

# VICTORY AMONG PEOPLE

Lessons from Countering Insurgency and  
Stabilising Fragile States

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# INTELLIGENCE IN LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICTS: LESSONS FROM AFGHANISTAN

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An old saw has it that during the Cold War the enemy was easy to find, but hard to kill. In low-intensity conflicts the enemy is easy to kill, but hard to find. Unconventional wars are referred to as intelligence-led efforts for good reason. However, the kind of intelligence required in each category differs because the strategic objects are different. Additionally, not all low-intensity conflicts are the same. On the contrary, they span the full gamut of strategic possibilities: from state-sponsored proxy wars in third-party territories (Vietnam and Afghanistan in the Cold War); to anti-colonial insurgency (Algeria); separatist terrorism (the IRA and ETA); international intervention to quell anarchy in failed states (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Haiti, Somalia); to counter-insurgency following externally imposed regime change in a hostile environment (contemporary Iraq); to counter-insurgency following externally imposed regime change in a culturally diverse hostile environment within an all but failed state that is contested by multiple nations that transcend state boundaries (Afghanistan). This

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chapter will confine itself to discussing the intelligence challenge in the latter case, because it is the most challenging and continues to be a contemporary strategic conundrum.<sup>1</sup>

Typically, military intelligence in conventional warfare is concerned with locating the enemy and identifying its size, disposition, readiness, and, if possible, discerning its intent (the holy grail of military intelligence). Simply put, intelligence is about targeting. In low-intensity conflict where an external power imposes regime change in a failed state over extreme geographic and cultural barriers, intelligence takes a vastly more complex turn. Knowledge of every aspect of the political, economic, ethnic, social and cultural landscape, through history to the present, is vital to create or choose a viable partner and to monitor progress in the execution of the war to a successful conclusion. In this kind of conflict, the intelligence challenge is primarily about intent; not just of the enemy, but also of every actor that is party to the conflict. This is a profound challenge. It is, counter-intuitively, both ultimately strategic and fundamentally tactical. It is strategic in the sense of needing to know how all the parts fit the whole (broadly defined) and tactical in the sense that such knowledge is largely derived at the local level and means different things to different actors.

Intelligence in this kind of conflict is not so much about collection as it is about analysis. If the analytical lens is incorrectly focused, no amount of information will help win the war. On the contrary: the plethora of information in today's wired battle space will simply overwhelm good people trying their hardest to do a good job.<sup>2</sup> Analysts must be able to sift vast quantities of data. In order to do that effectively, they must have strong historical, cultural and strategic judgment that is acquired over years of experience in and around the territory of interest, in order to turn that raw information into knowledge of the complex social world they seek to dominate. Collection is important, but secondary to analysis. Culturally aware analysts must drive collection requirements in order to get the right data upon which to exercise judgment. This in turn raises questions about the divisions

between collectors and analysts across some parts of the US intelligence community. In intelligence of this kind, 'Clausewitzian genius' is the ability to see through the patterns and the discontinuities from the local to the global level in complex overlapping alien cultures, and find seams along which war aims might be prosecuted either politically or by the use of precise force. This kind of warfare is complex, nasty, expensive and long.

This raises an important point in understanding the study and application of intelligence and its role in warfare. While it can be usefully studied in isolation, intelligence cannot be fully appreciated in the absence of knowledge about the strategy it seeks to serve or the resources dedicated by a government to the fulfilment of that strategy. Thus the conduct of warfare is dependent upon the interplay of all three arms of what might be called the 'iron triangle of warfare' – intelligence, strategy and resources.<sup>3</sup> The arms of the triangle must be in agreement and mutually supportive. If not, the object of the war will be impossible to obtain.

This chapter contends that the arms of the US 'iron triangle' in Afghanistan are currently not in alignment. The resources the US is willing to expend do not support the current strategy, and significant evidence suggests that the intelligence system has never quite mastered the considerable difficulty of adapting to the new demands placed on it since the initial invasion. Further, US resources devoted to the war in Afghanistan were set to diminish in 2011 but that date may have been pushed out to 2014. It follows that the strategy, and thus the intelligence requirements for the war, will also change. It will be argued here that it would be prudent both to accept that these changes are inevitable (due to the parlous public accounts of the US, public opinion about both these accounts and the war in Afghanistan, and concomitant executive action to remedy both public policy challenges), and to build a plan to anticipate the new reality, rather than merely react when the inevitable crunch comes. The good news is that away from Afghanistan and Iraq, the US has been engaged for some years in a much more effective and

sustainable fight in the Horn of Africa and the Philippines that may come to be viewed as a model for reform. US military *doctrine* (the much favoured counter-insurgency doctrine) should not continue to act as a substitute for a national *strategy* for winning a global war against radical Islamic extremists.

### **Background to the Conflict**

As the forgoing suggests, even characterising the war in Afghanistan is a complex exercise. In reality there are multiple wars in Afghanistan between different groups: between the coalition (ISAF – International Security Assistance Force) and Al-Qa’ida; between the allies and the Taliban; a proxy war between Pakistan and India for strategic depth and influence with ‘Afghans’, China and the US;<sup>4</sup> between the US and Iran for regional influence (another proxy war); between Pashtuns and most other trans-state groupings (Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, and so on); as well as intense competition based on mutual suspicions between so-called ‘frenemies’ such as the US and Pakistan,<sup>5</sup> and friends, the US and India.<sup>6</sup> This chapter deals primarily with only a small part of the wider conflict and its consequences, namely US policy towards Afghanistan. When broken down into its parts, the problem is clearly much more than a question of countering an insurgency. But – in the absence of a coherent regional policy, a robust inter-agency mechanism for state-building, an acceptable model of governance able to resolve demands of competing groups, an incorruptible electoral mechanism, and the ability to moderate the behaviour and policies of regional powers – merely applying a military doctrine to counter an insurgency will only address a symptom of the problem. This is why so many COIN advocates talk about military force being marginal compared to all the other tasks of good governance. Yet the fact is the US is unable to achieve these wider tasks cited, given a range of powerful factors including past failures in Afghanistan, the growth of anti-US forces, the loss of resolve and the state of the public accounts.

The US invaded Afghanistan in direct response to the unprovoked surprise attack mounted by Al-Qa'ida in September 2001. The initial action had three goals: capturing Osama Bin Laden 'dead or alive'; preventing Afghanistan from being used as a staging ground for future attacks on the US and its interests (as it had been throughout the 1990s); and eliminating Al-Qa'ida. Global public opinion was strongly in support of the American response.

However, a range of factors complicated matters. Afghanistan was ruled by the Taliban, who had fought their way to dominance over the myriad warring groups that were left in the wake of the Soviet retreat. They were (and remain) the strongest and best organised of all the nations, political networks, terrorist networks, crime syndicates and warlords that exist within the territory of Afghanistan. All these groups straddle international boundaries into adjacent states.<sup>7</sup> Pashtun by birth, Islamic extremist by indoctrination, the Taliban did not then, nor do they today, pose a direct threat to the US however culturally alien and politically unsavoury they may be in the eyes of Western society. In addition to their politics, their tribal custom of *pashtunwali* was also a factor that encouraged them to provide sanctuary to the transnational terror network that came to be known as Al-Qa'ida when it escaped to Afghanistan from Sudan in the 1990s. When the US invaded Afghanistan, its fight against Al-Qa'ida necessarily became a fight against the Taliban as well. Small groups of US Special Forces, allied with indigenous rivals to the Taliban, toppled the regime and retook the country in a matter of weeks. Badly mauled, Al-Qa'ida and the Taliban melted into the population to wait, re-equip, reorganise, and plan their return via a classical insurgent campaign. Many escaped US forces by slipping across the border into Pakistan's lawless Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which became a new safe haven for their activities.

The outward appearance of rapid and near-complete success had a range of consequences that have subsequently complicated US strategy. First, the job was not complete. Osama Bin Laden was at large, and

Al-Qa'ida was not broken. While Afghanistan itself was no longer a safe haven in the way it once was, the war had prompted the enemy to create new safe havens in Pakistan that were largely outside of US reach. Second, as each day of Al-Qa'ida's survival passed, it appeared to their fellow travellers the world over that the terrorists had got away with their atrocity against the last remaining superpower. For those who might wish the hegemon and its allies ill, the lesson was impossible to miss. Third, fresh attention was placed on the deep problems of daily life in Afghanistan. There was a natural reaction to want to try and aid the situation. Mission creep, from eliminating Al-Qa'ida to building a stable Afghanistan to creating a democracy, had begun. Fourth, the strategic pause in Afghanistan was the perfect opportunity for those in the Bush administration who wanted to add Iraq to the US response to 9/11. Fifth, the resulting change in US strategic priorities shifted resources and attention away from the unresolved situation in Afghanistan. Sixth, once weapons of mass destruction were dropped as the rationale for the Iraq war, and the spread of democracy became the *post-bellum casus belli*, mission creep in Afghanistan accelerated. Yet all the while, the war in Afghanistan was an 'economy of force operation', concentrated on fixing and eliminating the enemy – largely via air strikes called in by small patrols searching along enemy lines of communication away from population centres. Seventh, presidential candidate Barack Obama had campaigned on the war of necessity in Afghanistan taking priority over the war of choice in Iraq. The rise of US COIN doctrine and its initial success in Iraq set the stage for a change in the US approach in Afghanistan once the new Obama administration came into office in 2009.

### **US Intelligence in the Afghan Theatre Pre-2009**

The approach to military intelligence on Afghanistan mirrored the course of US strategy. During the economy of force period, military intelligence was focused on traditional tasks associated with the prosecution of discrete enemy targets and the challenge of force

protection as the ISAF mission grew. Changes in emphasis occurred as different NATO commanders rotated through the headquarters in Kabul. While conducting an intelligence review in January of 2009 the new commander of Central Command (CENTCOM), General David Petraeus, discovered that at that time ISAF 'had not directed intelligence collection toward economic, social and political issues of the Afghan tribes and villages'.<sup>8</sup> This assessment was reinforced by a review instigated by General Stanley McChrystal after he took command in June of that year. Review members observed, 'Intelligence collection was in a shambles. The military understood relatively little about the Afghan people. It could not measure how the Taliban's propaganda campaign of fear and intimidation affected the population.'<sup>9</sup> As troop strength increased, so did improvised explosive device (IED) attacks. Theatre intelligence assets were consumed by the pressing requirement to get on top of the IED threat and continue to hunt down enemy forces.

Things did not fare much better at the strategic level. When Major General John M Custer was the director of intelligence at US CENTCOM,<sup>10</sup>

He grew angry at how little helpful information came out of the NCTC [National Counter Terrorism Centre]. In 2007, he visited its director at the time to tell him so. 'I told [Vice Admiral John Scott Redd] that after 4 ½ years, this organization had never produced one shred of information that helped me prosecute three wars!'

The intelligence prioritisation also reflected the operational stance at the time, which had not yet adopted a COIN approach. Nevertheless, according to one of his top intelligence advisers, the state of intelligence at the time of his review 'was a forehead-smacking moment for Petraeus ... The problem was obvious. He needed to fix the intelligence shortcomings immediately ... Petraeus decided to create his own intelligence agency inside CENTCOM'.<sup>11</sup> From this, the



Af-Pak Center of Excellence was created in Tampa, which has grown dramatically since its inception (and at the time of writing was due to move into a brand new 270,000 square foot facility).<sup>12</sup>

Petraeus's intelligence adviser at the time, Derek Harvey of the Defense Intelligence Agency, is credited with revolutionising military intelligence as it pertains to COIN. 'The insurgency's resources, leadership, financing, freedom of movement, popular support and group cohesion all had to be measured. No such metrics had existed'.<sup>13</sup> These findings were also reflected in the McChrystal review that discovered that '70% of the intelligence requirements were enemy-centric'.<sup>14</sup> Of the ninety different metrics collected at the time, few paid attention to the populace. 'Harvey wanted to expand [the metrics collected] to 500' to better reflect the complex requirements of a population-centred COIN strategy.<sup>15</sup>

Harvey is also credited with creating what became known as the 'AfPak Hands' programme. The US military personnel system is ruthlessly resistant to change – though often for a lot of very sensible reasons – and it has come under criticism for the two-year assignment cycle that ensures personnel are rotated out of a job they have only just begun to master. By contrast, the AfPak Hands programme invites volunteers to devote five full years of their career to learning a relevant language and undertaking a series of deployments between the region and AfPak centres in Tampa and the Pentagon. While there are a number of concerns with the programme, it is an important initiative designed to provide the military with the kinds of expertise that could help answer the deeper cultural intelligence requirements that were missing when both Generals Petraeus and McChrystal conducted their respective reviews.<sup>16</sup> In some respects AfPak Hands is reminiscent of the British Army in India.

Afghanistan is perhaps one of the world's most complex cultural geographies. Adopting a population-centric approach, as General McChrystal did when he took command, placed a further premium on wider and deeper situational awareness than the intelligence system

was providing at the time. When President Obama was presented with a map depicting tribal culture in Kandahar, which reportedly resembled 'a crazy quilt of overlapping colors that represented a piece of modern art [that] would almost require a PhD in Afghan culture for an American to comprehend', he was heard to remark, 'what makes us think that given that description of the problem, that we're going to design a solution to this?' As Bob Woodward observed with considerable understatement, 'the Taliban lived this, putting the US at a strategic disadvantage'.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Flynn Review**

The ISAF intelligence chief, Major General Michael Flynn, personally co-wrote the most damning indictment of the conventional approach to intelligence in this complex low-intensity conflict. In an unusual move, General Flynn issued his commander's directive on 'Fixing Intel' in the form of a Washington, DC think tank working paper.<sup>18</sup>

Eight years into the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. intelligence community is only marginally relevant to the overall strategy. Having focused the overwhelming majority of its collection efforts and analytical brainpower on insurgent groups, the vast intelligence apparatus is unable to answer fundamental questions about the environment in which U.S. and allied forces operate and the people they seek to persuade.

US intelligence analysts are 'ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects ... and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers'.<sup>19</sup> This had created a situation where, according to General McChrystal, 'Our senior leaders – the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense, Congress, the President of the United States – are not getting the right information to make decisions'.<sup>20</sup> For example, 'in a recent project ordered by

the White House' – presumably the Obama review – 'analysts could barely scrape together enough information to formulate rudimentary assessments.'<sup>21</sup> The report urges, 'The urgent task before us is to make our intelligence community ... "relevant".'<sup>22</sup>

The Flynn report goes to significant lengths to stress that the intelligence enabling the targeting of the enemy is effective. Rather, the key intelligence weakness is moving beyond kinetic operations to understanding the highly disaggregated cultural geographies within each of the 398 districts across the thirty-four provinces of Afghanistan (which is about the size of Texas). Not surprisingly, the report discovered that the most effective intelligence practices could be found primarily at the tactical level of war.<sup>23</sup> This makes sense in so far as intelligent, adaptive and able field commanders will do whatever they need to do to accomplish the mission. But it also demonstrates the complexity of Afghanistan, where knowledge of local issues is vital to local operational outcomes. As any commander who has been there will say, generalising between tribes, valleys or districts in Afghanistan is a complicated business.<sup>24</sup> It is hard to aggregate data that has meaning above the local level. In a COIN fight, '[T]he best information, the most important intelligence, and the context that provides the best understanding come from the bottom up, not from the top down.'<sup>25</sup> This is certainly true in Afghanistan.

Flynn and his co-authors note that some units have become very adept at pushing intelligence officers down to the company level, training infantrymen to be collectors, and a range of related programmes to collect 'white' or cultural/societal intelligence. But they go on to highlight the disconnection between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of military intelligence. 'We were unable to find significant information in official reports and summaries reaching headquarters level ... Moving up through levels of hierarchy is normally a journey into greater degrees of cluelessness'.<sup>26</sup> They continue on this theme, quoting an operations officer of a US task force who complained that the intelligence fusion centre had no

data on the population in his area of operations: 'I don't want to say we're clueless, but we are.'<sup>27</sup>

The report makes a series of unconventional recommendations to leverage the good work they observed in the field, including empowering analysts to move freely between commands looking for patterns within the ground-level data, and creating open source stability operations information centres (SIOCs) designed to create substantive written reports and provide comprehensive situational awareness across data sets. At the regional command level, the authors argue the SIOCs should be placed under the State Department's representatives responsible for development programmes.<sup>28</sup>

Taken together, their assessment and recommendations make it very clear that the US military intelligence system is exceptionally well configured for counter-terrorist operations, but woefully inadequate for the Afghan counter-insurgency mission. President Obama explicitly rejected a COIN strategy. The military resisted the president and has continued to mount a combination of direct and indirect operations aimed at COIN objectives. What is also interesting is that strategic intelligence has been highly effective. So taken together, tactical and strategic intelligence are working well: it is the operational or theatre level where the breakdown occurs, at least in the case of US Afghan strategy. More specifically, it would appear from the evidence that the bureaucracy of intelligence, at least in the US model, has not caught up with advances at the sharp end of the military instrument. Due to the nature of the threat, there are in fact two spears in the American arsenal. The first we have examined; we now turn to the next.

### **Strategic Intelligence**

The threat of non-state extremist terrorism in the US has radically changed the size and structure of the intelligence community and has required a very different approach to strategic intelligence to that of the past. There has been an incredible expansion of strategic intelligence capabilities since 2001. By one simplistic measure, more than 17

million square feet of office space for 'top-secret intelligence work' is under construction, or has been built since 2001. That is the equivalent of four and a half Pentagons.<sup>29</sup> More than 854,000 people have top secret security clearances (it is estimated that 31 per cent, or 264,000, of whom are contractors), 206 new classified organisations have been created, meaning that in total '1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States'. For the first time in history the complete US intelligence budget numbers were released. In 2009, military and non-military intelligence spending was \$80.1 billion dollars.<sup>30</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency personnel numbers have swelled from 7,500 (2002) to 16,500 (2010), not including contractor support that is likely be as much as four times that number – if not more. The list of code names for specific, highly classified 'Special Access Programs' is in excess of 300 pages. 'There's only one entity in the entire universe that has visibility on all SAPs – that's God', quips James R Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence.<sup>31</sup>

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 was the legislative vehicle that created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), which was designed to be the co-ordinating authority across the seventeen different organisations that comprise the intelligence community.<sup>32</sup> However, the DNI does not have budgetary control of the whole community; a key weakness in the new arrangements established in the wake of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations.<sup>33</sup> This could be changing: DNI James Clapper announced on 1 November 2010 that he had 'secured at least a conceptual agreement with the secretary of defense to take the national intelligence program out of the defense budget. We plan to do that by 2013. I mention that because I think that is one specific way to accrue more authority to ODNI in the oversight and execution of that funding.'<sup>34</sup> The 2004 reforms dispensed with the foreign/domestic intelligence divide – for example, by creating the National

Counterterrorism Center as an all-source analysis organisation. The scale of the challenges that the strategic intelligence enterprise faces on a daily basis is staggering: 'Terabytes of foreign intelligence information come in each day, vastly exceeding the entire text holdings of the Library of Congress, which is estimated at 10 terabytes. [The] National Counterterrorism Center's 24-hour Operations Center receives 8,000 to 10,000 pieces of counterterrorist information, roughly 10,000 names, and 40-plus specific threats and plots, every day.'<sup>35</sup>

Ultra hi-tech intelligence platforms are at the heart of many US strategic intelligence programmes, and they are routinely used in low-intensity conflicts. From space-based reconnaissance satellites, to battle space robots (drones on land and in the air), to airborne electronic warfare and land movement radar, to phenomenal computing power driving searches of data collected by these and a remarkable array of other means, the US brings a great deal of raw intelligence power to the table.

In Afghanistan, for example, the incredible capability of the Real Time Regional Gateway has been used extensively. It can take data intercepted by any means, 'store it, and make it instantly available to intelligence analysts and operators allowing the US to react quickly in response to the enemy'. Director of National Intelligence McConnell explains the power of this capability in simple terms; 'they talk, we listen. They move, we observe. Given the opportunity, we react operationally'.<sup>36</sup> It is notable that this system, like many in the strategic category, is designed to provide information for counter-terrorism targeting (known as the 'sensor to shooter kill chain'). But they do not offer the understanding of the social environment needed in counter-insurgency.

Criticisms have also been made of the post-2001 growth of organisations involved, the use of contractors, and the sheer scale of the strategic intelligence system. Redundancy is useful in intelligence work: different agencies have different information needs, and can see the same data point in a variety of different and useful ways. But there

is little doubt that the system is too large to be effectively controlled. Lieutenant General (Rtd) John R Vines, 'who was asked [in 2009] to review the method for tracking the Defense Department's most sensitive programs was stunned by what he discovered':

'I'm not aware of any agency with the authority, responsibility or a process in place to coordinate all these interagency and commercial activities,' he said in an interview. 'The complexity of this system defies description. Because it lacks a synchronizing process, it inevitably results in message dissonance, reduced effectiveness and waste,' Vines said. 'We consequently can't effectively assess whether it is making us more safe.'

Admiral Dennis Blair later said, 'as we so often do in this country ... the attitude was, if it's worth doing, it's probably worth overdoing.'<sup>37</sup> Frequently, strategic assets are essentially searching for a single individual with a bomb strapped to their side. It is much worse than a needle in a haystack: it is a silver needle in a stack of three million stainless-steel needles.<sup>38</sup> Given the odds, it is probable that, occasionally, a terrorist will be lucky. The howls of outrage following the discovery of the 'underwear bomber' pointed to some of the problems inherent in a culture that relies so heavily on technology for security. America was built on innovation in science and technology. There is a deep seam running through the culture that more resources and more technology can solve any problem. There is no doubt that it is better to have the vast capabilities that the US possesses than not. However, the counter-terror threat is inherently a human challenge, and the literature is clear that human intelligence has long been a weakness in US intelligence. And recent evidence suggests, the literature has not kept up with developments on the ground.

It is worth noting that significant improvements have been made in HUMINT in recent years in Afghanistan and across the border in FATA. Nizam Khan Dawar, a tribesman from North Waziristan, said in

a phone interview, 'The number of agents for the CIA has been increasing considerably in recent months ... Mysterious people disguised as Taliban militants are behind these attacks, guiding the drone missiles.' The report continues, 'A Taliban commander in North Waziristan said the militant group is trying to unmask the spies that have been guiding the strikes'.<sup>39</sup>

The CIA's Afghan counter-terrorism pursuit teams have partnered with 'the agency's paramilitary wing, known as the Special Activities Division', which used:<sup>40</sup>

[B]order bases to build and manage networks of ethnic Pashtun informants who cross into Pakistan's tribal belt. In combination with near-constant surveillance from U.S. drone aircraft in the skies, the informants have enabled the CIA to identify the whereabouts of al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders. At the same time, the border-hugging bases have reduced the CIA's dependence on Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, a mercurial spy service that has helped track down dozens of al-Qaeda and other insurgent leaders but is also considered a secret supporter of the Afghan Taliban. For years, the ISI restricted CIA operatives to Pakistani bases in the tribal belt and strictly controlled access to its sources in the region. As a result, the Americans were kept largely in the dark about the presence of al-Qaeda and Taliban forces on that side of the border.

These are impressive outcomes and they need to be enhanced not just in the border areas, but wherever the US and its allies are fighting 'by, with, and through' local partners. Importantly, the local partner is not the Afghan government, but Pashtun tribesmen. Additionally, this is yet again an example of counter-terrorism, not counter-insurgency.

At 854,000 personnel and with a budget of more than \$80 billion a year, the US intelligence community is bigger than the rest of the world's intelligence services combined. Does it deliver a proportionally superior product? The vast majority of the work done within the intelligence community is technical, not analytical. Strategic judgments



are made by a very small cadre of senior decision-makers that, on average, do not amount to more than the 1 per cent at the top of each of the seventeen agencies that comprise the intelligence community. Of those agencies, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence is charged with taking a community-wide view and presenting it to the president and his top national security advisers. With around 1,200 staff, the Office amounts to 0.14 per cent of the intelligence community. It is not possible to survey the quality of the work, but the numbers give a glimpse into the imbalance between technical and analytical capabilities in the US intelligence system.

If there is a quantitative imbalance between technical and analytical work, could there be a qualitative imbalance also? In the absence of an exhaustive investigation into the quality of the intelligence community's work (which would require reading all of its highly classified reports), this proposition is impossible to prove. Therefore, it is a matter of opinion, but one worth serious thought. It could be that what is missing in intelligence work dependent on hi-tech capability is not so much new systems and methodologies, but the deep learning and broad knowledge through which data gets critically assessed by the analyst. Diagnostic and quantitative systems and methods support – but do not supplant – a critical mind. Therefore, the most important quality is the ability of the analyst to see linkages and patterns where others see chaos. No new systems or methodologies have made critical thinking and seasoned professional judgment redundant. This is not to suggest that the intelligence community does not have highly educated, culturally adept, and strategically nuanced analysts. The Flynn review is proof that it does: but it is also proof that they are clearly in the minority.

Given the quality of assessments released to the public and the academic work of former analysts, there is strong evidence that it exists at the strategic level too. But where is the reporting on the mismatch between intelligence, budgets and strategy in the US approach to Afghanistan? There is no doubt that some in the intelligence

community are seeing and reporting these disconnects, given that they are so glaring. But for all the money, people and emphasis on technical wizardry, the US strategic community seems comparatively light on alternative strategies for success in Afghanistan. When tasked with giving the new president alternative courses of action during the strategic review in 2009, by their own admission, the most senior Pentagon leaders repeatedly failed.<sup>41</sup> As Woodward's account makes clear, the president was continually frustrated with long time lines forced on him by the Pentagon. Announcing the review's findings, President Obama insisted on summer 2010 as the drawdown date. However, the Pentagon is now citing 2014 in various media. They could not come up with more than one idea – COIN. The irony is that the military talks COIN, but it is really not doing COIN at all: it is doing counter-terrorism. This goes beyond intelligence and into the realm of the intelligence-budget-strategy iron triangle.

### **Intelligence and Strategy**

The focus of Obama's strategy as declared in 2009 is on Al-Qa'ida, not the Taliban; the core aim is to transfer responsibility to Afghan security forces; and Pakistan takes centre stage. Based on his success in Iraq, General Petraeus, with the support of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Michael Mullen and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, never presented the Obama administration with any option other than an Afghan surge. The military plan was packaged as COIN, but it does not have the manning, the resources or the time to be effective – as defence leaders indeed argued repeatedly in National Security Council meetings with the president. In fact, the additional troops are conducting large-scale counter-terrorism operations in addition to a major escalation of the covert war in FATA over the border.

There are problems with the strategy. First and foremost among them is Pakistan. Despite the fact that anti-government forces have mounted dozens of successful attacks on Pakistani military facilities, intelligence facilities and leaders, and for a time gained control of

the Swat Valley, the Pakistani national security establishment is still absorbed with India as the greater threat. In a society vulnerable to fantastic rumour, even the president believed that the anti-Pakistani Taliban were a creation of the CIA and Indian intelligence services.<sup>42</sup> This is a common view the author has heard from Pakistani officers. Is Pakistan a dubious ally? Pakistan complains about US drone strikes against the Taliban, but also hosts the base from which they are launched. It profits from the US supply convoys stretched across its two access lines into Afghanistan, yet has shown that it will cut those vital supply lines to make a political point. In 2009, the Pakistani military mounted intense operations against anti-government forces in South Waziristan, but not against Al-Qa'ida and Afghan Taliban in North Waziristan. Nevertheless, the US is reluctant to push Pakistan too hard, for fear that the government will collapse and the radicals will take over a territory with 166 million people and a number of nuclear warheads.

With the best intelligence in the world, the United States cannot alter two critical facts in the war in Afghanistan. It cannot improve the quality of the government in Kabul or its acceptance among the people, and it cannot make Pakistan change its policy on supporting terrorists. Pakistani claims that it does not support terrorism are weak in the face of a body of evidence to the contrary and former president Pervez Musharraf's recent admission that these activities took place. Bruce Riedel's assessment of Pakistan in 1999 was that it was 'behaving as a rogue state in two areas – backing Taliban/Osama Bin Laden and provoking war with India [in the Kargil crisis]'. President Bill Clinton complained to Nawaz Sharif in 1999 about Pakistan's role in tacitly supporting the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden.

Following the Mumbai attacks, 'The CIA received reliable intelligence that the ISI was directly involved in the training for Mumbai'. Woodward continues, 'An upset Bush asked his aides about contingency plans for dealing with Pakistan'. When DNI McConnell briefed President-elect Obama, Pakistan was presented as the foremost

national security challenge to the US. President Obama assessed the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan thus: 'we need to make clear to the people that the cancer is in Pakistan ... we need to excise the cancer in Pakistan'.

For the enemy, Pakistan, with its nuclear weapons, is a much richer prize than Afghanistan, which makes the situation for the US and its allies so much more acute. Additionally, the strategic imbalance of dedicating \$1 billion of military effort per Al-Qa'ida operative in Afghanistan in 2010 seems to fulfil Bin Laden's desire to drain America of its blood and treasure, and thus, in the long run, its will to fight.

### **Conclusion**

Adopting a new approach will not be without costs. The US has to move past its zero-defect approach to counter-terrorism. By virtue of the time it will take to win this struggle, there will be a concomitant rise in the success rate of enemy attacks on the US (and European) homeland. American life may come to resemble, in very small part, British life during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Despite the best intelligence system in the world, it is inevitable that a terrorist will again achieve a strike on the US homeland at some point. That is the nature of this war. It will not be a sign of weakness, as indeed various domestic demagogues will inevitably seek to paint such an attack once it happens.

The enemy has been breathtakingly stupid in its terror operations, killing many more Muslims than anyone else. This, in turn, has turned public opinion against extremism throughout the Muslim world and enhanced the power of the extremists' 'near enemies', namely governments from Riyadh to Jakarta. There is good evidence to suggest that a major shift has already taken place among radical extremist intellectuals. As Lawrence Wright writes about Dr Fadl's rejection of violent jihad:<sup>43</sup>

People hate America, and the Islamist movements feel their hatred and their impotence. Ramming America has become the shortest road to fame and leadership among the Arabs and Muslims. But what good is it if you destroy one of your enemy's buildings, and he destroys one of your countries? What good is it if you kill one of his people, and he kills a thousand of yours? ... That, in short, is my evaluation of 9/11.

Once one of the foremost advocates of violent jihad, Fadl, like Noman Benotman and a number of others, have come to see the hopelessness of the struggle in its violent form.<sup>44</sup>

The Afghan Taliban are now in negotiations with Kabul and the US.<sup>45</sup> It has been driven to the negotiating table by the unrelenting counter-terrorism operations on both sides of the Afghan border since January 2010. But it is not really the Taliban with whom we should be negotiating. Ironically, the best political advice on Afghanistan comes from one of our dubious allies in this fight. General Musharraf, in a Churchillian assessment, summed it up thus:<sup>46</sup>

Now you try to negotiate with so-called 'moderate Taliban,' but there is no such thing as a moderate Taliban. There are Taliban and Pashtuns. But as I have always said: All Taliban are Pashtun, but not all Pashtun people are Taliban. Again, you should reinforce the ancient Pashtun clans who are not ideologically aligned with the Taliban to govern Afghanistan and to fight the Taliban. That's my strong advice.

In the long run, America will win because the allure of what it stands for is far more attractive than what is offered by the enemy. The US and its allies must capitalise on its strengths in unconventional warfare and counter-terrorism intelligence capabilities if it is to cost-effectively answer the threat over the many years still ahead in the long war against Al-Qa'ida.

- Approaches* (Vol. 9, No. 1, 2009), for a short but telling example of the positive effects of relationship building and non-standard special operations approaches.
33. Josh Scott, 'US Commander Leaves Lasting Impact in Southern Philippines', JSOTF-P Public Affairs, 2 July 2010, available at <<http://jsotf-p.blogspot.com/2010/07/us-commander-leaves-lasting-impact-in.html>>; Pia Lee-Brago, 'US Envoy Says Abu Sayyaf, JI, RSM Weaker Today', *Philippine Star*, 3 July 2010.
  34. D P Fridovich and F T Krawchuk, 'The Special Operations Forces: Indirect Approach', *Joint Forces Quarterly* (No. 44, 2007), pp. 24–27.
  35. For press releases highlighting the results of the military efforts, see JSOTF-P Public Affairs, 'DVIDS – Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines', available at <<http://www.dvidshub.net/units/JSOTF-PH>>.
  36. The efforts of JSOTF-P are not without precedence. From 1950–54, US military advisers trained and supported – but did not materially participate in – the successful Filipino counter-insurgency against the communist Huks. For a comprehensive rundown of this and other US surrogate operations, see Richard D Newton, 'Seeds of Surrogate Warfare', *Contemporary Security Challenges: Irregular Warfare and Indirect Approaches* (Vol. 9, No. 3, 2009), pp. 1–18.

### **Intelligence in Low-Intensity Conflicts: Lessons from Afghanistan** (pp. 107–26)

1. Characterising the war in Afghanistan is a complex exercise. One thing is clear: calling it a counter-insurgency falls way short of accurately characterising the war.
2. 'Battle space' is used here because the intelligence challenge goes beyond where the conflict physically takes place.
3. In this usage, resources include time, blood and treasure.
4. Because of the cultural diversification within the territory, even the utility of the label 'Afghan' is limited.
5. This is not to suggest that the US and Pakistan are not co-operating closely in some areas, but rather to explain that there are many levels to the US-Pakistan relationship: many co-operative, some counterproductive. In part, this is because Pakistan is not a singular nation-state with strong governance across all aspects of its national security institutions, let alone national life (broadly defined). Not only are there differences between the various peoples of Pakistan and the state, but both groupings have multiple sub-groups that often vie with one another for

power and thus have markedly different approaches to the US and its interests in the region. The modern elites in both public and private sectors tend to see Al-Qa'ida as a threat to Pakistan, while Islamist-leaning groups in both sectors see India as by far the greatest threat to Pakistan and the cultivation and support of *talibs* [students] in Afghanistan as vital to keeping India in check.

6. The Indo-US relationship is marked by a mutual struggle to overcome historical prejudices and misperceptions.
7. Some of the ethnic and tribal groupings include the following peoples (or nations): Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Nuristanis, Aimaqs and Balochis. In addition to these groupings, must be added sub-national tribes and clans, as well as political groupings (such as the Taliban), terrorist groups, warlords and various regional and international actors.
8. Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 2010), p. 77.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
10. Dana Priest and William Arkin, 'A hidden world, growing beyond control: Top Secret America Special Report', *Washington Post*, 19 July 2010.
11. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
12. Priest and Arkin, *op. cit.*
13. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 79. Woodward goes on to explain that Harvey created a colour-coded mapping system thus: ISAF was blue, insurgents red, Afghan security forces green and Afghan people white. This is noteworthy because in the Flynn report, discussed below, the authors refer to the pressing need to collect 'white' intelligence.
16. There are many questions about the programme, especially relating to career progression and development, especially given the proposed US drawdown in Afghanistan starting in July 2011.
17. Woodward, *op. cit.*, pp. 350–51.
18. Michael Flynn, Matt Pottiner and Paul Batchelor, 'Fixing Intel: A Blueprint for Making Intelligence Relevant in Afghanistan', Center for a New American Security, Washington DC, January 2010.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 13, for example.
24. Adrian Bogart, *One Valley at a Time*, JSOU Report 06-6 (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2006); Jim Gant, *A Strategy for Success in Afghanistan: One Tribe at a Time* (Los Angeles, CA: Nine Sister Imports, 2009).
25. General Martin E Dempsey, commander of the US Army Training and Doctrine Command, quoted in Flynn, Pottiner and Batchelor, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 12.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
29. The source for the Pentagon office space is <<http://pentagon.afis.osd.mil/facts.html>>. Accessed 7 October 2010. See Priest and Arkin, *op. cit.*, but their calculations are off: they estimate that only two Pentagons equate to the same floor space (17 million square feet).
30. Walter Pincus, 'Intelligence Spending at Record \$80.1 Billion in First Disclosure of Overall Figure', *Washington Post*, 28 October 2010.
31. Priest and Arkin, *op. cit.*
32. Although the legislation fell short insofar as key powers remain with the CIA, and these are a source of tension between the Office of the Director for National Security (ODNI) and the CIA. For example, the director of the CIA 'still had authority on covert actions and reported to the President on them', Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
33. It managed the National Intelligence Program budget, but not the Military Intelligence Program budget, which resides under the authority of the Secretary of Defense according to ODNI, 'National Intelligence: A Consumer's Guide', 2009. On the recommendations, see 'The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States', July 2004, pp. 407–16
34. Eli Lake, 'Intel Foiled at Al Qaeda Plot, DNI Chief Says', *Washington Times*, 2 November 2010
35. ODNI, 'Questions & Answers on the Intelligence Community Post 9/11', undated, available at <[www.dni.gov/content/Question\\_and\\_Answer\\_IC.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/content/Question_and_Answer_IC.pdf)>. Accessed 7 October 2010.
36. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 7.



37. Priest and Arkin, *op. cit.*
38. Quote by General Jack Keane as Army Vice Chief of Staff, 'Inside American Power: The Pentagon', *National Geographic* [TV], 13 May 2003.
39. Ernesto Londono and Haq Nawaz Khan, 'Pakistani Government Condemns NATO Airstrikes', *Washington Post*, 28 September 2010, p. 12.
40. Craig Whitlock and Greg Miller, 'Paramilitary Force is Key For CIA', *Washington Post*, 23 September 2010, p. 1.
41. Secretary of Defense Gates and Chairman Mullen are quoted numerous times in Woodward, *op. cit.*, as admitting that they failed to present alternatives when different options were specifically demanded of them. Their advice reflects their professional judgment and they are obligated to give the president their unvarnished opinions. However, aside from throwaway non-options, the fact remains they were unable to think of a different approach. Their thinking was supported by a tremendous amount of analysis and intelligence, which one assumes was equally unable to articulate an alternative.
42. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
43. Lawrence Wright, 'The Rebellion Within: An Al Qaeda mastermind questions terrorism', *New Yorker*, 2 June 2008.
44. Noman Benotman, 'An Open Letter to Osama bin Laden', *Foreignpolicy.com*, 10 September 2010.
45. Karen De Younf *et al*, 'Taliban in High-level Talks with Karzai Govt, Sources Say', *Washington Post*, 6 October 2010.
46. *Der Spiegel*, 'Interview with Pervez Musharraf', 4 October 2010.

### **The Role of Media Operations (pp. 127–38)**

1. David Kilcullen, 'New Paradigms for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conflict', *Foreign Policy Agenda* (Vol. 12, No. 5, May 2007), p. 44.
2. Ayman Al-Zawahiri, July 2005. Letter intercepted by American intelligence.
3. British Army, 'British Army Field Manual: Countering Insurgency', October 2009, pp. 1–6.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–6.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–4.