ISAF Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance[1]

Protecting the people is the mission.
The conflict will be won by persuading the population, not by destroying the enemy.
ISAF will succeed when GIRoA earns the support of the people.

ISAF's mission is to help the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) defeat the insurgency threatening their country. Protecting the Afghan people is the mission. The Afghan people will decide who wins this fight, and we (GIROA and ISAF) are in a struggle for their support. The effort to gain and maintain that support must inform every action we take. Essentially, we and the insurgents are presenting an argument for the future to the people of Afghanistan: they will decide which argument is the most attractive, most convincing, and has the greatest chance of success.

> An ISAF patrol was traveling through a city at a high rate of speed, driving down the center to force traffic off the road. Several pedestrians and other vehicles were pushed out of the way. A vehicle approached from the side into the traffic circle. The gunner fired a pen flare at it, which entered the vehicle and caught the interior on fire. As the ISAF patrol sped away, Afghans crowded around the car. How many insurgents did the patrol make that day?

The Afghan people are a diverse mix of ethnicities and tribes with strong traditions and a fierce sense of independence. Their country has been scarred by 30 years of war, and the fabric of Afghan society has been badly damaged. Traditional tribal structures have been undermined deliberately by the insurgents; many communities have fractured. State weakness and corruption erode confidence in government. Nearly eight years of international presence has not brought the anticipated benefits. The Afghan people are skeptical and unwilling to commit active support to either side until convinced of a winning proposition.

We need to understand the people and see things through their eyes. It is their fears, frustrations, and expectations that we must address. We will not win simply by killing insurgents. We will help the Afghan people win by securing them, by protecting them from intimidation, violence, and abuse, and by operating in a way that respects their culture and religion. This means that we must change the way that we think, act, and operate. *We must get the people involved as active participants in the success of their communities.*

Every action we take must reflect this change: how we interact with people, how we drive or fly, how we patrol, how we use force, how we fund work programs and projects. This is their country, and we are their guests. We must think carefully about everything we do and understand the impact of our actions on the people we are here to partner with and protect. Security may not come from overwhelming firepower, and force protection may mean more personal interaction with the Afghan people, not less.

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[1] This guidance applies to both counterinsurgency and stability operations in Afghanistan

How insurgents operate. Our task is complicated and threatened by a resilient, highly adaptive, and multifaceted insurgency. An insurgency is unlike a conventional military threat. The insurgent's attack is a secondary effort to discredit the government and provoke a counterinsurgent response that alienates the people. Corruption and abuse of power by government officials feeds into the insurgent narrative. Behind the smoke of battle, the insurgents are principally focused on political and social activities, to include information operations, designed to gain control over the population. In so doing, they displace the government's legitimacy.

We must understand how the insurgents compete in order to combat their strategy. They adapt to local conditions. They influence the population through both intimidation and attraction. In their propaganda they claim to protect Afghan culture and religion. They incite social strife and undermine traditional structures. In places, they control the roads, collect revenues, and mete out swift justice. They co-opt disenfranchised groups and pay young men to fight. They exploit ISAF mistakes and inappropriate actions to reinforce their argument.

> An ISAF unit in a relatively permissive area had a difficult time maneuvering large vehicles along a road because it was lined with fruit trees. To improve mobility, the unit had the trees cut down. Many people in the village had their livelihoods destroyed. IEDs began appearing along the road shortly thereafter.

Playing into their hands. A military force, culturally programmed to respond conventionally (and predictably) to insurgent attacks, is akin to the bull that repeatedly charges a matador's cape – only to tire and eventually be defeated by a much weaker opponent. This is predictable – the bull does what comes naturally. While a conventional approach is instinctive, that behavior is self-defeating.

First, an insurgency cannot be defeated by attrition; its supply of fighters, and even leadership, is effectively endless. Roughly seventy percent of the Afghan population is under age 25. Vast unemployment, illiteracy, and widespread political and social disaffection create fertile ground for insurgent influence and recruiting.

The intricate familial, clan, and tribal connections of Afghan society turns "attrition math" on its head. From a conventional standpoint, the killing of two insurgents in a group of ten leaves eight remaining: 10 – 2=8. From the insurgent standpoint, those two killed were likely related to many others who will want vengeance. If civilian casualties occurred, that number will be much higher. Therefore, the death of two creates more willing recruits: *10 minus 2 equals 20* (or more) rather than 8. This is part of the reason why eight years of individually successful kinetic actions have resulted in more violence. The math works against an attrition mind-set. This is not to say that we should avoid a fight, but to win we need to do much more than simply kill or capture militants.

Second, conventional military action against insurgents consumes considerable resources with little real return and is likely to alienate the people we are trying to secure. Large scale operations to kill or capture militants carry a significant risk of causing civilian casualties and collateral damage. If civilians

die in a firefight, it does not matter who shot them – we still failed to protect them from harm. Destroying a home or property jeopardizes the livelihood of an entire family – and creates more insurgents. We sow the seeds of our own demise.

Although disruption operations may be necessary at times, we must recognize their effects are temporary at best when the population is under insurgent influence or control. Sporadically moving into an area for a few hours or even a few days solely to search for the enemy and then leave does little good, and may do much harm. The local insurgents hide in plain sight and the people remain ambivalent. Once we depart, the militants re-emerge and life under insurgent control resumes. These operations are not only ineffectual, they can be counter-productive. In conducting them, we are not building relationships with people, and we are not helping Afghans solve Afghan problems.

In short, we don't have to be stupid or ineffective to fail – just misguided in our approach.

Changing our mindset. We need to think and act *very* differently to be successful. The will of the people is the Objective. An effective "offensive" operation in counterinsurgency, therefore, is one that takes from the insurgent what he cannot afford to lose – control of the population. We must think of offensive operations not simply as those that target militants, but ones that earn the trust and support of the people while denying influence and access to the insurgent. Holding routine *jirgas* with community leaders that build trust and solve problems is an offensive operation. So is using projects and work programs to bring communities together and meet their needs. Missions primarily designed to "disrupt" militants are not.

An ISAF unit was often taking rocket fire from nearby a certain village. Rather than raiding the village, the commander decided instead to find out more about them and the reasons for hostility. The ANA commander suggested an ANA patrol to learn more about the village. The patrol discovered the village was upset about a night raid that occurred over two years ago. He also learned education was important to the village but they had no school or supplies. The commanders sent another patrol to the village a few days with a truckload of school supplies. The next day, the village elders came to the base to meet with the ANA and ISAF commanders. They delivered over 100 thank-you notes from the children. Soon, several local projects were coordinated with the elders for the village – projects they owned. The rocket attacks stopped.

Think of counterinsurgency as an argument to earn the support of the people. It is a contest to influence the real and very practical calculations on the part of the people about which side to support. Every action, reaction, failure to act, and all that is said and done become part of the debate. The people in the audience watch, listen, and make rational choices based on who can better protect them, provide for their needs, respect their dignity and their community, and offer opportunities for the future. Ideology can influence the outcome, but is usually subordinate to the more practical considerations of survival and everyday life.

Earn the support of the people and the war is won, regardless of how many militants are killed or captured.

We must undermine the insurgent argument while offering a more compelling alternative. Our argument must communicate – through word and deed – that we and GIRoA have the capability and commitment to protect and support the people. Together, we need to provide a convincing and sustainable sense of justice and well-being to a weary and skeptical populace. We must turn perceptions from fear and uncertainty to trust and confidence.

To be effective, therefore, we have to help change the local context so people are more attracted to building and protecting their communities than destroying them. Leverage economic initiatives and routine *jirgas* with community leaders to employ young men and develop peaceful means to resolve outstanding issues; create viable local alternatives to insurgency.

At the same time, it would be naïve to ignore the fact that the enemy often gets a vote on how we focus our time and energy. This is certainly the case in times of high kinetic activity as well as in the areas where the "shadow government" influences the population. There is clearly a role for precise operations that keep the insurgents off balance, take the fight to their sanctuaries, and prevent them from affecting the population. These operations are important, but, in and of themselves, are not necessarily decisive.

They *can* be effective when the insurgents have become so isolated from the population that they are no longer welcome, have been kicked out of their communities, and are reduced to hiding in remote areas and raiding from there. Setting these conditions throughout the year will enable kinetic operations to have an enduring rather than fleeting impact.

One ISAF unit and their partnered Afghan company were participating in a large shura in a previously hostile village. Over 500 people, to include former fighters, were in attendance. Nearly the entire village turned out. The unit had been working for months to build relationships with the elders and people. As the relationships strengthened and local projects began improving quality of life and employment opportunities, the village elders requested the meeting. During the meeting, two insurgents began firing shots at one of the unit's observation posts. Knowing the stakes of the meeting, the young sergeant in charge of the OP told his men to hold their fire. He knew this was a provocative act designed to get him to over-react and ruin the meeting. He reported the incident. The shura continued. Later, the village elders found the two militants and punished them accordingly.

Keeping the right balance over time is critical and there is no mathematical formula for it. *Mobilizing the community* to participate actively for their own safety, stability, and success is the crux of counterinsurgency at local levels – and creates circumstances to end insurgent influence permanently.

We must know the people, their environment and aspirations, and work together with them to meet their needs. Strive to focus 95% of our energy on the 95% of the population that deserves and needs our support. Doing so will isolate the insurgents. Take action against the 5% – the insurgents – as

necessary or when the right opportunities present themselves. Do not let them distract you from your primary tasks:

Embrace the People. Build connections and be conscious of the need to pass them off to your successor. Afghan culture is founded on personal relationships. Earning the trust of the people is a large part of our mission. Build relationships with tribal, community, and religious leaders. Success requires communication, collaboration, and cooperation. Seek out the underprivileged, the disenfranchised, and the disaffected and bring them on the team. Understand the local grievances and problems that drive instability, and take action to redress them. Work with the children and students. Insist the ANSF and GIRoA officials support these efforts, and teach them to lead these efforts.

Use your relationships with the people, the ANSF, and the GIRoA officials to become an expert on the local situation. Get to know the neighborhood. Learn who is the most successful farmer and why, who feels excluded and why, and which families are the most powerful and who they are united to by marriage. Be a positive force in the community, shield the people from harm, and foster safety and security so people can work and raise their families in peace.

Carefully assess risk and project confidence – excessive force protection is distancing, not inspiring. Think of how you would expect a foreign army to operate in your neighborhood, among your families and your children, and act accordingly. The way you drive, your dress and gestures, with whom you eat lunch, the courage with which you fight, the way you respond to an Afghan's grief or joy – this is all part of the argument.

> A Police Mentor Team believed the District ANP Chief to be corrupt. After multiple attempts to facilitate a change in behavior, the PMT built a case to take to the Provincial leadership. The Provincial leadership conducted an operation that confirmed the evidence. They replaced the corrupt Police Chief with an honest, hard-working leader, and referred the removed Chief to the Afghan justice system. Although the process required many weeks, the PMT helped to empower Afghan leaders to take appropriate action to protect the population from this malign actor.

Win the argument. Use localized development and economic support to bring community leaders and people together for their own success. Listen, share, and get buy-in. Build local ownership and capacity. Together with legitimate GIRoA leaders, work all local issues with the local shura and community. Foster ownership. As the Afghans say, "If you sweat for it, you will protect it."

Partner with ANSF at all echelons. Our job is to hold them accountable for performance in serving the Afghan people and protecting them from harm. Build their capacity to secure their own country. Foster ownership – their success is our success. Live and train together, plan and operate together. Share the same battle-rhythm and information. Integrate your command and control structures. Put them in the lead and support them, even before they think they are ready. Coach them to excellence, and they will amaze you with how quickly they take charge.

Build Governance Capacity and Accountability. Developing good governance is everyone's responsibility. Build capacity and accountability at all levels, down to local communities. Promote

Afghan leadership that serves the people. Empower those who display competence, care, and commitment for their people. But be discerning and make distinctions. Confront self-serving officials who monopolize wealth and power and abuse the people's trust. Working alongside our Afghan counterparts, we must find incentives and mechanisms to change behavior, and demand Afghan leaders take appropriate action to hold corrupt officials accountable. Looking the other way or enabling government officials who fail to meet their obligations makes you part of the problem. Protecting the people not only requires protecting them from physical harm, but also from corruption and abuse of power.

Get better every day. Take action to improve stability in your area. Learn how to adapt, how to shape the environment, and how to be more effective with the community leaders and the people. Listen to our Afghan colleagues; talk with the Afghans you meet; ask questions about how we can improve and help them achieve their goals. Listen to their stories and what they want to tell you. You are authorized – indeed, it is your responsibility – to adjust your actions within the intent of this guidance to adapt to local conditions.

Over-communicate. Quickly share critical information and ideas. Challenge the conventional wisdom if it no longer fits the environment. This is a battle of wits -- be vigilant as the environment shifts and the enemy adapts. If you are comfortable, the enemy is probably ahead of you. To win, we must understand their strategy and learn from their successes and their failures – and from our own as well. Adapt faster than they are able to adjust.

We (GIRoA and ISAF) will succeed by transforming the environment through local security, connecting responsive and credible governance to the community leaders and the people, and facilitating compelling alternatives to the insurgency. The people will decide the contest in GIRoA's favor.

ISAF Counterinsurgency Guidance: Key Points

The Afghan people are the Objective. Protecting them is the mission. Focus 95% of your time building relationships with them and, together with the Afghan government, meeting their needs.

Get rid of the conventional mind-set. Focus on the people, not the militants. By earning their trust and helping an accountable GIRoA gain the support of the people, you take from the enemy what he cannot afford to lose – the control of the population.

Embrace the people

- Think before you act. Understand the consequences of your actions – how you drive, how you patrol, how you relate to people, how you help the community. View your actions through the eyes of the Afghans. If we harm Afghan civilians, we sow the seeds of our own defeat.
- Be an expert on the local situation. Build connections and hold routine *jirgas*. Afghan culture is founded on personal relationships. Listen to the population and adjust accordingly. Earn their trust. Develop their ownership in the solution. If they sweat for it, they will protect it.
- Be a positive force in the community; shield the people from harm; foster stability. Use local economic initiatives to increase employment and give young men alternatives to insurgency. Demand that CERP, CIMIC and other capabilities support these efforts. Help Afghans solve Afghan problems.

Partner with ANSF

- Live, eat, and train together, plan and operate together, depend on one another, and hold each other accountable – at all echelons down to soldier level. Treat them as equal partners in success.
- Their success is our goal. Respect them; put them in the lead and coach them to excellence.

Build Governance Capacity and Accountability

- Facilitate and enable transparent and accountable governance from national to community level. Insist government officials serve the people; support those who do.
- Confront corrupt officials. Protecting the people requires protection from physical harm, corruption and abuse of power. With your Afghan counterparts work to change corrupt behavior that adversely affects the people and the mission. If the behavior does not change, demand the Afghan higher leadership take appropriate action.

Get Better Everyday

- Learn and adapt to the environment. Keep your skills sharp. Improve daily.
- Learn how to shape the environment, and how to achieve greater effects with the people more quickly. Listen to and learn from our Afghan colleagues.
- Communicate and share ideas. Challenge the conventional wisdom if it no longer fits the environment. This is a battle of wits – learn and adapt more quickly than the insurgent.