan. 2010).

<sup>22</sup> There is division within the NATO in regards to term Influence operations where some nations prefer term Information operations or Inform and Influence Operations.

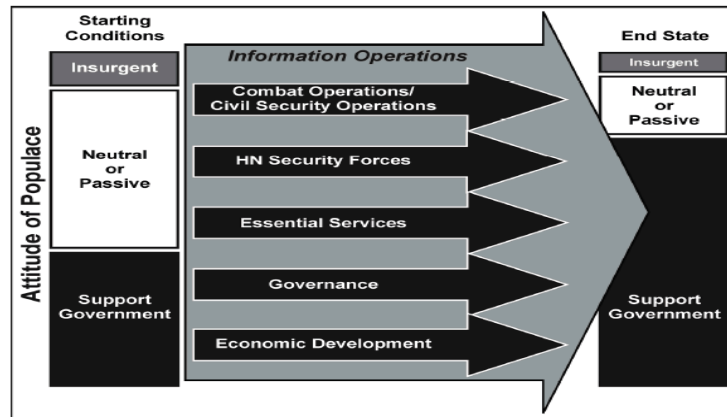


Figure 1: Logical lines of operations for a counterinsurgency<sup>23</sup>

One of the definitions for Influence Operations states: "it is an overarching term that subsumes or subordinates the capabilities of information operations and other activities to achieve influence objectives." Another definition states: "the art of integrating lethal and non-lethal capabilities to affect the information environment."<sup>24</sup>

In one doctrinal construct Influence Operations or activities include the following: Information Operations, Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC), Operations Security (OPSEC) and Public Affairs (PA). The aim of all these activities is to "influence" the perceptions of selected target audiences in ways and directions that are favourable to on-going military operations and thereby contribute to overall mission accomplishment. Considering the complexity of COIN operations, some have suggested that successful coordination and execution of Influence Operations may even become a prerequisite for mission success.

Information Operations are the main component of Influence Operations. NATO defines Information operations as: "a military function to provide advice and coordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries and other parties in support of Alliance mission objectives."<sup>25</sup> Information Operations include a number of activities and techniques that are employed to influence attitudes and behavior of selected targeted audiences. These activities can include one or more of the following: Psychological Operations (PSYOPS),

<sup>23</sup> U.S. FM, 3-24 Counterinsurgency at 5-3 (2006).

<sup>24</sup> Larson, E. V. Understanding commanders' information needs for influence operations. RAND Corporation, (2009).

<sup>25</sup> NATO AJP-01(D) Allied Joint Doctrine (2010)

Electronic Warfare, Presence Posture Profile, Computer Network Operations, Deception, Physical Destruction and Information Security. These tools are used to deliver certain messages intended to influence selected target audiences. Use of these various “tools” of Information Operations must be carefully coordinated and closely monitored to insure that the messages delivered are consistent, culturally acceptable and meet local conditions.

Civil Military Coordination (CIMIC) and Public Affairs (PA) are viewed doctrinally as being closely related to Information Operations and can support an Information Operations campaign. NATO publications define CIMIC as: the co-ordination and co-operation, in support of the mission, between the NATO Commander and civil actors, including national population and local authorities, as well as international, national and non-governmental organizations and agencies” while Public Affairs (PA) are defined as: “function responsible for promoting NATO’s military aims and objectives to audiences in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance.”<sup>26</sup> Both CIMIC and PA functions are to be integrated with Influence Operations in an Information Campaign supporting a military force executing a COIN campaign.

The goals of ISAF Influence Operations in Afghanistan have been defined as:

- Gaining the support of the population
- Denying support for the insurgents
- Destroying, degrading, disrupting, denying, deceiving, exploiting and influencing enemy actions
- Enhancing legitimacy of the Host Nation government
- Utilizing the capabilities of positive influencers
- Denying the capabilities of negative influencers<sup>27</sup>

ISAF’s IO “lessons learned” were identified through numerous “after action reviews” and in several studies. Overall, these reviews and the “lessons learned” focused on IO organization, training, planning and messaging. The following are some of the findings.

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<sup>26</sup> NATO AJP-01(D) Allied Joint Doctrine (2010).

<sup>27</sup> COIN Center Afghanistan briefing, available at: <http://ronna-afghan.harmonieweb.org/CTCA/Pages/index.aspx>.

Preparations for IO in the pre-deployment phase should focus on increasing the non-physical knowledge and understanding the operational environment. This knowledge will help to create culturally acceptable IO products and define how the IO messages could be delivered. Some means of message delivery identified for Afghanistan's operational environment are: Jirgas/Shuras, Local Media, Key Leader Engagements, word of mouth, Leaflets and Pamphlets, Radio in a Box (RIAB) (discussed further below), and various Host Nation Government activities.

IO can become a key component in the fight for establishing and maintaining the legitimacy of both NATO's ISAF forces and the Afghan government in the minds of the Afghan population. It was noted that unfortunately for ISAF, the insurgents in Afghanistan also used and were masters of Influence Operations. Insurgents do not use sophisticated printing facilities or over-complicated and creatively designed messages to influence the local population. One example of a simple but very effective use of Information Operations by the insurgents was the use of "night letters" to intimidate (i.e., influence) the local population. A "night letter" is a written message to an individual or group of villagers which are posted during the night on the door of targeted person or local leader. The content of those letters is mostly intimidating, threatening a target to stop activities which are supportive of ISAF or the Afghan government.<sup>28</sup> This method was particularly effective because ISAF patrolled during the day while for the night they moved back to their Forward Operating Bases (FOBs). By not protecting the population "24/7" ISAF exposed the local population to the insurgents at night. Overall, the insurgent's main advantage in the information operations contest with ISAF was found to be their intimate understanding of local culture.

Due to the complexity of Influence Operations and the number of players involved, coordination is essential in order to achieve coherence and synchronization in an information campaign and the synchronization of that campaign with on-going maneuver/kinetic activities. A technique developed by ISAF was to establish an Influence/Information Operations Coordination Board. Membership on this board is directed by the commander and depends on his objectives for the information campaign. However, all influence operations actors must be represented in some way to insure the coordination of targeted "messages" and with actions on the ground. A recurring problem area was the slowness of this coordination process and

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<sup>28</sup> Hodžić, H. Afghanistan – The War for Perceptions? Katastrofy Naturalne i Cywilizacyjne, Polish Military Academy Vraclov, 361-376 (2011).



hence the long time required to receive approval for delivery of an information operations “message”.

Influence operations narratives and messages should be developed early in the planning process and become integral part of any operational plan from the beginning. During a specific military operation the need for information operations support should be anticipated and, when undertaken, the response should be executed with speed, accuracy, and truth. Lying is not an option! When exposed, an information operations message that was a lie will taint all future information operations messages. Sooner or later, a lie will generate more damage than benefit. It was also noted that some commanders on the ground in Afghanistan tended to use influence activities only in crisis situations as some sort of damage control when a situation appeared to be lost.<sup>29</sup>

Successful transmission of an information operations message will be heavily dependent on relationships built with the local population by ISAF units operating in an area. Everything a unit does can have either a positive or negative impact and will be used by the local population in how they interpret and view an IO message. It is not only what ISAF says in its information operations messages, but also what soldiers do on the ground in their daily patrols. Soldiers’ actions must support and reflect IO messages.

In regards to transmission or delivery of IO messages, a unique and positive example is ISAFs “Radio in a Box” (RIAB) program. ISAF troops have given tens of thousands of hand crank/solar powered radios to Afghan district governors and Afghan National Security Forces for distribution among the general populous. Program content is varied. The station plays traditional Afghan music, reports the news, and plays messages provided by the Government of Afghanistan and ISAF information program messages. These programs have proven to be very successful and have helped counter Taliban propaganda. ISAF also has cleverly used soldiers on patrol to distribute paper flyers that promoted RIAB.

Bottom line - IO involves every ISAF soldier at every level. IO programs can range from the very simple to the complex. In Afghanistan, contact with the population occurs daily at the small unit level; each soldier’s behavior carries a message to the population (aggression,

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<sup>29</sup> COIN Center Afghanistan briefing, available at: <http://ronna-afghan.harmonieweb.org/CTCA/Pages/index.aspx>.

respect, kindness). Since in Afghanistan, “word of mouth” is the main communications channel, such things as creating simple talking points for small unit leaders to be used on patrols can be a very effective method for distributing key messages. Given that small units have the most interaction with local populations, they should be allocated additional capabilities which can range from trained psychological operations (PSYOP) personnel, combat camera, to Radio in a Box (RIAB) transmitter for distribution. IO billets should be established and manned by trained and capable IO personnel. IO training should be conducted for all personnel beginning with the individual soldier who interfaces with the population while on patrol, to commanders and staff at battalion and higher headquarters.<sup>30</sup>

## **6. Use of Force**

*“We must assume that civilians are present unless we can establish otherwise.”*

*COMISAF Tactical Directive, 2011*

The measured and precisely calibrated use of force is a critical aspect of contemporary military operations since, in words of former British General Rupert Smith (in his book titled “*Utility of Force*”), most future military operations will not take place on a conventional battlefield but rather in populated areas and amongst the civilian population. Avoiding collateral damage, principally civilian casualties (CIVCAS), has therefore become a paramount criteria in planning and conducting military operations. All military application of force must comply with the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). But in population centric COIN, the use of force must be seen as legitimate by the local population. That means the civilian population must view the level of force used as being judicious, appropriate and proportional to the threat which, in turn, will contribute to achieving overall legitimacy of the military, a fundamental requirement for success in COIN operations. Studies have shown that ISAF-caused CIVCAS have undermined trust and credibility in ISAF and have harmed ISAFs relationship with GIRoA. CIVCAS have also created grievances exploitable by the insurgents.

Several high-profile CIVCAS incidents in 2008 and 2009 served to focus the various commanders of ISAF on ways to reduce civilian casualties. Since 2009, each ISAF

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<sup>30</sup> Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned (MCCLL), [Information Operations in Afghanistan](http://info.publicintelligence.net/MCCLL-AfghanIO.pdf) available at <http://info.publicintelligence.net/MCCLL-AfghanIO.pdf>.

commander has issued a “Tactical Directive” to provide his guidance and intent for the "disciplined use of force." Stated in another way, these tactical directives have provided guidance to subordinate commanders for making tactical choices based on limited use of force while maintaining force protection. These tactical directives all re-emphasized that the center of gravity of the struggle in Afghanistan is the Afghan people and firmly places dealing with the presence of civilians at the center of every decision involving the use of force.

Operational as well as tactical procedures have been modified. Rules of Engagement (ROE) and Escalation of Force procedures continue to be reviewed and modified to reduce CIVCAS. These actions have all served to communicate COMISAF’s intent to minimize CIVCAS and that ISAF was willing to accept the tactical risk of greater casualties in order to avoid a strategic failure by losing support of the population. ISAF’s strategic goal remained to defeat the insurgency. To achieve this, ISAF must separate the insurgents from the Afghan population.

To assist U.S. and NATO forces in dealing with CIVCAS in Afghanistan the U.S. Army’s Center for Lesson’s Learned (CALL) published a study that identified three types of fires that resulted in CIVCAS: direct-fire engagements, indirect-fire engagements, and escalation of force (EOF) engagements. A direct-fire engagement is when coalition forces are in contact with the enemy and engage with organic weapon systems. CIVCAS resulting from a direct-fire engagement happen for two reasons: the presence of unobserved civilians in the target area and civilians being misidentified as enemy. Indirect-fire engagements are coalition forces’ mortar or artillery fire to engage the enemy. CIVCAS from indirect-fire engagements occur because rounds fail to strike their intended target. EOF engagements occur when ISAF forces engage in order to reduce a threat during a convoy/patrol or to reduce a threat at some sort of control point. The tricky part of EOF engagements is to identify hostile intent and, based on this, to make a decision as to when or whether to escalate force. This is the main reason for so called “fog of war” incidents. These occur when ISAF forces misinterpret the actions of the civilian population. The local population often behaves in a manner that is misinterpreted by ISAF troops, who perceive hostile intent. This often results in CIVCAS. These incidents are more common for troops who lack cultural awareness training.

In addition to the Tactical Directives, the various commanders of ISAF have issued other directives, all with the aim of minimizing civilian casualties. Some of the more important one's are:

- COMISAF Night Operations Tactical Directive,
- COMISAF Tactical Driving Directive,
- COMISAF Directive on Medical Facilities,
- COMISAF's Guidance Concerning Civilian Casualties,
- Direction and Guidance on Escalation of Force.

Each of these directives builds upon the base Tactical Directive and further provides guidance and direction to ISAF troops on engagement with local population.

Despite these many CIVCAS reduction focused directives, ISAF has not been as successful as desired in preventing CIVCAS and additional procedures have been instituted. CIVCAS Mitigation Working Boards and CIVCAS Lessons Learned panels were established to investigate in the immediate aftermath of a CIVCAS incident. The main purpose for these quick response actions was to record, study and learn from the incident and then disseminate the findings quickly so that similar incidents could be prevented in the future. Another lesson learned is to use a KLE as part of the incidence "consequence management process." Through a KLE, local Afghan leaders would be informed of the actions being taken by ISAF after a CIVCAS incident. ISAF leaders would also ask the Afghan leaders to explain to their villagers what actions on the part of the villagers were perceived as hostile by coalition forces and to inform the villagers how they should act in the presence of ISAF forces to minimize any misunderstandings of their intentions. It was noted that a good prior relationship of the military with local leaders increased the chances of successful situation management after an incident occurred.

Reporting itself is an important part of the mitigation process. ISAF took the position that it must be "first with the truth" in order to initiate appropriate messaging and the KLE process. Further aspect of CIVCAS prevention is proper training for deploying units where a "CIVCAS mind-set" should be developed during pre-deployment training through familiarization with COMISAF's CIVCAS Directives and other guidelines. [NOTE: from my personal experience, this is rather difficult as units do not perceive this sort of training

particularly “exciting” and would rather focus on battle drills and procedures than practicing soft measures focused on engaging the civilian population.]

The ISAF COIN Center in Kabul, a leading institution for COIN training for both ISAF troops and for Afghan National Security Forces, promoted so called “courageous restraint” and “tactical patience” concepts.

Courageous restraint means having the courage to restrain from overreacting in an engagement with the enemy. This is particularly important for decisions made at the lowest level. Certain decisions can produce unwanted 2nd and 3rd order effects which can seriously harm relationships with the local population. The “pay-off” for exercising courageous restraint comes when the local population (when they observe the exercise of courageous restraint) begins to understand, that ISAF is acting in their best interests. This builds public confidence in a unit’s efforts and support for their presence and operations is increased.

Tactical patience means waiting for a situation to develop and unfold before reacting to it. Tactical patience can last from a few seconds to hours. It should be war gamed in unit and leader training programs using the “decision loop” methodology steps of: observe, orient, decide, and then act when the best conditions for success are present that will obtain the most advantageous outcome. Both courageous restraint and tactical patience should be trained at every level. The ISAF COIN Center in Kabul and the ISAF Advisory and Assistance Team collect and share lessons they have learned from units in regards to courageous restraint and tactical patience.

Another important aspect in minimizing CIVCAS is the need for a thorough understanding of the local patterns of life and the operating environment and to use that in planning all military operations. An in-depth knowledge of the human terrain can help to alleviate CIVCAS. For example, the earlier described ASCOPE planning tool develops knowledge that enables units to identify risky areas with a high potential for CIVCAS.

IO is another tool which is well suited to CIVCAS mitigation and prevention. During pre-and-post operations IO personnel could provide talking points to inform and influence the population before an operation and, if needed, in the aftermath of a CIVCAS incident, to counter any insurgent propaganda and to get the truth out about what actually happened. ISAF found the key is to be first with the truth, followed by condolences, solatium payments, use of a KLE and media engagements to deliver messages of regret and to inform the local

population of precautions they can take to avoid incidents when ISAF is conducting military operations in their area.

Another positive initiative to mitigate CIVCAS was to place a Legal Advisor (LEGAD) in a military unit's Tactical Operations Centers (TOC) who could provide immediate legal advice on the use of fires during operations, especially if air support and indirect fire support was requested. This made a legal opinion and advice immediately available to leaders for evaluating fire requests within the context of ISAFs many SOP's, Directives and ROE.

## **7. Protection of Civilians**

*“Protecting the population from insurgent coercion and intimidation demands a persistent presence and focus that cannot be interrupted without risking serious setback.”*

*COMISAF Initial Assessment*

Protection of civilians (POC) is intimately related to the “use of force.” It is a “hot” topic both within military community as well as the humanitarian relief and assistance community. However, there are significant differences in how ISAF and the United Nations views and defines this issue. The UN takes a very broad view by defining protection of civilians as “efforts to protect civilians from physical violence, secure their rights to access essential services and resources, and contribute to a secure, stable, and just environment for civilians over the long-term.”<sup>31</sup> POC, by UN standards, lies on three tiers: protection through the political process, protection from physical violence and more broadly through the long-term establishment of a comprehensive protective environment. As highlighted in the discussion on the use of force, in terms of POC, ISAF is more narrowly focused on preventing its forces from causing civilian casualties. SOLLIMS, a U.S. Army program that provides a Knowledge Management/Lessons Learned for Peacekeeping and Stability Operations provides a noteworthy lesson here: “... placing a focus on the international force's operating procedures is insufficient with regard to protecting civilians in cases where the environment has a major insurgent threat. Although civilian casualties (CIVCAS) caused by the international force can indeed be reduced/minimized through various command-directed measures – i.e., training,

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<sup>31</sup> Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. Protection of Civilians Military Reference Guide at x (2012).

discipline, and the judicious application of force – stability can still be significantly impeded by the perpetuation of civilian harm by others, particularly by the insurgent threat ... meaning that other options should be considered by the international force ... Civilians may care more about the total number of deaths than who is actually responsible.”<sup>32</sup>

While ISAF has implemented a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy, there remains the criticism that its view and execution of POC is inconsistent with that strategy. The COMISAFs initial assessment in 2009 highlighted this when he reflected that ISAF is pre-occupied with protection of its own forces, which distances itself, both physically and psychologically, from the people that should protect.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the units operating in Afghanistan are stationed in large Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) from where they conduct daily patrols and other operations and then return to those bases at night. COIN doctrine calls for “24/7” protection of civilians with the emphasis on leaving security forces among the population. Lack of security and protection is the major complaint by local populations. When Afghans were asked what the main problems were in their area most respondents stated that ISAF was not able to protect the population “24/7”, both physically and psychologically from insurgents. Even after particular area is “cleared” of insurgents as a result of ISAF operations, threat from insurgents is still present. Insurgents take advantage of the lack of ISAF “24/7” presence to extend their influence through intimidation and attacks on civilians and the infrastructure they use. This fact turns the local population against ISAF and GIRoA as they are not able to live up to the promises of security.

This is another observation from SOLLIMS regarding the protection of civilians in peacekeeping and stability operations: “The imperative of protecting civilians should be at the forefront of every peacekeeping and stability operation. Although many international missions have not been mandated or sufficiently resourced to meet this imperative, experience has shown that populations can turn against the foreign force (stabilization force) when they perceive that they are not being adequately protected by this force.”<sup>34</sup> UNAMA’s Report on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict-2012 reports that “Anti-Government

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<sup>32</sup> SOLLIMS Lessons Learned Sampler – Protection of Civilians (2010).

<sup>33</sup> Stanly McChrystal, COMISAF Initial Assessment (Unclassified) -- Searchable Document, available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/21/AR2009092100110.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Strategic Lessons in Peacekeeping & Stability Operations, Strategic Lesson Number 13: The Imperative of Protecting Civilians, (Nov. 2012).

elements have increasingly exerted influence or control. Such perceptions influence the extent to which people feel secure to exercise their rights to free movement, political participation, education and healthcare.”<sup>35</sup> And, people do not feel protected, although they feel that ISAF is adequately resourced to protect them.

One interesting initiative to deal with the difficult problem of POC in Afghanistan is the so called Village Stability Operation (VSO). VSO is a program that provides security, governance and development to village or district communities in Afghanistan through a "bottom up" approach. The concept was developed by U.S. Special Forces supporting local defense and community watch programs with the goal of fostering an enduring stability for the people on a local level. VSO in one village or district includes a small Special Forces team (sometimes reinforced with infantry squads) that lives among the people and uses the COIN methodology of *Shape-Clear-Hold-Build*. The focus is on protecting the local community, but significant effort is also put to undermining insurgent influence and control, and building support for the GIRoA from within. Within each village, small security elements have been formed as local police (Afghan Local Police) trained and mentored by Special Forces teams. Living among the population in the villages also allowed the soldiers to learn local culture and gain greater understanding of the population’s vulnerabilities. The end result is a protected village where local capacity can be built and where the insurgents remain separated from the population.

## **8. Use of Female Engagement Teams (FET)**

*“History has taught us that most insurgent fighters are men. But, in traditional societies, women are extremely influential in forming the social networks that insurgents use for support. Co-opting neutral or friendly women, through targeted social and economic programs, builds networks of enlightened self interest that eventually undermines the insurgents. To do this effectively requires your own female counterinsurgents.”*

*David J. Kilcullen, Twenty-Eight Articles*

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<sup>35</sup> UNAMA&UNOHCHR, [Afghanistan, Mid-Year Report 2012, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict](#) (2012).



As has been amply noted, ISAF found it difficult to fully engage with the local population which is a fundamental COIN precept. A major problem was finding ways to engage women, who make up half the population. The Afghan cultural context of segregating females from males results in the predominantly male coalition security forces being prohibited from interacting with 50% of the population. If coalition forces are to get information from the female half of the population, then military coalition females must be the one's getting that information. As stated by Major Maria Vedder, Civil Affairs, US Army ISAF HQ, Afghanistan's culture is unique in terms of segregation by gender.<sup>36</sup> Segregation has historical and cultural roots. During the Taliban rule of Afghanistan, segregation was particularly severe. Women were almost totally excluded from public life. They were denied access to schools and other sorts of interaction, had to wear the burqa in public and had to be accompanied by male family members when outside of home. Since the Taliban were removed from power this situation has improved but mainly in urban areas while in rural areas the role of women remains severely restricted. Female Engagement Teams (FET) were developed to engage the female Afghan population which could not be done by male ISAF soldiers due to these cultural sensitivities.

During ISAF's initial operations in Afghanistan, the issue of having to reach out to and deal with Afghan females was not addressed and most likely not even thought of. Consequently there was neither a doctrinal basis nor tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) for FET-like activities. Over time, through experience and adaptation, a broad doctrinal consensus emerged for FET operations. It is roughly along these lines: FETs are tasked with engaging the local female population to find out information on female needs and problems; address their security concerns; and form links between them and the military. FET conducts information engagements with the female population in a culturally respectful manner in order to build confidence and support for GIRoA and ISAF.

The first FET was established by U.S. Marine Corps to support military operations in 2009 based on lessons from Iraq where female service members were used to access, engage, and

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<sup>36</sup> Vedder, M. Engaging the Female Populace. Proposal for Military Females to Engage Afghan Females. Public Intelligence, available at <http://publicintelligence.net/isaf-afghan-female-engagement-teams-proposal>.

search Iraqi women. Since then, the U.S. Marine Corps has led the way establishing a FET training program to meet the tenets of the ISAF FET directive.<sup>37</sup>

In the early beginning, FETs were rather ad hoc female teams composed of female soldiers in theater with the idea to engage the local female population to support specific missions as directed by ground commanders. After action reports from units employing FETs found that they provide significant benefits in the areas of intelligence gathering and information dissemination. FETs are now being employed in a variety of operations and activities including intelligence collection, search, seizures and cordon-and-knock operations, key leader engagements, civil affairs programs, enhancing information operations and dissemination for PSYOPS.<sup>38</sup>

There is no fixed FET organization. The team is structured to support a specific operation and to carry out specific tasks in support of that operation. However, some basic organizational tenets have been prescribed. These are: FETs should have as a minimum 2 females per mission with preferably one being a female linguist. When possible, FETs are also to be accompanied by an ISAF female medic, ANSF female partners and/or female GIRoA officials.

During 2010 ISAF initiated in-theater FET training for female soldiers. Adding to this, in February 2011, COMISAF requested that all units deploying to Afghanistan after 31 August 2011 should deploy with FET trained and qualified female soldiers. Key “takeaway” from FETs is that they have allowed the ISAF military unit to gain greater acceptance from the local population and are able to collect information that can be used in subsequent operations. FET is about building relationships with the Afghan female population which was previously beyond ISAFs ability to influence. FET can engage both men and women. Afghan men often see western women as a “third gender” and will approach coalition forces’ female soldiers with different issues than are discussed with men.<sup>39</sup> FET is not the only ISAF initiative for closer engagement with the Afghan population. The success of the Female Engagement Teams spawned other gender based teams such as Female Search Teams (FSTs) and Female HUMINT Exploitation Teams (FHETs)

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<sup>37</sup> Erwin, S. K. The Veil of Kevlar: An Analysis of the Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan, Naval Postgraduate School (2012)

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Center for Army Lessons Learned, Commander’s Guide to Female Engagement Teams (2011).

### **Chapter Three: ISAF Lessons Learned viewed through the prism of the UNs three Key doctrinal peacekeeping principles and three Critical Factors for Mission Success**

*“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is most adaptable to change.”*

*Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1892)*

The United Nations is an international organization established at the end of World War II to facilitate international cooperation, security, sustainable development, human rights and most importantly to maintain world peace. The UN’s peacekeeping operations directly support its foundational goal of global peace and security. Peacekeeping is also currently the most visible activity of the UN. At the end of 2012 there were 14 UN peacekeeping operations and one Special Political Mission (Afghanistan) deployed on four continents. Overall, 115 countries were contributing 114,830 uniformed personnel and civilian experts to these missions. As noted earlier, UN peacekeeping operations have changed dramatically since their inception in 1948. Since the 1990’s and the end of the Cold-War UN peacekeeping operations have been conducted almost exclusively in complex physical, operational and political environments. They are now mandated to carry out multiple tasks ranging from security, to relief and development activities and transitioning war-torn states from conflict to sustainable peace.

The UN’s capstone doctrinal peacekeeping manual which was published in 2008 provides an insightful description of the currently very complex peacekeeping environment. “Multi-dimensional United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UN PKO) deployed in the aftermath of an internal conflict face a particularly challenging environment. The state’s capacity to provide security to its population and maintain public order is often weak, and violence may still be ongoing in various parts of the country. Basic infrastructure is likely to have been destroyed and large sections of the population may have been displaced. Society may be divided along ethnic, religious and regional lines and grave human rights abuses may have been committed during the conflict, further complicating efforts to achieve national reconciliation.”<sup>40</sup> This is an apt description of the operational environment still facing ISAF in

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<sup>40</sup> United Nations. Principles and guidelines - capstone doctrine (2008)

Afghanistan. It is no stretch of the imagination to deduce that there is a great possibility that UN peacekeepers will face situations like NATO faces in Afghanistan.

From a military operational standpoint ISAF is conducting counterinsurgency operations. However, at the same time, ISAF, along with a variety of international partners to include the UN (UNAMA), is also involved in nation building tasks commonly found in all large UN multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations. These tasks include such things as establishing a safe and secure environment; support for national, regional and local governance; reform and restructuring of national military and police forces as well as the judiciary (known collectively to the UN as Security Sector Reform (SSR)); economic development; and, human rights and humanitarian assistance. Therefore, NATO and ISAF's efforts in Afghanistan can be seen to largely mirror the tasks of multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations which are to rebuild a country that has been devastated by decades of war.

As discussed in the previous chapter, there have obviously been many lessons learned at the "tactics, techniques and procedures" (TTP) level by ISAF forces that can relate to UN peacekeeping operations. The focus in this chapter will be to analyse those same lessons using the UN's three key doctrinal principles for peacekeeping and the three critical factors for mission success. The key UN doctrinal principles are: *Consent, Impartiality, and Non-use of force except in self-defense and defense of the mandate*. The three "Key Factors" the UN has identified for peacekeeping mission success are: *Legitimacy, Credibility, and Promotion of National and Local Ownership*.

1. ***UN view of CONSENT*** - There must be *consent* by the main parties to the conflict for the presence and operations of the intervening force. This is a pre-condition for deployment. *Consent* is dynamic, operates at different levels, and must be managed continually by mission leaders. Withdrawal of *consent* by small "spoiler" elements is tolerable but must be dealt with robustly. Withdrawal of *consent* by one of the major parties however may prevent implementation of the mandate and cause or force the outside intervening military force to withdraw from the mission.

**ISAF lacks Consent.** There was never consent by the Taliban for the presence and operations of ISAF. However, opinion polls showed that, for a number of years, a majority of the Afghan population supported the international military presence and felt that the country

was heading in the right direction. By 2009, with the resurgence of the Taliban, it became doubtful in the eyes of the Afghans (given the size and rugged terrain of the country) that ISAF had the strength to establish and maintain a safe and secure environment needed for the other nation-building tasks to be effectively undertaken. Simply stated, Afghans began to realize that the Taliban insurgency could be successful. Surveys of Afghans began to show the population felt less secure about their future. At the same time the increased fighting between the insurgents and ISAF caused civilian casualties to grow significantly. This caused further erosion of consent for the international presence. As early as 2009 one analysis voiced the opinion that “the United States, its NATO allies and the government of Hamid Karzai are losing not just ground in Afghanistan – but also the hearts and minds of the Afghan People.”<sup>41</sup> Consent or support by Afghans for the presence and operations of ISAF was and is diminishing rapidly and increasingly so there are calls for NATO/ISAF to limit their operations and even leave.

**Lesson Learned.** In both COIN and peacekeeping operations the “center of gravity” is the security of the population and the support of the population for the intervening military force. While *consent* to NATO/ISAF presence and operations in Afghanistan would probably never have been given by the Taliban, more attention and a greater effort could have been taken by ISAF to plan, evaluate and execute operations in the light of how these will affect the overall level of the Afghan populations *consent* and support for ISAF. If, for whatever reason, the population remains neutral or is actively against the operations of the intervening force in COIN and/or in peacekeeping, then the missions mandated objectives may remain unachievable.

**2. IMPARTIALITY** – The mandate must be applied without favor or prejudice to any party. Activities that might compromise the image of *impartiality* must be scrupulously avoided. *Impartiality* is crucial to maintaining consent and cooperation of the parties.

**ISAF is not “impartial” in executing its mandate.** ISAF supports the elected government of Afghanistan and its security forces and is attempting to defeat the Taliban insurgency. Therefore the peacekeeping principle of *impartiality* does not apply as such. However, *impartiality* can be viewed as an issue applicable in the broader Afghan context. Afghanistan

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<sup>41</sup> abc News, Support for U.S. Efforts Plummets Amid Afghanistan’s Ongoing Strife, available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1083a1Afghanistan2009.pdf>

continues to suffer from bad governance and predatory political elite. The Afghan government continues to give free-rein to well-known warlords and human rights abusers as well as corrupt politicians. This has significantly eroded support for the current Afghan government on the part of the Afghan people. ISAF can be seen as being partial to, and propping-up, a corrupt government structure at the expense of the general population.

It is also worth noting that there is no direct correlation of impartiality as a peacekeeping principle to COIN operations in Afghanistan which are directly in support of the Afghan government and have an identified enemy - the insurgents. In peacekeeping the peacekeepers must implement their mandated tasks in an impartial manner not favouring or punishing any faction. It must be further noted that impartiality does not imply neutrality on the part of the peacekeepers if they witness acts of violence against the civilian population. Since peacekeeping operations in the mid-1990's peacekeepers have been trained and directed to intervene (within their capabilities) to halt attacks on civilians in their operational area by any group or faction. This is not a violation of impartiality. Stated simply, peacekeepers cannot stand-by idly (neutral) if they have the capability to intervene when witnessing violence against civilians.

**Lesson Learned.** If the outside intervening force is seen as supporting a national and local governments and government officials that are seen as corrupt by the population then the principle of *impartiality* is compromised.

***3. NON-USE OF FORCE EXCEPT IN SELF-DEFENSE AND DEFENSE OF THE MANDATE*** – In peacekeeping, force should be used as a measure of last resort when other measures of persuasion have been exhausted. If used however, the force should be calibrated in a precise, proportionate, and appropriate manner and in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. The *use of force* always has political implications. Judgments must be made at appropriate levels based on a number of factors such as: Mission, Capability, Public Perception, Humanitarian Impact, Force Protection, Safety of non-military partner organization personnel and the impact its use will have on *consent* for the mission.

**ISAFs Use of Force.** Since 2001, the annually large number of Afghan civilian injuries and deaths caused first by U.S. and then ISAF operations has been a constant source of friction between the international force, the Afghan government and the Afghan people. The pattern

of civilian deaths caused by the international military forces has been fairly consistent. Most have been caused by airstrikes. President Karzai has repeatedly accused the U.S. and ISAF of not taking enough care to protect Afghan civilians. These civilian casualties and deaths regularly spark anti-U.S./ISAF public protests. Most recently, on 13 February 2013, an ISAF airstrike in eastern Afghanistan killed ten civilians including children. The air support had been called in during a joint ISAF-ANSF raid. Speaking at the national military academy in Kabul three days later, President Hamid Karzai announced that he was ordering an end to Afghan forces requesting coalition close air support under “any circumstances.” This was followed on 17 February 2013 by the commander of ISAF stating that coalition forces would comply with President Karzai’s directive banning Afghan forces from calling in coalition airstrikes.

**Lesson Learned.** The disciplined *use of force* must be a top priority when operating under a population centric strategy such as counterinsurgency or peacekeeping. Clear rules of engagement (ROE) must be crafted and units subjected to rigorous training programs that firmly embed these ROE as guide for action when force must be used. This must be done even though restrictive ROE may pose a threat of more casualties to the military force. Since General McChrystal’s tenure as commander in 2009, ISAF has issued an ever more restrictive set of guidelines for the *use of force*. These now restrict air strikes or artillery fire on areas where insurgents might be mixed in with civilians, limits on hot pursuit in populated areas and a ban on air strikes and artillery fire on areas where it is difficult to distinguish who is on the ground.

Without question, civilian casualties caused first by U.S. and now ISAF operations has negatively impacted on the Afghans’ *consent* for ISAF operations as well as their perception of the *legitimacy* (discussed below) of those operations.

**4. LEGITIMACY** – Again, as pointed out previously, in terms of international law, *legitimacy* for a military or peacekeeping intervention comes from the UN Security Council Resolution that authorized the intervention. But, *legitimacy* of the intervention and the intervening forces in the eyes of the local population is established and sustained based on the military force’s actions and conduct. This generally includes such things as firmness and fairness in exercising the mandate and the use of force, respect for local customs and respect for national sovereignty.

**ISAF and Operational Legitimacy.** General McChrystal's "COMISAF's Counterinsurgency Guidance" issued to ISAF in 2009 clearly stressed the need for all of ISAF's activities to be seen as *legitimate* in the eyes of the population. He stressed: "Protecting the people is the mission. The conflict will be won by persuading the population, not by destroying the enemy..."

As discussed above, civilian casualties and collateral damage from ISAF's robust use of force, especially airpower, has had a negative impact on the Afghans' views of ISAF's *legitimacy*. Cultural understanding is especially important in the interaction of military forces with the local population where wrong steps can be especially damaging. In this respect, Afghanistan has been called a "cultural minefield" for western non-Muslim military forces.

As noted earlier ISAF has undertaken a number of initiatives to raise cultural awareness, both for individuals and in planning and conducting operations. These include the assignment of Human Terrain Teams to larger combat units, Female Engagement Teams, use of Key Leader Engagements and assignment of Cultural Advisors to certain levels of command. ISAF has also directed that all soldiers must complete training on cultural awareness prior to each deployment before leaving their home station.

The deployment and use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) which carry-out developmental projects in the countryside certainly show that, in addition to conducting military security operations, ISAF is devoting a major effort and significant resources to improving the life of the Afghan people. This helps to *legitimize* ISAF's presence to Afghans.

**Lesson Learned.** Military counterinsurgency operations and peacekeeping are conducted in towns and villages among the people. As stated previously, support of the population is the "center of gravity." Military operations will be viewed as *legitimate* by the population when they are seen as benefitting the people in the long run and when the behaviour of individual soldiers and units respect local culture and customs. Cultural awareness at all levels and in all activities is a key to gaining and maintaining a legitimate status among the local population. All operations must be planned and conducted with cultural sensitivity. Individuals and units must be sensitized and trained in cultural awareness.

5. ***CREDIBILITY*** – UN peacekeeping operations are often deployed in volatile environments and are likely to be tested for any weaknesses early in the mission. Early establishment of a



force's *credibility* is vital. To be *credible* a force must have a clear and deliverable mandate with resources and capabilities to match. The force must conduct itself professionally, maintain a confident posture and earn the respect of the parties and the general population.

**ISAF and credibility.** ISAF is a powerful military coalition with warfighting capabilities that far exceed that of the insurgents and their supporters. It is a very *credible* warfighting organization. However, as Anthony Cordesman notes in a recent CSIS Study titled “*Avoiding Creeping Defeat in Afghanistan*,” “the U.S. is not losing the war in Afghanistan in the classic military sense. The U.S., its allies and Afghan forces still win virtually every direct military encounter. The problem is that this is a political war where the political impact of combat, politics, governance, and economics are far more important than tactical success in directly defeating the enemy...it is unclear that the U.S. and ISAF have effective plans to deal with the political nature of the war they are fighting...”

**Lesson Learned.** ISAF must demonstrate it has a comprehensive and properly resourced population centered strategy. And, the Taliban must be sufficiently convinced that ISAF is committed to this population centric strategy and will use force to compel the Taliban to yield. Without this the Taliban will likely continue to violate the peace because the expected benefits of continuing the insurgency are seen to exceed the expected costs.<sup>42</sup> The bottom line is that the *credibility* of ISAFs commitment is crucial for the population-centric strategy to be effective against the insurgency. This lesson can be directly transferred to the design and execution of multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations. The peacekeeping force must be seen as a force capable of and having the will to establish a safe and secure environment and fulfil the mandate.

**6. PROMOTE NATIONAL AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP** – Both the international intervention in Afghanistan, as well as multi-dimensional peacekeeping interventions, are designed to help states emerging from conflict to be able to exercise full and responsible national sovereignty. As quickly as possible, national and local authorities and institutions and must accept and assume authority and responsibility.

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<sup>42</sup> Tatjana Stankovic, “Strategy and Credible Commitment: A game theoretic analysis of the conflict in Afghanistan,” NUPI Report Publisher: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (Oslo: University of Oslo, Autumn 2009) pp 81-82

**ISAF and the Promotion of National and Local ownership of the Peace Process.** The concept of ‘national and local ownership’ in terms of post-conflict peacebuilding is generally understood as being the progressive transfer of full responsibilities to the state to manage its own affairs. Operationally, it connotes the participation of the central government and other key regional and local actors in the conception and implementation of the national reform, reconciliation and reconstruction process.

U.S. military counterinsurgency doctrine stresses that progress in stability in places such as Afghanistan requires efforts to legitimize a host-nation government to its own people, build its capacity to serve its citizens effectively and accountably, extend its authority throughout its territory, and conform to international humanitarian law, human rights, rule of law, and “good governance” standards.

Most analyses and observations of current Afghan governance show it is progressing very slowly if at all in reaching those standards. Afghans generally feel that corruption is a problem throughout the country and recognize that many authority figures abuse their position to benefit themselves rather than society.<sup>43</sup> “The government is weak and does not have access to the resources it needs to pay for its own operations. Afghans are generally sceptical that anyone, in the public or private sectors, is looking out for their interests.”<sup>44</sup>

**Lesson Learned.** For national and local ownership to be transferred from the intervening force and its implementing partners the State’s institutions and representatives there must be accountable government. A close look at Afghanistan after 2001 reveals that political authority is fragmented among a multiplicity of external and internal actors who have divergent interests and agendas, making it difficult for the population to attain responsive and accountable governance. National and local ownership is seen as having been handed over to a narrow range of unpopular political and military figures without a local consensus by international actors who failed to appreciate the context in which they entered Afghanistan in 2001. However, despite this, plans are progressing for transferring full responsibilities to the Afghan state, even as it remains crippled by political disunity, rampant corruption, and a clear lack of capacity.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Robert D. Lamb, “Formal and Informal Governance in Afghanistan,” CSIS Occasional paper No. 11 (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2012) p. 16

<sup>44</sup> Marika Theros, “Understanding Local Ownership in Peacebuilding Operations in Afghanistan,” (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, October 2012) pp. 2-6

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p.12.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout its lengthy operational deployment in Afghanistan, ISAF has been adapting its strategy, operational approach, tactics, techniques and procedures to face evolving challenges. Some of these operational initiatives have been drawn from “dusty” lessons learned from Malaya, the Philippines and other colonial-time insurgencies and counterinsurgencies as well as the American experience in Vietnam and Iraq. Although these lessons are mainly counterinsurgency in nature, they are relevant for other types of international operations, to include UN peacekeeping operations. UN peacekeeping operations are far more focused on the peace process or the maintenance of peace once conflict is over. Still, multifunctional and robust peacekeeping missions tend to take place in volatile and uncertain environments, very similar to the ISAF operational environment. Some of the challenges which modern UN missions face such as an asymmetric threat (now present in DRC, Somalia) will require similar approaches to that which ISAF used in Afghanistan.

ISAF’s lessons learned have been purchased at a high cost. More than 3,200 coalition troops have died serving in Afghanistan. It must be emphasized that the lessons ISAF learned which are presented in this document are only one segment of the overall lessons NATO has learned from Afghanistan. This thesis focused primarily on lessons that are applicable for operational and tactical level UN peacekeeping operations. Collectively these lessons point to the fact that contemporary conflict is constantly changing its face and multinational forces conducting operations in this sort of environment must constantly adapt. At the tactical level, unit commanders must have a complete understanding of their operational environment and adopt a flexible posture and approach to all operational problems because issues will overlap either reinforcing or negating each other. A priority for the mission leadership is to establish and maintain the “legitimacy” of the mission. As ISAF lessons learned demonstrated, this is heavily influenced by mission’s approach to Protection of Civilians. The more civilians feel protected, the higher the credibility of the force which, in turn, reinforces legitimacy. The importance of cultural awareness is another major lesson from ISAF. Proper cultural understanding will inform and be a guide to developing the right rules of engagement and serve to minimize civilian casualties. Influence operations can be a gigantic force multiplier and have a major impact on all aspects of military operations. A well developed Information Campaign can communicate a wide array of information to the public which will help to gain

and keep their support for the operations of the military force. An “Integrated Mission” approach is a basic requirement for effective peacekeeping. ISAF successfully employed this in its structuring of its Provincial Reconstruction Teams which allowed for the synchronization of civilian and military efforts at district levels in areas where security was problematic. The use of Female Engagement Teams was innovative techniques in reaching out to Afghan females and dealing with them in a culturally acceptable manner. For the UN, use of FET’s would also be another way to advance one of their major initiatives in peacekeeping, to achieve gender equity in peacekeeping missions.

Experiences from Afghanistan, ISAFs “lessons learned” that have been presented in this thesis are applicable and might be utilized in some UN-led peacekeeping operations. It is only a hope that UN troop contributing nations will recognize applicability of lessons from Afghanistan and commit resources and capabilities developed in ISAF to support UN operations in contemporary conflict and post-conflict environments.

### ***Acknowledgments***

*The author would like to thank COTIPSO mentor Mr. Karl Farris, for guidance and support throughout thesis development. I am also grateful to my colleagues and peers for their comments, suggestions and fruitful philosophical debates and exchanges of knowledge regarding peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations. Peace Support Operations Training Centre, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina deserves special appreciation for sponsoring both, my military and civilian education, including this valuable professional development program for peacekeepers.*

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