Combating a Modern Insurgency: Combined Task Force Devil in Afghanistan

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Whatever else you do, keep the initiative. In counterinsurgency, the initiative is everything. If the enemy is reacting to you, you control the environment. Provided you mobilize the population, you will win. If you are reacting to the enemy, even if you are killing or capturing him in large numbers, then he is controlling the environment and you will eventually lose . . . Focus on the population, further your game plan, and fight the enemy only when he gets in the way. This gains and keeps the initiative.

—Lieutenant Colonel David Kilcullen, Australian Army[1]

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PHOTO: CTF Devil, TF Koa, and an ANA brigade commander meeting with sub-governor, police chief, and elders in Chapadara, Kunar province, 14 November 2005. (U.S. Army, LTC Trevor Bredenkamp)

IN EARLY SUMMER OF 2005, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was in the midst of its sixth rotation of forces in Afghanistan since late 2001. On 1 June 2005, the 1st Brigade of the 82d Airborne Division became the core of Combined Task Force (CTF) Devil and assumed command of Regional Command East (RC East). Its area of responsibility included 10 provinces and covered a mountainous region roughly the size of North Carolina. Attached to CTF Devil were 8 provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs), 5 maneuver task forces, a forward support battalion, 2 batteries of artillery, and 9 separate companies for a total of over 5,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. Special Operations Forces, to include a Special Forces battalion, and other government agencies cooperated closely with the task force, while two brigades of the Afghan National Army (ANA) served as primary partners in addressing security within the borders of RC East (see figure 1).

CTF Devil received a classic counterinsurgency (COIN) mission:

- Conduct stability operations to defeat insurgents and separate them from the people.
- Protect the people in RC East and interdict infiltrators out of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).
- Transform the environment by building the Afghans' capacity to secure and govern themselves.

In these operations, CTF Devil fought four different enemies:

- The insurgents themselves—the Taliban, the Hizb-i Islami (Islamic Party) Gulbaddin (led by Gulbaddin Hekmatyar), and Al-Qaeda. Each had differing techniques, tribal affiliations, and goals.
- Afghanistan's own weak-state threats: the corruption, smuggling, drugs, and refugee problems associated with 25 years of near-constant war.
- A challenging climate: rains in the spring brought powerful floods, the summer heat limited aircraft loads, and extreme cold and snow in

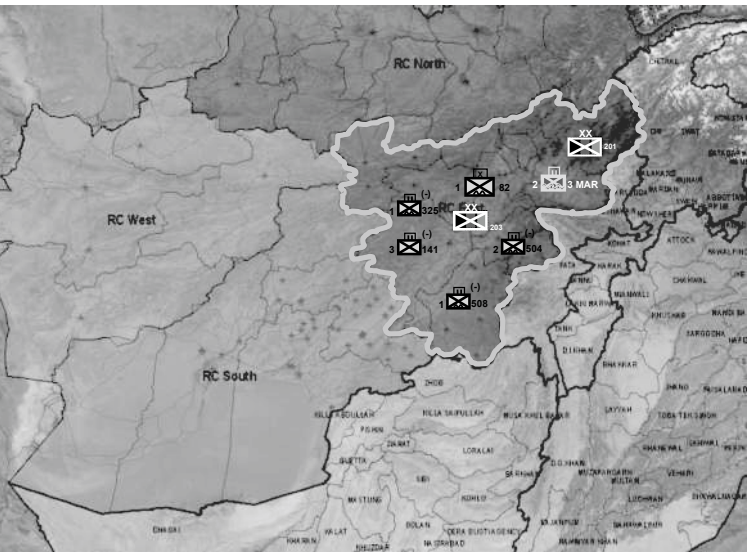

Figure 1. Regional Command East and CTF Devil disposition, August–December 2005

the winter cut off cities and even entire provinces from the rest of the country.

- Very difficult terrain varying from high plains 7,000 feet above sea level, to densely forested mountains over 10,000 feet high (with only camel trail access), to deep valleys with raging rivers.

The AO's strategic significance lay in the 1,500 kilometers of border shared with Pakistan, including the Khyber Pass, the main entry point into Afghanistan for commerce. To manage this sprawling battlespace, CTF Devil executed a pragmatic strategy that balanced kinetic, nonkinetic, and political actions.

Operational Environment in RC East

At the provincial and district levels, the government in Afghanistan was so weak in 2005 as to be nearly nonexistent, especially in the border areas where only tribal authorities were recognized. The people ignored district and governmental boundaries, and a gamut of unofficial actors filled gaps in the power base. Internal councils (shuras) governed the primarily Pashtun tribes, and carefully selected leaders and elders represented them externally. These tribal structures and shuras were de facto governments in areas where no institutional functions existed. They also represented a challenge to the emerging provincial governments because they resisted ceding their traditional authority. Mullahs gained political clout during CTF Devil's tenure because they increasingly saw politics as their inherent sphere of influence. Surprisingly, they were relatively anti-Taliban and supported a moderate version of Islam. CTF Devil routinely worked with the mullah shuras to dispel rumors, counter extremist propaganda, and address security issues directly.

While the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (IRoA) and coalition forces represented a progressive alternative to Taliban authority, strongmen, warlords, and militia leaders were still influential, particularly in border districts. In certain cases, former warlords had become the local chiefs of the Afghan Border Police or Afghan National Police (ANP) to mask their criminal operations behind official duties.

In theory, the Afghan government is a strongly centralized system, with power mostly flowing from Kabul. In practice, the central government has limited influence in much of the country outside of Kabul. During Operation Enduring Freedom VI, this limited influence was due to a lack of financial and human resources, destroyed institutions and infrastructure, corruption and inefficiency, and the inherent difficulties of governing the fiercely independent people in the border regions.

Task force provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) and maneuver battalion commanders had contact with the provincial governor who served as the coalition's principal interlocutor with the ministries and national government. At the lowest level, a sub-governor appointed by the provincial governor administered each district and maintained close contact with company-level leadership.

The task force determined at the start that reconstruction could only move forward if coalition and Afghan army and police forces maintained an offensive posture; therefore, it made a concerted effort to synchronize capabilities. To keep the initiative, CTF Devil implemented a campaign plan that focused on four goals:

- Building Afghan capacity.
- Extending the reach of the central government.
- Blocking infiltration.
- Ensuring good governance.

A key task involved promoting and protecting the nation's first-ever parliamentary elections. These goals drove many of the CTF's actions during its first six months in country. Measures of effectiveness focused on positive indicators such as changes

in infrastructure and institutional capacity (numbers of businesses opening, police manning their posts, children in school, homes with electricity, etc.) and the degree to which the people supported their local and national government (number of IEDs turned in to the police by civilians, voters registering, former Taliban reconciling, etc.).

During planning in May 2005, the CTF determined its main effort would focus on building Afghan security with three supporting lines of operation: good governance and justice, economic and strategic reconstruction, and security cooperation with Pakistan along the shared border. The task force used this focus to shape its campaign.

Killing or capturing insurgents was important when required, but this was not an essential task. The CTF's decisive operations would focus on the people, the center of gravity. For operations to succeed, coalition forces realized the people needed to believe they were secure. The task force found itself in competition with the Taliban for the will of the people. Though both sides were trying to win over fence sitters who were waiting to see which side would bring them the most benefits, the CTF possessed two very effective means to rally support: a substantial development effort, and alignment with the popular Afghan president, Hamid Karzai. By 2005, these two factors had substantially eroded support for Taliban theocratic ideology in eastern Afghanistan. As a result, the Taliban had to resort to coercion, intimidation, and terrorism.

The preferred manner of engaging Taliban insurgents was not through search-and-attack missions between mountaintops and ridgelines. Instead, the task force asked PRT and maneuver commanders to identify the most effective methods of separating the insurgents from the population. CTF Devil believed it had to give the people quick, tangible reasons to support their government. To obtain this support, perception of Afghan institutional autonomy had to improve. Expansion of U.S. cooperation with the Afghan National Security Forces helped initially.[2] Task force leadership understood that conditions for long-term security had to be set first. Improved security had the potential to set the conditions for a wave of sustainable development that would both improve perceptions of government autonomy and undercut insurgent aspirations.

In pursuing security, U.S.-only operations aimed at eliminating insurgents did not lead to favorable outcomes. CTF leaders quickly discerned that unilateral operations were culturally unacceptable to Afghans, encouraging conditions that would perpetuate the insurgency. For instance, a paratrooper entering an Afghan building for any reason without accompanying Afghan forces brought shame to the owner of the dwelling. In addition, according to the Afghan Pashtunwali code, for every zealot-militant U.S. forces killed, no less than three relatives were honor-bound to avenge his death.

CTF Devil's goal in this regard involved developing Afghan security capacity to a point where ANSFs could conduct and, ultimately, lead clearing operations. Just putting an "Afghan face" on missions (i.e., having token Afghans along on U.S. operations) was not sufficient. There were challenges to overcome first, though. The Afghan National Police knew their communities and the insurgents operating in them, but they feared taking action because they were often outgunned and out-manned. Furthermore, the nascent Afghan legal system was still weak, and police were reluctant to arrest insurgents because corrupt judges often released them quickly. But by working closely with the police, building trust through combined training, and showing the willingness to backup the ANP, the task force emboldened its allies. After CTF Devil established this partnership, the often ill-equipped and poorly trained ANP suddenly began discovering IEDs and willingly moved against insurgent cells in their districts.

Still, U.S.-led kinetic operations were necessary, particularly in Kunar province's Korengal Valley

U.S. Army, LTC Trevor Bredenkamp

Afghan National Police in Nuristan, Afghanistan, 30 September 2005.

in the north and the border districts of Lwara and Bermel in Paktika province. In areas like these, the insurgents proved to be well trained, well equipped, and able to operate in groups as large as 100. Their rocket threat against forward operating bases and a resurgence of IED cells in the interior districts presented concerns only U.S. forces were ready to address effectively. In such situations, the CTF tried to function as a shield, the idea being that the Afghan police and army could form behind U.S. forces and, eventually, take over the fight.

During CTF Devil's tenure, transitioning Afghans to the lead proved to be an evolutionary process, not a series of revolutionary events. The task force conducted frequent combined operations with an increasing focus on cooperative security development. It did so from company to brigade level, and it included provincial security forces. In time, these efforts brought Afghan and coalition forces closer and closer together.

Combat Operations

U.S. commanders learned what every maneuver battalion has to understand when fighting a counterinsurgency: protecting the people, motivating them to support their government, and building the host-nation's capacity are all primary objectives. In pursuing these priorities, the CTF's maneuver battalion commanders pioneered efforts to share intelligence with their counterpart ANA brigades and police commanders. The efforts yielded immediate tactical and eventual strategic results.[4] They cultivated the enduring trust and confidence sorely needed to protect and support the people.

While the main effort in the AO was building Afghan security capacity, the task force also conducted many deliberate combat operations that garnered meaningful results. These maneuvers ranged from air assault raids against insurgent leaders along the border with Pakistan to brigade operations in partnership with ANSF in the Afghan interior. In every case, maneuver generated intelligence, and that intelligence drove further operations, allowing the CTF to maintain the initiative and keep the militants and their insurgent leaders on the run.

Principles Guiding CTF Operations

These principles, elaborated below, governed CTF operations:

- *Commit to making every operation a combined operation*. Including the ANSF in coalition operations enabled them to gain experience and improve their skills. They participated in planning and rehearsal processes, and the CTF collocated key leaders to assist them during execution phases. CTF Devil pre-cleared all targets and operations with the provincial governors and ANA brigade commanders. Although "how" and "when" were not revealed, normally the ANA would wholeheartedly endorse the task force's target selection and provide additional Afghan resources to help achieve U.S. objectives. CTF Devil never had an operational security leak from sharing this information with Afghan leaders, although commanders had feared such occurrences.

Combined operations provided the task force with reciprocal benefits. The regular presence of Afghan counterparts enhanced coalition combat power by increasing the number of intelligence collectors, linguists, and cultural experts working together to solve the same problems. As aforementioned, CTF Devil discovered having Afghans search a compound was much more culturally acceptable and effective than doing U.S.-only searches. Not only did the Afghan search avoid the issue of perceived sovereignty violations, but also the Afghans knew where to look, and the professionalism of their searches impressed the people. ANA soldiers or local police officers also conveyed key messages to village elders much more effectively than could U.S. Soldiers using interpreters. U.S. forces thus learned to embrace their roles as advisors in a counterinsurgency.

- *Always seek to mass effects*. CTF Devil did this, for instance, by cross-attaching rifle companies from one battalion to the next to give them the combat power needed for an operation. In massing, the task force worked with governors and ANA brigade commanders to get the most Afghan support possible. CTF Devil could not task the ANA to participate in operations, but it "partnered" with them to identify missions of mutual interest. The combined force positioned itself to mass fires by emplacing artillery, mortars, radars, and observers throughout its battlespace and by creating numerous autonomous fire and counter-fire teams. The teams paired fire direction centers and counter-fire radar with two to four howitzers commanded by an experienced lieutenant. In employing these teams,

CTF Devil fired over 6,800 artillery rounds during its OEF rotation.

Artillery proved useful for defeating the ever-present rocket threat and for handling ambush situations by covering a company movement through a valley where enemy squads occupied dominating ridgelines. The task force also massed electronic warfare assets; information operations; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; Army aviation; and close air support (CAS) to assist operations. When it had troops in contact or when actionable intelligence breakthroughs occurred, the CTF also re-tasked these assets on the fly.[5] Just as importantly, the task force massed joint nonlethal effects, seeking to exploit every possible advantage over the Taliban insurgents.

● *Make an understanding of how local traditions influenced the battlespace and the Afghan people a significant part of operations planning*. Identifying the effects of tribes, ethnicity, religion, and weak-state threats enabled CTF Devil to better understand and respond to what was happening. Local Afghans, security forces, and government leaders contributed to our targeting processes and provided insights needed to gain operational advantages. Understanding how these cultural idiosyncrasies affected the conditions proved invaluable.

For example, an area like Lwara was constantly in dispute for a host of reasons: the Zadran tribal territory extends across the border there, and the insurgent leader Haqqani is a Zadran elder; Lwara is a traditional crossing point from Pakistan's Miram Shah within the federally administered tribal area into Afghanistan, and the border there has been contested for centuries; a trafficable river valley leads from Miram Shah to the nearby Lwara Dashta plains just inside Afghanistan; and the Lwara foothills contain rich deposits of chromite ore, which smugglers move across the border for resale in Pakistan. Such knowledge can be a tremendous help to U.S. planners, but it is hard to gain without involving Afghans in the targeting process.

● *Seek operational interoperability with the Pakistan military forces (PAKMIL)*. Such interoperability was essential when operating along the border. CTF Devil therefore developed relationships with its PAKMIL counterparts by conducting numerous flag meetings at all levels, from company to brigade and higher. The task force sought to have Afghan commanders join these meetings too, in order to reduce border friction between the wary neighbors. Eventually, CTF Devil developed reliable communications with PAKMIL battalions and brigades across the border and began to coordinate actions to prevent insurgent forces from using the border region as a sanctuary. For example, when CTF Devil reported an ambush, PAKMIL counterparts maneuvered forces to block the insurgents' egress across the border. Once U.S. and Pakistani leaders acknowledged they were fighting the same enemy, the task force began to share intelligence with the Pakistanis and integrate operations along the border. Cooperation did not come easily; it required a consistent effort to build trust, but it was critical to success. On one occasion, after U.S. forces had fired counter-battery artillery on a target that was close to a PAKMIL ground commander's border checkpoint, the brigade headquarters received an angry phone call from the commander. The task force explained to him that a rocket fired from that location had destroyed a hangar the PAKMIL commander had himself visited just a week earlier. This information was sobering. He was mollified when U.S. officers explained they had certain knowledge of an insurgent rocket's point of origin before they began to return artillery fire.

● *Treat Afghans with respect and display discipline at all times.* U.S. restraint and professionalism contrasted with coarse Taliban cruelty and capriciousness, reinforcing the CTF's legitimacy. Mentoring, training, and supervising Afghan forces,

U.S. Army, LTC Trevor Bredenkamp

Colonel Patrick Donahue and Lieutenant Colonel Michele Bredenkamp confer with a Pakistani brigadier general during a flag tri-partite meeting in Lwara Bazaar, Pakistan, 8 February 2006.

in conjunction with embedded training teams (ETTs), cemented that legitimacy. With the police particularly, values reform represented welcome progress in the eyes of the people; it gained the Afghan government much-needed public support. When people's confidence in their local police grew and they saw ANA soldiers comporting themselves professionally, they began to develop a nationalistic pride in their new security forces and became more willing to turn against the insurgency. As they did so, intelligence reporting from local sources increased, leading to even more successful combined operations.

- *Apply combat power, civil-military expertise, and IO simultaneously—not sequentially*. For example, if CTF Devil were executing a cordon-and-search of a village to locate an IED cell, it did not wait until after completing the mission to explain its rationale. Additionally, if it searched one end of the village, it also conducted a medical civil affairs program on the other end, often treating hundreds of local villagers. This type of operation created goodwill and established excellent new sources of intelligence. Just as combat operations had an Afghan lead, so, too, did these concurrent civil-military operations. The ANA distributed humanitarian relief supplies to refugees, and its medics treated patients. In some cases, CTF Devil asked the provincial governor to broadcast a radio message to explain its mission and ask for people's support. When the task force met with tribal elders to explain the purpose of an operation, it brought Afghan counterparts to explain their roles and their view of the threat. The CTF followed up with a PRT project for those tribes that helped solidify and consolidate the gains our maneuver battalions made. These actions enabled us to maintain good relations with the public and led to much better actionable intelligence and early warning.

Operations in Kunar Province

The most contested region in RC East during OEF VI was the Wahabbiist stronghold in the Korengal River Valley, in the center of Kunar province. All three battalions from the 3d Marine Regiment from Hawaii that rotated through RC East during our tenure had responsibility for this area. In the aftermath of the shoot-down of an MH-47 in this area during Operation Red Wings in July 2005, it became clear that moving tactically in the dangerous high ground surrounding the valley required detailed preparation and logistical planning. Movement through the precipitous hills and across the craggy cliffs had to be slow and deliberate. Sometimes it would take an entire day to traverse a single kilometer of the mountainous terrain.

Securing a landing zone (LZ), for instance, took hours in the mountains. Marines and paratroopers had to secure all terrain that dominated the LZ—not just the LZ's four corners. Similarly, resupply in the mountains had to be painstakingly plotted, then carefully executed using varied means, including containerized parachute delivery systems, guided donkey caravans, hired pick-up trucks, and contracted porters from local villages.

Fully planned and coordinated artillery support was also vital to the success of missions in Korengal. Artillery was so overwhelmingly important that CTF Devil required follow-on battalions to train and certify on relevant artillery-related tasks upon arrival in country. Adjusting fires in the mountains required different approaches from those used at Fort Bragg or Grafenwoer, Germany. CTF Devil rediscovered the art of employing indirect fires for operational advantage in mountainous terrain.

U.S. Army

A 2d Battalion, 504th Infantry paratrooper pulls security near the crash site of an MH-47 in the hills of the Korengal Valley, July 2005.

U.S. Army, LTC Trevor Bredenkamp

A combined U.S./Afghan patrol preps for a mission, Khost, Afghanistan, 5 June 2005.

In every engagement its maneuver battalions fought in Kunar province, CTF Devil had to show the Afghans it was worth the risk to support their government. Commanders learned to appreciate the provincial governor's role and the targeting of reconstruction to contested areas as a technique for cementing security gains won in a fight. Although personalities and commitments varied, the coalition found that the Afghan authorities were uniformly dedicated to improving conditions and helping their people achieve a higher standard of living.

Building Afghan Security Capacity and Partnership

In fostering Afghanistan's nascent security apparatus, CTF Devil forged partnerships with U.S. government agencies, international organizations, and the Afghan government. Whereas TF Phoenix's embedded training teams mentored their ANA counterparts, CTF Devil's battalions actually teamed with them. Teaming up meant providing infantry, artillery, engineer, combat service support, and planning opportunities the ETTs could not. After coordinating with Afghan corps and brigade commanders and their U.S. advisors, the task force aligned or "partnered" CTF Devil units with Afghan units and established habitual training and operational relationships. Rifle squads and military police platoons teamed with the ANA and routinely conducted sustained five-to-seven day training modules with ANP in the district police headquarters to reinforce training the Afghans had received at their academies.

Training in this team-oriented relationship routinely ended with an Afghan-planned and led combined operation. During these operations, the coalition strengthened trust between it and the ANSF by providing close air support, artillery support, army aviation, MEDEVAC, and infantry reinforcements. For its part, the CTF learned to be more sensitive to cultural concerns, such as evacuating soldiers killed in action ahead of the wounded, which was important to the ANSF for religious reasons. In the process of developing this relationship, coalition forces and ANA soldiers shared experiences, hardships, and operational intelligence with one another. In sum, these team-oriented interactions went far in developing autonomous capacity in the ANSF.

Partnered teamwork also engendered greater unity of effort in the AO. CTF Devil conducted frequent combined planning and strategy sessions with Afghan leaders, including targeting meetings with the ANSF and intelligence-fusion meetings with the National Defense Service (the Afghan domestic intelligence agency, similar to the FBI). These efforts all helped build a unified approach to security and reconstruction. They also prevented zealot militants and insurgents from exploiting

U.S. Marine Corps, LtCol Robert Scott

A Navy Corpsman with 2/3 Marines (TF Koa) provides medical aid to a wounded ANA soldier during a partnered operation in Pech River Valley, Kunar province, August 2005.

seams between organizations. Most important, as CTF Devil successfully fostered Afghan security planning capacity, its leadership role gradually diminished. Afghan counterparts assumed greater responsibility for guiding these efforts. This shift came about as CTF Devil incrementally empowered indigenous leaders.

Along these lines, the commander of the 1-508th Airborne created the first provincial coordination center (PCC), in Paktika province, to focus the various Afghan security forces on addressing common threats. This PCC experiment proved a great success, and so CTF Devil replicated the effort by establishing PCCs in every province prior to the 2005 National Assembly and parliamentary elections. It resourced the PCCs with teams of talented coalition and ANSF officers and NCOs. Functioning like battalion command posts, the PCCs became a key link between coalition forces, ANSF, and often elusive district sub-governors. During the elections and later during day-to-day operations, the PCCs were a key enabler of intelligence-sharing and joint-security-related problem-solving by ANSF units, the task force, and provincial governors. Initially, CTF Devil led all the efforts and conducted all the shift updates, overcoming intelligence classification issues by describing only the "who" or "what" of the intelligence without disclosing the source. Within a few months the PCCs became nerve centers, and Afghans ran the briefs. CTF Devil then replicated the effort across the AO. Every provincial capital put a PCC into operation to coordinate security for the elections, and they eventually provided a longer-term solution to synchronizing security responses.

Because of the trust built with their ANA allies, U.S. forces continued operations during Ramadan, maintaining support from the ANA throughout the Muslim holy month. Afghan authorities even granted religious exemptions to their soldiers for Ramadan. These dispensations were important because Taliban leaders had already granted exemptions from fasting, and were maintaining a high operational tempo during those holy days. Task force maneuver battalions learned hard lessons about this period early in their tenure, but they figured out what the enemy was doing and why he was doing it. They consistently passed on maneuver-battalion best practices that addressed coping with religious complexities to units in other sectors that were grappling with similar issues.

PRT Threat-based Reconstruction

At our transfer of authority in mid-2005, 25th Infantry Division's Task Force Thunder had established provincial reconstruction teams and initiated reconstruction and development efforts across RC East. In January 2005 Task Force Thunder had shifted the PRTs' focus from emergency support to more sophisticated development and had met Afghan necessities for food, water, and shelter, although these were primitive by first-world standards.

However, CTF Devil had to address other problems:

- An antiquated medical system.
- Limited road networks.
- An insufficient power grid.
- Access to education.
- A judicial system tribal leaders ignored.

In addition, the economy, while improving, languished during the early phases of OEF VI, and high unemployment persisted. Since the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were unable to provide any form of reconstruction, development, or aid to the people, the situation was ripe for improvement. CTF Devil saw an opportunity to use intensified reconstruction operations as a nonlethal mechanism to improve security, governance, and overall economic development. The CTF, however, also realized it had to use this mechanism in a way that did not create unrealistic expectations.

CTF Devil began by re-focusing the efforts of its eight PRTs and five battalions to speed reconstruction, especially of infrastructure and roads—the high-impact and high-visibility projects. Close coordination between task force staff and higher headquarters (CJTF-76) brought increased Commanders Emergency Relief Program (CERP) funding. CTF Devil then tasked each PRT and battalion commander to develop plans with representatives of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and State Department to invigorate "unity" in reconstruction efforts. This focus of reconstruction activity threw the insurgents back on their heels. Taliban forces simply could not compete with a well-designed reconstruction strategy. Because cleric-militants focused on otherworldly authority, they never developed anything tangibly positive to offer the population; they could not counter a community-supported project with real-world benefits.

Instead, the insurgents had to turn to religious propaganda, terrorism, and violence, the only tactics they possessed to realize their strategy of protracting the conflict.

Because of these tactics, seeking projects in contested areas became CTF Devil's first priority. Doing so required developing community support and backing from Kabul for the initiatives. Provincial government legitimacy soared when tangible completed projects trumped insurgent exhortations and attacks. This community-investment approach, discussed below in more detail, became integral to the CTF campaign plan. However, while concentrating CERP projects in contested areas (see the high threat areas on figure 2), CTF Devil had to eschew large, unwieldy projects that had no chance of being completed, or were not sustainable, after the departure of U.S. troops, depletion of CERP funds, or loss of community support.

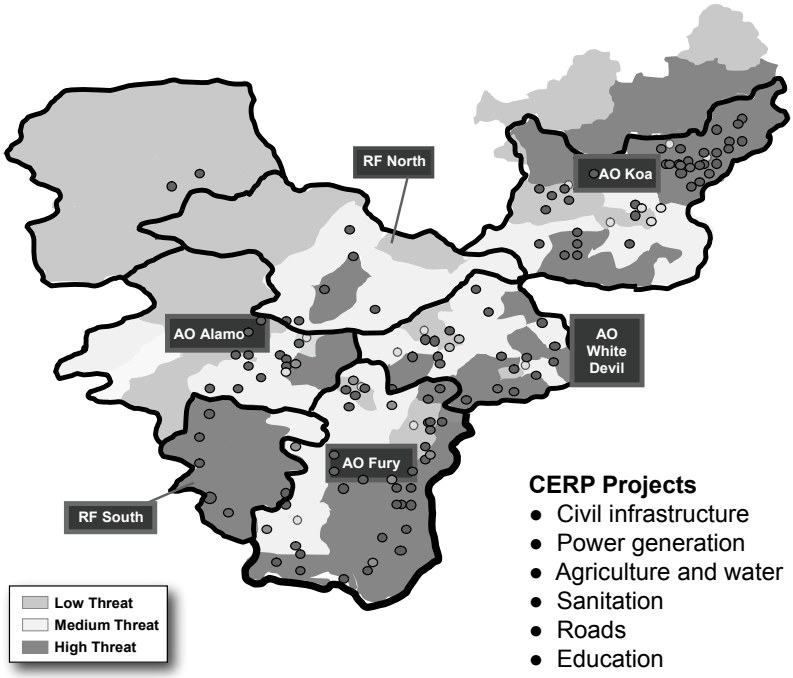

Figure 2. CTF Devil reconstruction projects and threat assessments, January 2006.

Ill-conceived, poorly placed, or failed projects would constitute victories for the insurgent IO campaign. When CTF Devil failed to meet public expectations, the people thought the Afghan government and the Americans were incompetent, creating openings for insurgents to wield their influence. For instance, when CTF Devil provided a power-generation capability for Sharana, the capital of Paktika province, without getting buy-in from the mayor, it created an embarrassing situation. After a single tank of U.S.-provided diesel fuel ran dry, the lights went out in Sharana. They eventually came back on, but in the interim the well-meaning PRT created frustration and resentment among the Afghans they set out to assist.

Achieving consistent success meant concentrating on sustainable projects and avoiding embarrassment for the coalition. Thus, CTF Devil avoided going against the grain and focused on contracting projects that took advantage of Afghan talents and the country's natural resources. To illustrate, after learning that Afghans had little experience with using concrete and cement in construction, but were deft at employing stone, a raw material abundant in Afghanistan, the task force contracted to build stone bridges, rock-foundation flood control walls, and cobblestone roads.

As CTF Devil developed its pragmatic approach to reconstruction, it used weekly PRT staff calls to broaden the development discussion. During these meetings, the task force emphasized projects provincial governors and district leaders would fully support so that development efforts would reinforce their ability to govern. Setting out simply to build and improve the environment in areas of perceived need (i.e., the "red" areas on the map in figure 2), was too haphazard. Tribal leaders had to be involved with informal certification. They had to approve all projects to avoid building a project on disputed land, for instance, and to ensure realistic timetables and community relevance. CTF Devil focused initial efforts on projects that units could complete within a reasonable amount of time (three to nine months) so the populace would quickly see results. Using techniques learned from successful non-governmental organizations (NGOs), CTF Devil also sought "sweat equity" from the community in the form of resources or labor. The CTF asked villages and tribes to contribute whatever they could afford. The resulting buy-in generated lasting community support for these projects.

As part of this process, the CTF decided to put a maximum number of Afghans to work. Major

General Jason Kamiya, the CJTF-76 commander, pioneered this approach, calling it "Temporary Work for Afghans." If CTF Devil had a choice between hiring one contractor with four bulldozers, 30 men from India, or a local contractor with 100 Afghans wielding picks and shovels, it chose the latter. Smart Afghan general contractors adopted practical methods to exploit this situation. Not only did they hire Afghans, but also they did so from the local community, which enabled their projects to progress without attacks. Contractors who didn't, especially foreigners, were often attacked and had their work sites destroyed. Their projects were delayed indefinitely or abandoned altogether.

CTF Devil also tasked its maneuver battalions and PRTs to work with provincial governors and IRoA ministry representatives to solicit support in planning and oversight of significant projects. The intent was to encourage Afghans to build their own capacity for development planning. At the same time, the task force sought to incrementally design a longer-range vision. Its overall objective was to make each provincial government more self-sufficient, community-invested, and competent.

As noted, the enemy tried to slow the CTF's new reconstruction effort. Setbacks typically took place in areas where the Taliban still maintained some form of influence, for example, in the Zormat district of Logar province where they attacked a recently constructed police checkpoint, and in the Puli Lam district, where they burned down a school under construction. In response, CTF Devil authorized Afghan contractors to hire local security in high-threat areas. It also sought local project protection by establishing security agreements with tribal leaders, making the latter responsible for protecting projects in their areas. So, in addition to the "sweat equity" mentioned, the populace had to commit to the projects by securing them. Completing these reconstruction endeavors marked real, tangible gains the local population could feel, but progress came only after they made a commitment. Completed projects with community buy-in weakened the Taliban and undermined any pretenses of its legitimacy.

In following through with these developments, CTF Devil also recognized the need to foster relations with international and nonprofit organizations in country. As the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) and development-focused NGOs saw CTF reconstruction successes, they found more ways to communicate with the coalition, and when security improved in different areas, the international community's organizations increased their presence. A mutual willingness to work together began to build. This cooperation was usually informal because the NGOs, fiercely independent anyway, had to preserve the perception that they were impartial. Thus, they were quick to criticize the coalition if it did something they believed adversely affected them. In its cooperation with these organizations, CTF Devil worked to make "unity of effort" more a working reality than a mere concept or discussion point.

Systems Approach to Reconstruction

A well-designed reconstruction effort took more than just selecting projects that villages, districts, or provinces fervently wanted. The coalition had to consider initiatives in a larger context, as a system of complementary projects. CTF Devil initially did not take this approach and, as a result, stand-alone projects in our AO did not substantially improve the economy or security or address compelling community needs. Eventually, CTF Devil moved to a systems approach to reconstruction. It required projects to be well planned and sustainable, and to complement other development efforts. For instance, road networks became favored projects because they often paved the way for a broader system of development.

In one example, CTF Devil created numerous farm-to-market systems in "red" districts and border provinces. Figure 3 illustrates the complexity of a farm-to-market system in Jalalabad that used CERP projects to complement or leverage existing NGO- or USAID-generated projects. This particular system included projects to improve productivity such as USDA classes on low-cost, modern planting techniques. It also included projects to build irrigation channels, flood control walls, and roads connecting district farms with their principal markets. Whether constructing a grain storage facility just off a new road or building a secondary road to a bazaar where the farmer could sell his product more conveniently, the task force aimed to create mutually reinforcing effects.

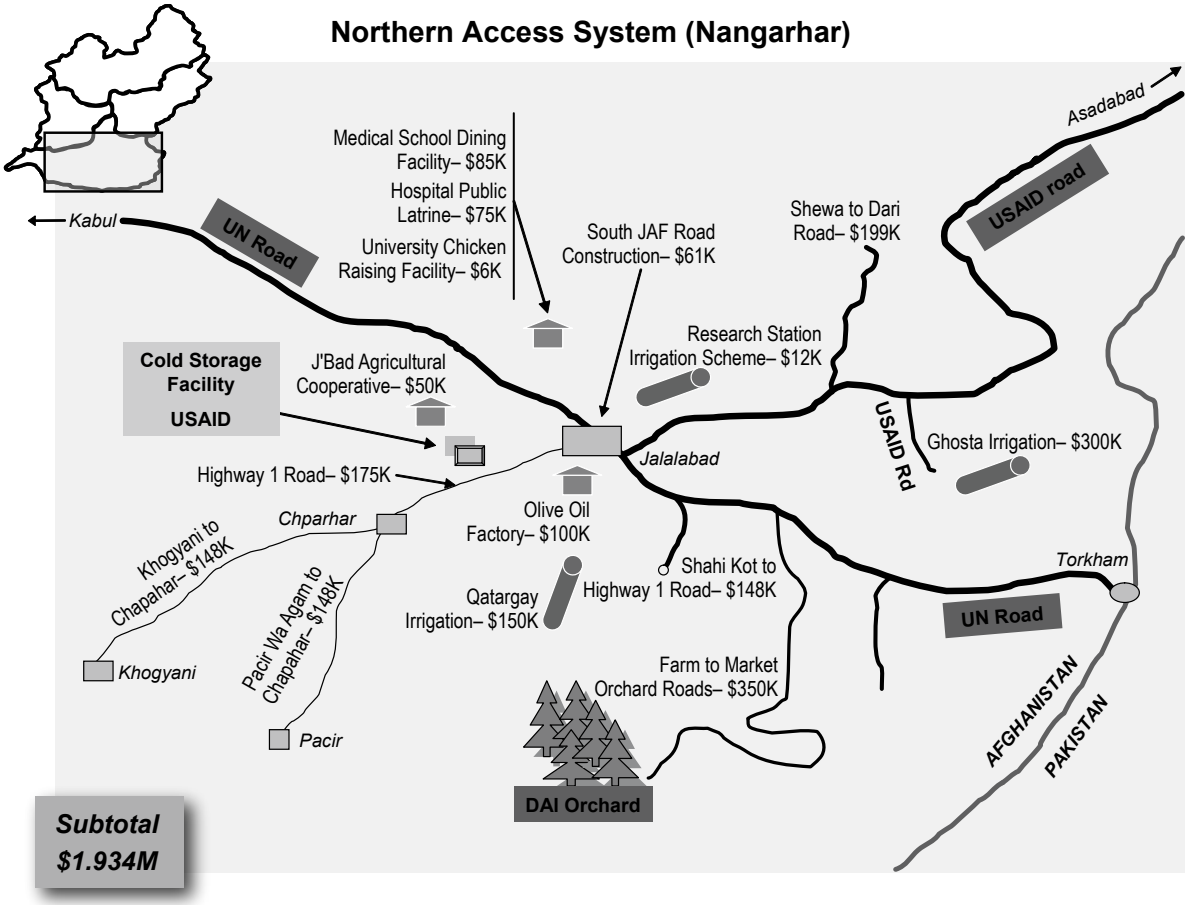

Figure 3. "Farm to Market System" briefed to CJTF-76 commander, Fall 2005.

CTF Devil sometimes had to win over key persons or populations to this systems approach. It avoided building projects in response to requests from government officials if the endeavors would not add to existing development systems. There were exceptions, but they required the CTF commander's approval, and he granted such exceptions only if the coalition could gain some significant operational advantage as a result.

As CTF Devil executed this intensified, systems-oriented plan, the working relationship with USAID and other agencies began to improve. The task force assessed the effects it delivered and analyzed the issues it faced in areas where traditional development was failing or simply not occurring. It realized that, in some cases, it was better to complement or set the conditions for NGO and international community development rather than try to initiate projects itself. It also found it could work with these organizations directly or indirectly. CTF Devil's USAID representative served as a bridge between coalition forces and other U.S. aid and reconstruction organizations. Through the intercession of our representative, the task force was able to capitalize on opportunities to reinforce existing initiatives.

For instance, CTF Devil benefited from a UNAMA-brokered agreement, the Zadran Arc Initiative (named for the tribe inhabiting the region), to promote development in areas of discontent in Khowst, Paktiya, and Paktika provinces. It built on the goodwill created by this agreement, started a major road project, and then began building police stations, clinics, and schools. The area had been a safe haven for Jalaluddin Haqqani elements and Taliban forces, but no longer is, thanks to the broadly supported agreement.

In most cases, once the coalition created a more secure environment, non-governmental and international organizations soon followed. The task force encouraged the PRTs to make the most of their presence by seeking the organizations' input to their reconstruction programs. Combined Task Force Devil tasked the PRTs to work with UNAMA and

the NGOs in their sector to start up or encourage the expansion of provincial development councils. The purpose of these development councils was to set development priorities and bring order to otherwise haphazard reconstruction efforts.

Sequencing and synchronization of reconstruction projects became a major priority. Schools, roads, administrative buildings, police checkpoints, mosques, medical clinics, and courthouses built out of sequence with, or without links to, other projects usually had little positive impact and could even be counterproductive. In one case a police checkpoint built far away from an existing road actually became a liability because its isolation made it vulnerable to attack. A few months into this heightened reconstruction effort, CTF Devil tasked the PRTs and maneuver battalions to review the timing of current and future projects, so the task force could spend subsequent reconstruction dollars more wisely.

The CTF Devil staff started this review process by conducting a seminar on the systems approach to development. The staff illustrated what a synchronized approach should look like and how it should have links to other projects in time and location. CTF Devil asked each unit to re-assess, re-evaluate, and refine reconstruction plans to reflect a systems approach. In the final planning step, unit commanders briefed the CTF commander, who approved a project only if it met one or more of four criteria:

- The project was in a red area.
- It linked directly to another system.
- The specific endeavor had buy-in from key government and tribal leaders.
- The project was sustainable.

CTF Devil denied many proposed projects because the PRTs and maneuver commands tended to invest in stand-alone projects, an outgrowth of attempts to placate local and tribal leaders with whom units engaged.

U.S. Interagency Teamwork

A wide array of U.S. agencies converged on Afghanistan after November 2001. Understanding what their roles were and where they operated was important to CTF Devil's becoming an effective interagency team member.

The State Department assigned political officers (POLADs) to the eight U.S. PRTs and to CTF Headquarters in Khost province. The POLADs had four primary tasks:

- Advising and mentoring Afghan leaders to govern more effectively.
- Acting as reporting officers, tasked with providing information on political, military, economic, and social trends to the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.
- Serving as conduits of information about the border fight in Pakistan to help define U.S. government policies in Afghanistan at the national level.
- Promoting U.S. government policies within the provincial governments.

The POLADS accompanied CTF commanders to meetings with Afghan political and military leaders. They helped commanders prepare for bilateral meetings and carry out reviews after negotiations or engagements were complete.[4] POLADS developed the social, tribal, political, and economic components of the counterinsurgency, allowing commanders to focus more on military concerns. Maintaining an awareness of these nonmilitary components might have otherwise been more elusive.

USAID assigned officers, designated as field program officers, to all the PRTs and to the coalition headquarters staff. These officers—

- Administered USAID projects at the provincial level.
- Advised military officers on development issues.
- Advised IRoA ministers and governors on long-term reconstruction and development strategy.
- Reported to USAID headquarters in Kabul.
- Worked with NGOs and international organizations to find ways to complement their projects with the development efforts of USAID and CTF Devil. In short, they coordinated development strategy at the provincial level.

The USAID officer in charge worked at CTF headquarters and from there managed representatives at the PRTs. Unlike the POLADs, all USAID representatives were contractors, not career employees. Successfully integrating these contractors into PRT operations depended upon a PRT commander's ability to integrate military development efforts with those of the interagency and international community. The USAID representatives taught PRTs how to gain support for projects from tribal and government stakeholders, and encouraged the task force to seek ways to link CERP reconstruction

efforts to USAID and international organization development projects.

Agricultural development in most of RC East proved necessary for long-term economic viability. United States Department of Agriculture officers provided development advice to the IRoA, the CTF, and, to a lesser extent, cooperatives and individual farmers. Although not present in most RC East PRTs, USDA officers worked on the staffs of three key posts (task force headquarters and the Ghazni and Jalalabad PRTs) for much of CTF Devil's tenure. These officers breathed life into USAID's alternative livelihood programs. They provided advice on which crops to substitute for the opium poppy and focused on implementing agricultural programs like micro-credit for farmers. They also helped devise high-impact but simple projects that enhanced the value of crops grown by desperately poor farmers. That said, the relatively limited USDA presence in RC East prevented the task force from making the most of its agricultural development programs.

The UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan in RC East, with hub offices at Gardez and Jalalabad, worked closely with U.S. government political and military officers. UNAMA had a wide mandate, ranging from conflict resolution to human rights monitoring. It played a substantial role in organizing the National Assembly and provincial council elections. Harnessing UNAMA's energy was imperative if CTF Devil was to reach the population effectively. Because UNAMA officers typically had been in Afghanistan for three or more years, had established trust with Afghan officials, and had developed keen insights into the motivations of district and provincial governors, they often served as the continuity in the provinces as military units rotated in and out of the battlespace.

Military CERP and USAID FY 2005 budgets for development in RC East highlighted the importance of interagency teamwork. CTF Devil had $29 million budgeted for development; USAID had 10 times that amount for the same area. Seeing the vast potential for COIN progress if CTF Devil and USAID collaborated, the task force commander directed that development planning involve a concerted effort to bring our two organizations closer together.

From early on, however, CTF Devil encountered staggering gaps in communication, cooperation, and collaboration among representatives of the various agencies. USAID bureaucratic practices also obstructed teamwork and collaboration. Part of the challenge lay in the fact that over 90 percent of in-country USAID representatives were contractors serving under the agency's aegis and their contracts had no explicit provisions for cooperation. The larger problem, however, was the restrictive nature of USAID's development-fund distribution rules. Given USAID's relatively abundant resources, and the direct link between development progress and security, the agency's bureaucratic necessities proved universally frustrating. Nevertheless CTF Devil redoubled efforts, beginning at the brigade headquarters, to forge stronger interagency bonds and increase collaboration with representatives at the PRTs.

These efforts increased interagency integration throughout the command. The CTF overcame philosophical differences and, gradually, set new standards for interagency teamwork. When the CTF's deputy commander began including interagency representatives in PRT meetings and the executive officer started integrating them into the staff estimate process, partnership dynamics improved steadily. As CTF staff emphasized each success in their areas of responsibility, the PRTs and their interagency representatives began to develop into a stronger team. USAID, State Department, and USDA representatives increased their presence and influence in each PRT's area of operation. In the end, these representatives became valued PRT staff members and, along with UNAMA representatives, effective partners within the task force.

Integrating IO

CTF Devil found information operations most effective when Afghans employed them without the appearance of U.S. influence. Information operations messages designed and released solely by U.S. forces often came out too late or were ill suited for the Afghan region or tribe they targeted. Messages were much more effective when Afghan leaders cooperated and spoke directly to the people.[6]

Thus, CTF Devil chose to promote Programme Takhm-e Sohl ("Strengthening the Peace," or PTS), the Afghan government's reconciliation program. Given the success achieved by those governors who actively supported PTS, the task force commander believed that this Afghan-implemented program could become a "war winner." The task force

therefore encouraged local governors to support and manage this initiative. It yielded significant results when insurgents came down from the mountains and left Pakistan to swear allegiance to the Afghan government.[7] One governor, Hakim Taniwal in Paktia province, experienced noteworthy success with this program. He reached out to insurgents and engaged local tribal leaders to ensure no vendettas or revenge killings would ensue after the insurgents returned. Taniwal then brought in the insurgents, ran them through a vetting process in Kabul, and returned them to the provincial seat of Gardez. There he cycled them through a carefully orchestrated, elaborate allegiance ceremony in which tribal elders swore responsibility for the reconciled insurgents' future actions. Taniwal broadcast these ceremonies on the radio and kept track of the reconciled fighters to ensure they were not simply using the program to infiltrate the province. These reconciled insurgents typically encouraged other Taliban members to lay down their arms through the PTS program. Taniwal even employed a reconciled member of the Taliban as the director for his provincial support office of reconciliation.

Another governor, Shah Mahmood Safi in Lagman province, convinced tribal leaders to declare insurgents outside the protection of the Pashtun tradition of sanctuary, thus denying them a base from which to operate and forcing many to become part of the legitimate process. Still another governor, Assadullah Wafa in Kunar province, used PTS with IO reinforcement, often calling provincial shuras to gain the support of key tribal leaders. To make a case for peace, he regularly sent emissaries from the shuras to engage tribes that supported the Taliban and HiG (a fundamentalist faction of the mujahedeen) in the Korengal and Matin valleys. He also used radio addresses to tell the people of Kunar that specific tribes were "rebelling against the government" and that he was considering "turning loose" the coalition to defeat them if they did not reconcile.

Each provincial governor only needed a simple prod and minimal support to make his IO program work for PTS. Provinces where governors offered only token support to PTS did not yield results no matter how hard the task force worked. As a lesson learned, a successful reconciliation program like PTS should be the host nation's program, run by a regional or provincial authority with national oversight.

Of course, the PTS program came with some risks. In addition to the possibility of revenge killings, infiltrators might have used the PTS program as a shield. Experience suggested, however, that the power of one reconciled insurgent on the radio had the potential to effect more progress and influence more people than an infantry battalion on the attack.[8]

Measuring Success and the Way Ahead

While "metrics" of success in COIN are difficult to identify and even more challenging to track, they are nonetheless important. They serve as indicators to identify and monitor progress effectively, and they can suggest the need to modify plans. CTF Devil tracked negative indicators such as numbers of IED and rocket attacks, but it did not overemphasize them. The task force focused more on indicators of success. For instance, CTF Devil carefully cataloged when NGOs returned to a province. Their return implied security had reached the point where they felt safe enough to operate. When Afghan development ministries became involved in quality control for reconstruction projects, the CTF staff interpreted this as an indicator of growth in Afghan autonomous capacity. Similarly, unilateral operations by the Afghan army, from company to brigade level, suggested progress in military self-sufficiency. Another positive area was the number of IEDs found, reported, and turned in by Afghans. The coalition also noted that despite concerted efforts by the Taliban to disrupt national and provincial elections, over 50 percent of registered voters voted anyway.

The combined efforts of CTF Devil units, U.S. interagency representatives, Afghan government leaders, and international and non-governmental organizations were the driving force in achieving significant progress during OEF VI. Overall, the economy expanded, the government increased its reach, a successful election occurred, and the Taliban did not make appreciable gains in eastern Afghanistan.

As aforementioned, the Afghan people were and are the center of gravity in the COIN fight in eastern Afghanistan. Where the people see a tangible reason to take risk and side with their government, the Taliban will lose. The CTF's job was to help the Afghan government enhance security and win the people's trust. As in most countries, Afghans will

U.S. Army, LTC Trevor Bredenkamp

Khost Governor Pathan greets the Sabari district sub-governor during preparations for Afghan provincial council elections, 6 June 2005.

vote their pocketbooks, and if they do not perceive tangible economic benefits implying a hopeful future, they may throw out the Karzai government and side with the fundamentalists.

Education metrics will be telling as well. Democracy is unlikely to flourish in the long term if Afghanistan does not advance beyond its current, woefully low level of education, one that primarily serves religious dogma. Opportunities for a liberal arts education will have to be made available to help give the people the intellectual wherewithal to resist the Taliban's otherworldly propaganda and scare tactics. Countering the Taliban with logic and reason may seem too obvious to suggest, but it truly is the answer for encouraging a more moderate religious influence.

Numerous problems remain, including endemic corruption, unhealthy rivalries between tribes, poor infrastructure, a growing drug trade, instability in Pakistan and attendant cross-border attacks, low government revenues, a weak economy, and, as noted, a dark-ages educational framework. Decades of work remain to rebuild Afghanistan. Strong personal relationships and a focus on building Afghan security capacity are the keys to achieving unity of effort and, by extension, longer-term success in the Afghan COIN effort.

An important take-away from CTF Devil's year-long struggle to achieve and maintain unity of effort is that *where the military endeavor is concerned, there can only be one chief within a regional command.* U.S. forces should always place reconstruction and kinetic operations under the direction of one commander to prevent a constant shifting of priorities. This was the case for CTF Devil during OEF VI. With eight PRTs and five maneuver battalions all under the operational control of CTF Devil, the span of control at the brigade level was larger than some division-sized organizations, but it worked.

Experience has been the best source of practical knowledge in this regard. CTF Devil benefited greatly from lessons passed on to us by our predecessors from CTF Thunder in OEF V. In OEF VII, CTF Spartan built on the successes CTF Devil achieved but refined their plans based on changing threats and challenges. Such is the nature of coalition-forces progress in Afghanistan, where each successive CTF stands on the shoulders of those that came before. Each task force, with its varied commands (Airborne, Marine Corps, Army

U.S. Army

2d Battalion, 504th Infantry paratroopers leaving a landing zone, Patika province, Afghanistan, 25 May 2005.

National Guard, and PRTs), in cooperation with the myriad of U.S. and international aid agencies, develops experience and perspective that successive OEF iterations draw upon. Each of these contributions to evolving the COIN fight has helped to place us on the road to winning. ***MR***

NOTES

1. LTC David Kilcullen, Australian Army, *Twenty-Eight Articles: Fundamentals of Company-Level Counterinsurgency,* Joint Information Operations Center (IO Sphere Publication), 35.

2. 1st Brigade, 82d Airborne Division, had been deployed to Afghanistan as part of OEF III (2003-2004) under the same brigade commander as OEF VI. In OEF III, it routinely conducted coalition-only operations, mainly with attached Italian, Romanian, and French forces.

3. LtCol Jim Donnellan's 2/3 Marines worked in the northern sector of RC East; LTC Tom Donovan's 2-504th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR) and LTC Tim McGuire's 1-508 PIR in the CTF's central sector; and LTC Orlando Salinas' 3-141 IN (TXARNG) and LTC Dave Anders 1-325 Airborne Infantry Regiment in the west.

4. LtCol Pete Donnelly, a veteran of Operation Anaconda from OEF I, commanded the 13th Air Support Operations Squadron, and deployed with the CTF. He was instrumental in forming an exceptional joint team for combat operations by certifying joint tactical air controllers (JTACs), training units without JTACs (such as PRTs) to call in close air support, personally calling in airstrikes, and finding the best way for the Air Force to mass effects on the ground. Support from USAF A-10s, B-1Bs, B-52s, HH-60s and USN EA6Bs as well as intelligence platforms such as U2s, JSTARS, and Predator-Bs, was phenomenal.

5. Political officers like Rob Kemp, Liam Walsley, Harold Ingram, and numerous other brave Americans often accompanied commanders on patrol and air assaults to get a first-hand read of the battlefield.

6. Combined operations proved especially effective at producing IO messages and engagements that showed the Afghan people the strength and reach of their government in ways that fit culturally. Often the U.S.-produced products failed because the writers in Bagram did not understand the cultural context.

7. Twenty-four additional Taliban leaders were pending acceptance into the Afghan-run program at CTF Devil's transfer of authority.

8. One incident during CTF Devil's tenure perfectly illustrates the power of Afghan-delivered IO. In November 2005 (during Ramadan), a backpack bomb exploded inside Tani Mosque in Khost province, killing a popular pro-government imam and three other civilians. The imam's killing sent shock waves throughout the country, but produced the opposite effect from the one the Taliban sought. President Karzai condemned the attack and called for a full investigation of the murder. Initially, the provincial governor, Merajudin Pathan, insisted he would not attend the funeral because he was not a family member, but with some prompting from the PRT commander in Khost (LTC Chuck Miller), the governor changed his mind and handled the situation very differently: in addition to attending the funeral, he went to the hospital to visit those injured in the bombing, closed schools to ensure the community was fully mobilized, called for mass demonstrations in the streets, invited the press to follow him around the entire day, and held a 20-minute press interview with *Al Jazeera*. The city of Khost united in anger against the Taliban. With just minimal support, the governor took charge of the situation, organized thousands of people to march through the streets and condemn the Taliban, and set a classic leadership example for other Afghan governors to follow.

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