

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AFGHAN SURGE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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2018

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 15-06-2018		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2017– JUN 2018	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Measuring the Effectiveness of the Afghan Surge				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) MAJ Christopher Wallgren				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama declared that the United States would deploy additional combat power to Afghanistan to reverse the momentum gained by the Taliban and associated insurgent networks. Despite nearly eight years of war at that point, deliberate campaign assessment had only begun in 2008. Assessments exist to help commanders better understand the nature of the current campaign and how it changes over time. With an immature assessment process at the beginning of the surge, ISAF was forced to rapidly adapt and improve. Several changes to the assessment process during the surge included the creation of the ISAF Joint Command Information Dominance Center and Afghan Assessment Group. These organizations slowly increased transparency, credibility, and relevance at the strategic level. Despite improvements at the strategic level, however, advances were not as significant at the tactical level. Ultimately the improved centralized assessment process used by ISAF at the close of the surge was more effective at helping the COMISAF better understand the operating environment. Though the system still depended on quantitative data and failed to push assessments down to tactical units, it provided GEN Allen a more robust picture than GEN McChrystal received two years prior.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Afghanistan, surge, assessments in combat, International Security Assistance Force, Afghan Assessment Group, Operation Enduring Freedom, counterinsurgency, doctrine, organizational change in combat					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
			(U)	108	

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE AFGHAN SURGE, by MAJ
Christopher J. Wallgren, 108 pages

On December 1, 2009, President Barack Obama declared that the United States would deploy additional combat power to Afghanistan to reverse the momentum gained by the Taliban and associated insurgent networks. Despite nearly eight years of war at that point, deliberate campaign assessment had only begun in 2008. Assessments exist to help commanders better understand the nature of the current campaign and how it changes over time. With an immature assessment process at the beginning of the surge, ISAF was forced to rapidly adapt and improve. Several changes to the assessment process during the surge included the creation of the ISAF Joint Command Information Dominance Center and Afghan Assessment Group. These organizations slowly increased transparency, credibility, and relevance at the strategic level. Despite improvements at the strategic level, however, advances were not as significant at the tactical level. Ultimately the improved centralized assessment process used by ISAF at the close of the surge was more effective at helping the COMISAF better understand the operating environment. Though the system still depended on quantitative data and failed to push assessments down to tactical units, it provided GEN Allen a more robust picture than GEN McChrystal received two years prior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project began out of a personal desire to better understand how my role as a platoon leader and executive officer fit into the bigger plan for Afghanistan from 2009 to 2012. More importantly, I wanted to be able to place the courage, dedication, and sacrifice of the men and women I worked alongside into the greater context of America's intensified war effort in Afghanistan. This thesis is ultimately dedicated to those great Americans, many of whom returned home to continue serving in uniform or begin a new chapter of life. Others sacrificed their very breath for their friends, family, country, and the mission.

I would also like to thank the following individuals who served this country either in the diplomatic, military, or civilian enterprise and provided their time and perspective during my research: Ambassador Ronald Neumann, MG Brian Mennes, COL Kimo Gallahue, COL Bret Van Popple, MAJ Jason Adler, Dr. Ben Connable, Dr. Seth Jones, and Dr. Adam Shilling. Also, this project would not have been possible without the continual support, guidance, and involvement of my research committee. To Mr. Ronald Staver, Dr. Donald Stephenson, and Mr. David Loch, thank you.

Lastly, my family gave me a never-ending source of inspiration and motivation to see this process through to the end. To my wife, Erika, thank you for urging me to pursue this degree and seek balance in the process. To Charlotte and Timothy, your countless hours of "working" alongside me ensured I never forgot the greater things in life.

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ACRONYMS

AAG	Afghan Assessment Group
ANSF	Afghan National Security Force
COIN	Counterinsurgency
COMISAF	ISAF Commander
DAM	District Assessment Model
EBA	Effects-Based Assessment
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
IED	Improvised Explosive Devices
IJC	ISAF Joint Command
IJCIDC	ISAF Joint Command Information Dominance Center
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
RC	Regional Commands

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In November of 2008, Senator Barack Obama won the Presidential election of the United States. Two of his priorities were to minimize American presence and responsibility in Iraq and reevaluate military strategy in Afghanistan. At the time, national focus centered on operations in Iraq where the surge of forces in 2006 and 2007 seemed to have achieved relatively positive results. Later, on 1 December 2009, President Obama declared that he would deploy “an additional thirty thousand U.S. troops to Afghanistan” at a speech given at the United States Military Academy.¹ That decision sought to strike balance between two divergent groups among his policy team. Vice President Joe Biden advanced an option of counterterrorism operations with limited numbers of special operations forces while the Department of Defense, supported by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, requested 40,000 additional Soldiers for prolonged counterinsurgency operations.²

The United States military had been operating in Afghanistan for approximately seven years at that point. Initially, operations in Afghanistan were viewed more favorably than operations in Iraq by the American population due to direct ties between the Taliban and al-Qaeda. But as the war continued, negative sentiment slowly increased. In 2004, 25

¹ James Gannon, *Obama's War: Avoiding a Quagmire in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 144.

² Ibid., 143.

percent of Americans polled believed that the war in Afghanistan was a mistake; in 2008, that number rose to 30 percent, and in 2010, it increased to 40 percent.³ President Obama faced increasing pressure domestically and internationally to achieve results.

To help reinvigorate the American effort in Afghanistan President Obama made several leadership changes in senior military positions. General David Petraeus assumed duties as Commander, Central Command from his previous role in Iraq. Lieutenant General Stanley McChrystal was promoted and given command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and United States Forces-Afghanistan. With Petraeus' assignment, the administration sought to apply a similar force increase and approach that was used in Iraq. It was hoped that his experience and vision would lead to increased stability and peace, allow improved governance and develop host nation capacity.⁴ General McChrystal's background in the special operations community was valued in the administration as it could balance both the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies held by the Biden camp and Department of Defense respectively.

An analysis of the surge in Afghanistan is extremely relevant to today's military and its preparedness for future contingencies. The nation continues to wage a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan with questionable improvement in security, stability, and host nation capacity. Also, potential adversaries around the world have been emboldened with the thought that they can defeat or attrit the United States through

³ Frank Newport, "More Americans Now View Afghanistan War as a Mistake," Gallup, 19 February 2014, accessed 7 March 2018, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/167471/americans-view-afghanistan-war-mistake.aspx>.

⁴ Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), 153.

unconventional means. It is a realistic assessment that the United States will fight small wars and unconventional conflict again in the future.

The current situation in Afghanistan is a product of years of strategy changes, political turnover, coalition uncertainty, and enemy actions. Military and political leaders seek to increase force presence to consolidate gains and increase Afghan capability. Insurgencies have manifested many times in history and Afghanistan will not be the last place U.S. policy is put to the test. Multi-domain battle and the threat of a near-peer force is shaping current military thinking and preparation. Balance and flexibility in military capability are important to meet the current need and prepare for an unknown future. As a force, the United States must not allow the hard-fought lessons from Afghanistan to be forgotten while preparing for the multi-domain near-peer battle. The nation cannot be shortsighted enough to fail at our current mission. The study of current and past counterinsurgency campaigns is valuable to the United States military and its preparation for future conflict. At a minimum, the Afghan experience is woven into the historical fabric of the nation and serves to provide insight for future political and military leadership.

Primary Research Question

Research Question: How did senior military leaders assess progress in Afghanistan during the troop surge of 2010-2011 and how did the assessment process improve over time?

Secondary Research Questions

1. What were the conditions of the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan prior to President Obama's decision to deploy 50,000 (21,000 agreed to initially with 30,000 surge forces) additional forces to the country?
2. Prior to the increase in troop presence did the United States employ centralized measures of effectiveness to gauge efforts and successes?
3. Were measures of performance nested at the tactical level to clearly demonstrate success or failure of measures of effectiveness?
4. What success was achieved through the new strategy, and was it built upon or squandered with future policy changes?

Assumptions

The first assumption is that an increase in military forces did initially produce positive results in various categories on the battlefield in Afghanistan, however gains were not effectively reported, analyzed, and tracked. The use of clear measures of effectiveness in tracking progress is very important. The population-centric counterinsurgency approach depends highly on protecting civilian centers, establishing legitimate government control, and defeating isolated insurgent forces. To execute the population-centric approach, commanders need to adjust troop levels to be able to protect the population, train host-nation forces, and defeat the insurgent. The other counterinsurgency (COIN) approach focuses primarily on destruction of the enemy force, with little emphasis on governance and impact to the population. These approaches to COIN are similar in that they both produce large amounts of data and metrics, but they vary greatly in respect to integration of the population to target the support base of an

insurgency. This research is not intended to favor one COIN approach over the other but will look at the assessment processes used to measure effectiveness of operations.

At the operational and tactical level forces face a daily dilemma; to execute combat operations and court the civilian populace. This is important to evaluate for practical and future waging of counterinsurgencies. If the force increase was successful and senior leaders did not effectively plan, implement and evaluate methods of effectiveness, military operations would begin to show limited results and potentially do more harm than good with the population. It is possible that success was not consolidated or communicated, forcing future commanders to revise campaign plans and assessment processes.

The second assumption in this study is that the United States will not stop fighting counterinsurgencies. The new Field Manual (FM) 3-0 *Operations* states that “while the U.S. Army must be manned, equipped, and trained to operate across the range of military operations, large-scale ground combat against a peer threat represents the most significant readiness requirement.”⁵ This statement reflects the focus and organizational energy that is currently being applied into training, force modernization, and doctrine. This thesis does not argue the necessity for continual preparation for near-peer conflict. On the contrary, it acknowledges potential for future counterinsurgency operations that can benefit from lessons learned in Afghanistan. The military must prepare for multi-domain battle against near-peer threats and be able to quickly transition to stability and counterinsurgency operations. Threats around the world have seen the level of success

⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2017), ix.

achieved by extremist networks in Afghanistan. Insurgencies are a great equalizer against a vastly superior power and will therefore be used by weaker opponents for the foreseeable future.

Definitions

Measure of Effectiveness

Department of Defense doctrine defines a measure of effectiveness as “a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect.”⁶ In counterinsurgency and stability operations measure of effectiveness are most often tied to population, host-nation military and government capacity, and impact on insurgent forces. Measures of effectiveness can change during a campaign or operation based on a myriad of reasons.

Measure of Performance

Department of Defense doctrine defines a measure of performance as “a criterion used to assess friendly actions that is tied to measuring task accomplishment.”⁷ A measure of performance links directly back to a measure of effectiveness. Effective measures of performance are established with criteria that describe the level of success or failure of stated actions. The level of success or failure of a measure of performance

⁶ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 2016), 1-61.

⁷ Ibid.

correlates directly to a measure of effectiveness. Commanders use measures of performance to gauge if measures of effectiveness are working or not.

International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)

The ISAF is NATO's military coalition operating in Afghanistan. Over time the number of countries that participate, and the level to which they contribute has risen and fallen based on strategy and the level of popular support. ISAF leadership has changed many times, not always in a positive and productive way. Two enduring priorities of ISAF are to separate insurgent forces from population centers and increase Afghan military capacity. Over time, international contributions of troops to ISAF have ebbed and flowed, and priorities and strategy have changed frequently. This thesis will evaluate the assessment processes used by ISAF to make decisions during the troop surge.

Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was put in place as the legitimate legislative body in place of the Taliban. Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan operates from Kabul and has a large task of demonstrating influence and capacity to a largely rural population while minimizing corruption. Government ministries face additional challenges due to the diverse population of tribes and ethnicities across the country. Chief U.S. interests in Afghanistan include reducing corruption, increasing ministry capacity, and strengthening the legitimacy of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Taliban (“Student”)

The Taliban began fighting for control of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, seeking to implement Sharia law. Its founder, Mullah Mohammed Omar and the heart of the majority Pashtun, Sunni Muslim movement extended influence out of Kandahar.⁸ The growth of the Taliban is linked to support from Pakistan, where young males are educated in religious schools, or madrasas and inspired to cross back into Afghanistan.⁹ After a long and bloody civil war, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in 1996 and imposed a harsh rule of law. Ultimately, their relationship with al-Qaeda, who executed the 9/11 attacks, led to the United States invasion of Afghanistan in early October 2001.

Al-Qaeda (“The Base”)

Al-Qaeda is a terrorist network created by Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. This organization had rudimentary beginnings in Afghanistan against Soviet invaders. The end of Desert Storm, with increased American basing throughout the Middle East, garnered the attention of Osama bin Laden. He viewed American presence primarily in Saudi Arabia as an insult to Islam. Al-Qaeda’s role in planning and resourcing the 9/11 attacks was the primary cause for the United States invasion of Afghanistan.

⁸ Seth G. Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008), 38.

⁹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State Building in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 40.

Limitations

The primary limitation for this project is the role of Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, specifically the 75th Ranger Regiment. First, it is highly likely that most information supporting research of the Ranger Regiment's actions remain classified. The classification of this thesis is UNCLASSIFIED so only research with the same level will be used. These criteria will be made clear in all correspondence with individuals for research. In the event any information is perceived to be SECRET or higher, I will not include it in the research and contact the installation security manager.

Delimitations

The scope of this thesis begins with the election of President Barack Obama on 5 November 2008. Afghanistan strategy gained a lot of attention during his campaign and once the election outcome was clear, his review of policy and strategy most likely intensified. The end period for this research is slightly less clear. At this point, 2012 is used as a benchmark. The initial published date to begin withdrawing surge forces was July, 2011. In June, 2011 President Obama announced a plan to withdraw the aggregate number of surge forces by the end of 2012.¹⁰

Conclusion

The goal of this research and thesis is to analyze a major shift in America's counterinsurgency strategy and its level of effectiveness. For nearly six years, combat

¹⁰ Ted Barrett, Alan Silverleib, and Barbara Starr, "Obama to Announce Plan to Pull 30,000 Troops out of Afghanistan," *CNN*, 21 June 2011, accessed 2 October 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/06/21/obama.afghanistan.troops/index.html>.

operations in Afghanistan were hindered as resources and focus centered on operations in Iraq. According to Ambassador Ronald Neumann, efforts in Iraq had a very clear negative effect on operations in Afghanistan. Senior leaders at the strategic level were forced to make tough economy-of-force decisions on resources and attention between Iraq and Afghanistan. Only receiving a trickle of troops and funding, some civilian and military leaders in Afghanistan lamented “what can we do today to not lose the war?”¹¹ After multiple reviews of strategic options and debate with civilian and military advisors, President Obama adjusted efforts back to Afghanistan, but with strings attached. One condition applied to the surge in military forces and other national resources was a specified expiration date. In his speech to the Corps of Cadets at the United States Military Academy, President Obama noted that American military presence would begin to withdraw from Afghanistan in July 2011.¹² The July 2011 withdrawal date was most likely specified to satisfy both surge supporters and Obama’s Democratic political base.¹³

I believe that frequent policy and strategy changes have kept the American military from achieving decisive victory in Afghanistan. One way to prevent or minimize similar trends in the future is to study the process in Afghanistan. By studying the successes or failures of strategic shifts in this case study, we can increase situational awareness of future planning requirements. Lastly, I am invested in this project as I

¹¹ Ambassador Ronald Neumann, telephone interview with author, 14 February 2018.

¹² Kevin Marsh, “Obama’s Surge: A Bureaucratic Politics Analysis of the Decision to Order a Troop Surge in Afghanistan,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 10, no. 3 (July 2014): 282.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 283.

participated in four deployments to Afghanistan from 2009 to 2012. There is a vast
expanse of doctrine and decision making between national policy and tactical action; for
me and the Soldiers I lead, the process is a personal one.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

First, our military and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners within Afghanistan are targeting the insurgency, working to secure key population centers, and increasing efforts to train Afghan security forces. These military resources will allow us to create the conditions to transition to Afghan responsibility. In July 2011, we will begin reducing our troops responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground. We will continue to advise and assist Afghanistan's Security Forces so that they can succeed over the long term.

— President Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (2010)

This statement by President Barack Obama from the 2010 *National Security Strategy* outlined his vision for America's comprehensive mission in Afghanistan. The remarks note that military action against insurgent forces are not ends in themselves, but rather a means to provide freedom of maneuver for Afghan government and military forces. The document goes on to illustrate the importance of diplomatic and political means in a comprehensive strategy, but unfortunately gives military leaders a clear end date for their requested force increase. The *National Security Strategy* of 2010 rightly placed emphasis on Afghan responsibility and capability but was shortsighted in its projected timetable.

In this literature review, we will discuss three areas from the overall body of knowledge to frame and analyze the primary research question: recent Afghan history, counterinsurgency thought and doctrine, and military campaign analysis. Each of these topics is necessary to provide context to the situation in Afghanistan leading up to the surge, deployment of the additional forces, and most importantly, the assessment of effectiveness of tactical action and its integration to operational and strategic vision.

To understand the challenges and opportunities inherent to a military strategy in Afghanistan it is important to review history. An in-depth history of Afghanistan, with ancient culture and numerous tribal and ethnic intricacies cannot be adequately discussed in this document, but several salient points can be derived from the last four decades. External influences are prevalent and powerful, tribal structures are the primary power base among the diverse population, and geography complicates an already difficult situation.

Afghanistan has a rich and complicated history that has been influenced heavily by outside actors. Several external influences include military greats; Alexander the Great, Genghis Kan, and Tamerlane to massive industrialized empires such as Great Britain, Russia, and the United States.¹⁴ Numerous invasions have created a culture of militant tribes that unite to thwart common external enemies.

In 1893, the British empire established a rough border between Afghanistan and British India known as the Durand Line.¹⁵ The line is the officially recognized border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, splitting two major Pashtun populations. While its employment created two separate sovereign nations, the adjacent populations maintain close ethnic ties not easily contained.¹⁶ This arbitrary boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan destabilizes both sovereign nations. Afghanistan sought in earnest to consolidate

¹⁴ Lewis G. Irwin, *Disjointed Ways, Disunified Means: Learning From America's Struggle to Build an Afghan Nation* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2012), 8.

¹⁵ Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Durand Line," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed 11 November 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Durand-Line>.

¹⁶ Felbab-Brown, 191.

Pashtun tribes from Pakistan's western region after the division with India in 1947.¹⁷ This effort failed, and ethnic Pashtuns continue to impact stability in eastern Afghanistan and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas.

Political Scientist Seth G. Jones authored *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan*, a well-received historical account of conditions that led to the Soviet invasion in 1979 and later tribal warfare, Taliban control, and ultimately, American intervention. Jones is a former senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation and served as a USSOCOM representative to the assistant secretary of defense for special operations among many other high profile counterinsurgency advisory positions.¹⁸ He is currently the director of the Transnational Threats Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.¹⁹ Jones weaves personal experience from his time in Afghanistan with expertise in political science, counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism. In the introduction to his book, Jones states that "U.S. military and diplomatic officials were also well aware of Afghanistan's history" but that "the central tragedy of the American experience in Afghanistan is the way this history was disregarded."²⁰

¹⁷ Irwin, 11.

¹⁸ Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Seth G. Jones," accessed 17 March 2018, <https://www.csis.org/people/seth-g-jones>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), xxvii.

The current turmoil in Afghanistan began in 1973 when Mohammed Daoud forced his brother-in-law, King Zahir Shah into exile.²¹ Daoud struggled to maintain control of competing elements during this turbulent time. Eventually internal division among his military leaders proved too disruptive and in 1977 the Communist Party of Afghanistan rose to power. The following year President Daoud Kahn was assassinated and Nur Mohammad Taraki rose to power, deepening the Soviet Union's entanglement with the political process there.²² In 1979, Hafizullah Amin, Taraki's assistant seizes power and orders his execution.²³ Soviet leaders feared American intervention and assistance so close to their border, providing rationale for a major invasion to restore security. This extension of the Great Game resulted in Russia's ten-year occupation which started in December of 1979. Before the end of that year, Amin was killed by Soviet operatives and replaced with Babrak Karmal.²⁴ President Babrak Karmal remained in power until 1986 when he is replaced by Muhammad Najibullah.²⁵

Soviet forces utilized aggressive and hard-handed tactics that alienated much of the population and horrified the international community. Their early success would not last and dissent quickly united many of the tribes in the primarily rural, mountainous territory. Opposition to Russian atrocities led to the mobilization of mujahideen forces

²¹ Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 25.

²² Irwin, 12.

²³ Jones, *In The Graveyard of Empires*, xii.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

that operated effectively against a superior combined arms force. American support to the mujahideen in the form of financial aid and military advisors flowed into Afghanistan under the supervision of Pakistani intelligence officials in Islamabad.

With the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989, Afghanistan descended into a dark period of civil war. The human toll of the fighting against the Soviet Union was vast. It is estimated that 1,000,000 Afghan civilians were killed with an additional 8,000,000 displaced civilians.²⁶ As yet another external threat was gone, multiple internal powers fought to avenge past ethnic wrongdoing and unite the country under their respective ideologies. The 1990s saw rampant civil war amongst the various ethnic groups. There were two major factions, Pashtun forces primarily from the south and east and a coalition of Hazarra, Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek tribes. Control of Kabul and its suburbs ebbed and flowed between the two sides and periods of unspeakable persecution were common.²⁷

The violent backdrop and ethnic diversity of Afghanistan is also complicated by the three competing forms of rule in the land: *Sharia* law, *jurga*, and constitutional law.²⁸ This creates an overwhelming problem for any centralized form of government. *Sharia* law is the universal Islamic law that first made its way through Afghanistan in 642 AD.²⁹ The *jurga* is traditional law maintained at the village and tribal level and represents the

²⁶ Jones, *In The Graveyard of Empires*, xxvii.

²⁷ Felbab-Brown, 121.

²⁸ Irwin, 23.

²⁹ Ibid.

most powerful form of rule. Constitutional law fluctuates based on the existing ruler and its control lessens outside of large population centers controlled by a central government. Afghanistan and its people have experienced constant violence and upheaval for the majority of its modern history. Generations of Afghans have lived in an environment that fosters radicalization due to a lack of structure, law, and peace. Lack of education and unemployment propel the population toward instability. However, despite bloody ethnic tensions throughout Afghanistan, the presence of external actors historically served to unite the tribes against a common threat.

Further complicating the path to stability and peace in Afghanistan are tribal affiliations and structures. The tribe is the dominant source of power and legitimacy in this ethnically diverse country. The south and east are dominated by Pashtun tribes as they account for 40 percent of Afghanistan's population.³⁰ The north is largely populated by Tajiks, Hazaras, Turkmen, and Uzbeks. The Tajik ethnic sub group accounts for approximately 27 percent of the population.³¹ The various tribes operate autonomously and tend not to recognize centralized rule. This conundrum of ethnic affiliations becomes even more complicated as tribes are broken down into local "kinship loyalties [that] are often more powerful and politically relevant."³² For example, the majority of Afghanistan's population is Pashtun, which can then be subdivided into the Popalzai,

³⁰ David Romano, Brian Calfano, and Robert Phelps, "Successful and Less Successful Interventions: Stabilizing Iraq and Afghanistan," *International Studies Perspectives* 16, no. 4 (2015): 401.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Durrani, and Ghilzai sub-tribes. Afghan President Karzai is Popalzai while his cabinet is dominated by Durrani, and the Taliban recruit heavily from the Ghilzai.³³

The porous border with Pakistan poses a grave challenge for American strategy and is a great destabilizer for Afghan forces and government legitimacy. The border stretches through rugged mountainous terrain and is extremely hard to secure. Due to national caveats and the recognition of a sovereign Pakistan, ISAF forces are not permitted to conduct operations across the border. On its side of the line, Pakistan conducts occasional offensives against concentrations of fighters seeking refuge in the border territories. However, the limited nature of the operations and ambivalence of Pakistani leaders “reflects the persistent view of the Pakistani military-intelligence establishment that the jihadi groups are critical assets in preventing” a strong relationship between Kabul and New Delhi.³⁴ Thus, border security is a critical step in achieving stability and securing the population in Afghanistan. There are many routes into Pakistan facilitate insurgent fighters’ support zone which allows training, refit, and a fundamentalist ideological base. Both the Bush and Obama administrations recognized this issue and sought a balance of economic aid to Pakistan and precision military drone strikes in an effort to lessen the freedom of maneuver of Taliban and foreign fighter elements.

Afghanistan’s history is extremely lengthy and complex. The literature review seeks to determine aspects of Afghan history that shaped the environment leading up to

³³ Romano, Calfano, and Phelps, 401.

³⁴ Felbab-Brown, 196.

2009. There is no challenge in finding sources of Afghan history as there is a wealth of knowledge already published. The information is unbiased and well written as a whole. However, one challenge to discussing history is determining what is important enough to write about and what can be left for the reader to study at a later time. Recent Afghan history is important to better understand the challenges of establishing law and order, a legitimate government, and competent military force capable of defending that centralized government.

History and culture helped shape President Obama's understanding of the Afghan problem and compilation of a strategy to solve it. The issue at hand in my research is not if he, General McChrystal, or any other leaders implemented the correct strategy but how did they conceptualize a problem, align resources, and measure success. A challenge for observers and individuals is that history is interpreted differently by various actors and vastly different conclusions are drawn. Humans apply their past experiences and biases in drawing those conclusions and Afghanistan is no different.

In combatting insurgencies, "the expected result—final defeat of the insurgents—is not an addition but a multiplication of these various operations [military, political, police and judiciary]; they all are essential and if one is nil, the product will be zero."³⁵ This stark warning by David Galula in his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* informs us that countering insurgencies and small wars is hard dirty business that requires a whole-of-government approach. More importantly, his statement

³⁵ David Galula, "From Strategy to Tactics," in *Chewing Sand: A Process for Understanding Counterinsurgency Operations*, 2nd ed., ed. James Spies (New York: McGraw Hill Learning Solutions, 2008), 219.

articulates the importance of measuring the variables in the equation (military, political, police, and judiciary) and constantly adjusting those efforts to achieve success.

This thesis will focus on the military aspect of Galula's equation. The United States military has invested much organizational energy in updating doctrine and training for small wars since 2006. The process of rewriting FM 3-24 was a result of the rise of the Iraqi insurgency and the lessons learned in that fight as well as historical cases such as Malaya, Vietnam, Algeria, and others. Those lessons were codified in new manuals and brought into practice in both Iraq and later Afghanistan.

The creation of the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual* was an influential step in counterinsurgency doctrine. Its authors note in 1940 that "there is a sad lack of authoritative texts on the methods employed in small wars."³⁶ Small wars are defined loosely as an operation "which does not involve a major effort in regular warfare against a first-rate power."³⁷ Nations and militaries have fought counterinsurgencies to varying levels of success; no one experience is the same and applying a checklist will not guarantee victory. Authors of the *Small Wars Manual* go further to inform current (as of 1940) and future military leaders that "although small wars present a special problem requiring particular tactical and technical measures, the immutable principles of war remain the basis of these operations and require the greatest ingenuity in their

³⁶ US Department of the Navy (DON), Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-15, *Small Wars Manual* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

application.”³⁸ This advice is applicable to the rapidly changing conflicts that our military has participated in. Many facets of the operating environment change, but we must be able to execute operations against an armed enemy and protect the population.

The study of counterinsurgencies gained a large following among the military profession and academia since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the body of knowledge increased. In this portion of the literature review, I will discuss how the body of knowledge has changed since 2001, the fundamentals of American counterinsurgency and stability doctrine, and application to the surge in Afghanistan.

Counterinsurgencies are not new concepts for the United States military. The first instance of this type of warfare was the Philippine Insurrection that ensued after the Spanish American War. Ultimately the United States was drawn into war with Spain, one that appeared to start an era of colonial acquisition. It is noted that “at no time . . . did the principal actors at the time . . . consider the long-term implications of the decision that they were making in order to deal with the immediate military circumstances.”³⁹

After Spain was defeated, American and Filipino goals were incompatible and relations with the rebel leader Emilio Aguinaldo deteriorated. Intense fighting ensued from 1899 to 1904 and Aguinaldo’s guerilla tactics initially caused great frustration which, “in turn, distorted American strategy.”⁴⁰ American military leaders struggled heavily with both the physical and human terrain of the Philippines and demonstrated

³⁸ DON, FMFRP 12-15, 8.

³⁹ Wayne Bert, *American Military Intervention in Unconventional War From the Philippines to Iraq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 57.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

early on the challenges of counterinsurgency. One American general, Jacob H. Smith, exacerbated insurgent support by issuing orders such as “the more you kill and the more you burn the better you will please me . . . I want all persons killed who are capable of bearing arms.”⁴¹ The ensuing counterinsurgency faced by the American military displayed the challenges that go into adapting during conflict. After several years American leaders began to understand that success came only as insurgents were isolated from the population.

The Vietnam War made a tremendous impact on the United States in general and the military specifically. Literature on the Vietnam War is extensive in its scope and very passionate. There is much debate that surrounds the American military experience in Vietnam and impact that it made on the future professional force. Many of today’s senior military and political leaders grew up in the tumultuous times during and immediately after the war. Those experiences helped shape the world view of many future professional officers that led large formations in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

One widely circulated and read work on Vietnam is *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* by Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr. In it, Summers argues that the ultimate reason for failure in Vietnam was not linked to tactical or operational shortcomings, but due to “commit[ting] the Army without first committing the American people.”⁴² He went on to conclude that “such a commitment would require battlefield competence and clear-cut objectives to be sustained, but without the commitment of the

⁴¹ Bert, 68.

⁴² Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 1982), 13.

American people the commitment of the Army to prolonged combat was impossible.”⁴³ The cause of the outcome of the war in Vietnam is often blamed on failures in the field, especially in execution of counterinsurgency tactics. However, Summers advances that the will of the American people, in relation to Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity, was never strong enough to decisively win in southeast Asia.

On Strategy’s comprehensive analysis made such an impact on the post-Vietnam force that General Edward Meyer, the Chief of Staff, provided copies “to all army active and retired three-and four-star generals” and Newt Gingrich sent copies to “all members of the House and Senate.”⁴⁴ It appears that this book was well-received by many different groups, from Vietnam veterans, to politicians, and academics. After a glowing review from the *New York Times*, *On Strategy* became a course text across many undergraduate programs in the United States.⁴⁵

On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War is extremely well written and offers a comprehensive assessment of the American experience, however, the author makes a general statement in the foreword that causes concern. Summers informs the reader that “the key to understanding our failure did not lie in counterinsurgency theory, but in the long-since-discarded theories of conventional war.”⁴⁶ Although the arguments in support of U.S. tactical successes are compelling, professional officers must apply a

⁴³ Summers, 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xii.

⁴⁵ Ibid., xiii.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

greater degree of scrutiny to the effectiveness of counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam. By denying any connection of failure in Vietnam to understanding of counterinsurgency theory, perhaps his statement reflects the failure itself; the inability to admit that counterinsurgency operations could have been done better.

Douglas Blaufarb details a challenge for American forces in Vietnam in *CORDS in Charge: Vietnam, 1967-1972*. The challenge was consolidating military gains, whether against conventional or insurgent forces, while simultaneously increasing host nation government effectiveness. He argued that throughout the Vietnam War, American policymakers “were convinced that stability was the first requirement for progress in any other field and therefore refrained from a persistent and determined attempt to force the Thieu regime in the desired direction, pinning their hopes on persuasion and on a gradual evolution toward democratic norms which never materialized.”⁴⁷ Without an increasingly capable government in South Vietnam, Blaufarb suggests that American counterinsurgency efforts were predestined to fall short.

Unfortunately, Vietnam was not the last time the United States would experience the challenges of countering an insurgency. After the invasion of Iraq was complete, the situation deteriorated into a growing insurgency that had to be dealt with.⁴⁸ General

⁴⁷ Douglas S. Blaufarb, “CORDS in Charge: Vietnam, 1967-1972,” in *Chewing Sand: A Process for Understanding Counterinsurgency Operations*, ed. James Spies (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 393.

⁴⁸ Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 94.

George Casey was nominated as the Commander of U.S. Forces, Iraq in June 2004.⁴⁹ Upon visiting the Army Chief of Staff, General Schoomaker, he was given a copy of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife* by John Nagl. Nagl's work "was the first book he'd ever read about counterinsurgency. He found it interesting, but not interesting enough to seek out a second book."⁵⁰ This anecdote highlights the shortsighted planning in 2003 and 2004 that allowed insurgency to spread and strengthen. Counterinsurgency operations are a piece of the range of military operations but require a different mindset than high intensity offensive and defensive tasks.

American counterinsurgency doctrine experienced an overhaul in 2006. LTG David Petraeus chaired a working group of cultural experts, military officers, senior policy advisors, and reporters over several days at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.⁵¹ As the Commander of the Combined Arms Center and an advocate for counterinsurgency doctrine, LTG Petraeus sought to incorporate a diverse group of experts to create a comprehensive way ahead for the United States military. Not only was doctrine being updated but training itself was changing to reflect the nature of the conflict in Iraq. Petraeus noted several significant updates across the Army; students at the Command and General Staff Course received additional hours of counterinsurgency fundamentals and the combat training centers transitioned away from decisive action and focused on

⁴⁹ Josh White, "Gen. Casey Named to Head Forces in Iraq," *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2004, A24, accessed 18 March 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A44662-2004Jun15.html>.

⁵⁰ Kaplan, 96.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

counterinsurgency missions in an attempt to prepare conventional brigades for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵²

David Galula, David Kilcullen, John Nagl, and Frank Kitson are four notable authors of counterinsurgency theory. Their backgrounds and experiences reach from post-World War II to the present. Each individual has published multiple works on warfare and their collective work adds to the body of knowledge.

Galula experienced insurgencies firsthand in China, the Balkans, Malaya, and Algeria.⁵³ LTG Petraeus read his book *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* when he was a cadet and it immediately made an impact on him. The content of Galula's book likened insurgencies to "a fight between a fly and a lion" in that each side fights in a way that benefits their respective capabilities.⁵⁴ This early reading was influential on Petraeus at an early time in his career and would later shape his methodology for dismantling insurgencies.

Kilcullen is a former Australian army officer, a contemporary thinker on counterinsurgency who worked within the American political and military establishment and continues to advise, write, and research the topic. His perspective would prove important to GEN David Petraeus' strategy in Iraq during that surge. LTC Kilcullen first rose to notoriety in 2004 when he spoke at the "Irregular Warfare Conference" in Quantico, Virginia. His thesis was that irregular wars "should be called regular wars; the

⁵² White, 154.

⁵³ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.

only reason they were called irregular was the establishment army didn't want to fight them.”⁵⁵ To Kilcullen, American leadership was unprepared and unwilling to fight insurgencies with populations in mind, they were more apt to apply the standard kinetic metrics and end states. This was particularly disheartening since Kilcullen had experienced insurgency firsthand as a young advisor to Indonesian Special Forces fighting in East Timor.⁵⁶

Nagl is best known for his dissertation *Learning to Eat Soup With a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*. He established a longstanding relationship with Petraeus when he was a cadet assigned to the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe during the summer of 1987.⁵⁷ This relationship would later bring the two together again at Fort Leavenworth during the counterinsurgency doctrine working group. The formative event that shaped Nagl's view of the future of warfare occurred during a rotation at the National Training Center. After participating in Operation Desert Storm, he believed that no foreign power was capable of matching American armor.⁵⁸ As Nagl's armor operated during the training event, he initially achieved similar success, until the opposing force changed tactics and fought dismounted. His company failed miserably in that environment and he began to contemplate enemies

⁵⁵ White, 88.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 36.

of the future.⁵⁹ While Nagl continued work on his dissertation, he learned that the United States Army was not only ill-prepared for small, unconventional wars, but that there was a lack of concern and understanding among senior leaders. This issue is best described in a quote from the former chief of operations in Vietnam, General William DePuy, that he “should have studied human nature and the history of Vietnam and of revolutions, and should have known it, but I didn’t.”⁶⁰

LTC Frank Kitson was a British infantry officer that gained experience in Kenya’s Mau Mau rebellion and in the Malaya insurgency.⁶¹ Kitson was well known for developing methods of intelligence collection and analysis at the local police level. This information would then be shared with military security forces that targeted Mau Mau insurgent groups.⁶² LTC Kitson participated in a planning conference known as the April 1962 Symposium with 11 other notable civilian and military experts including David Galula. The RAND-sponsored symposium was intended to assist the Kennedy administration refine its anti-Communist strategy in Vietnam as American commitment was slowly increasing.⁶³ Kitson was later quoted saying “we had no difficulty in making our views understood to each other, we had mostly been unable to get our respective

⁵⁹ White, 37.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁶¹ Stephen T. Hosmer and Sibylle O. Crane, *Counterinsurgency: A Symposium, April 16-20, 1962* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2006), xx.

⁶² Ibid., xx.

⁶³ Ibid., iii.

armies to hoist in the message.”⁶⁴ This sentiment demonstrates the trend that small wars and counterinsurgency operations can be difficult to translate to political and public audiences.

American counterinsurgency doctrine and its transformation over time contribute to understanding the contemporary operating environment of this work. Doctrine must be thorough, updated, and understood across the military as it “promotes mutual understanding and enhances effectiveness during operations.”⁶⁵ The United States military was ill prepared for understanding the complexities of an insurgency. The process of training for, and participating in a counterinsurgency fight must be deliberate, but our military was forced to expedite that process out of necessity. This literature review found that the issue with doctrine was not necessarily in content, but in dissemination and understanding across the force. There are several manuals that I will reference, namely the Marine Corps’ *Small Wars Manual* and the Army’s FM 3-24 *Counterinsurgency* (2006) and *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (dated May 2014). Several other resources greatly add to the context of energizing the military to embrace counterinsurgency doctrine and employment at the tactical level.

Counterinsurgency theory and the officers that advanced it were not embraced by everyone in the military. There are several outspoken critics of the doctrine and those who advertise it as a simple formula for success. One opponent in particular, COL (Ret.)

⁶⁴ Hosmer and Crane, iv.

⁶⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2012), vi.

Gian Gentile wrote *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* from his personal perspective as a former squadron commander in Iraq. Gentile's argument is that while counterinsurgency is a valid effort on the range of military operations, the military establishment must avoid oversimplifying historical vignettes and current operations. He discusses the risk involved with deducing a general formula from Malaya, Algeria, Vietnam, or elsewhere and applying that to Afghanistan, Iraq, or future operations. COL (Ret.) Gentile urges that "the example of Malaya is often cited by those who believe that there is a template to follow for "winning" in Iraq. Such reductionist templates are seductive because they offer easy-to-understand solutions for complex problems."⁶⁶ Complexities of culture, politics, and geography make each case unique and in COL (Ret.) Gentile's opinion, the American pursuit of counterinsurgency strategy is often deficient or misplaced.

In his book, Gentile comes across as bitter and strongly against the current of popular belief in counterinsurgency strategy. I agree that military leaders must beware of applying "reductionist templates," but those historical case studies are important starting points for formulating strategy. Senior leaders must apply critical thinking when reviewing history and use conclusions responsibly in shaping operational approaches to current problems.

The third and final portion to the literature review is campaign analysis and counterinsurgency metrics. Military campaign analysis is critical to any operation in order to gauge progress measured against a predetermined end state. The process of

⁶⁶ Gian Gentile, *Wrong Turn: America's Deadly Embrace of Counterinsurgency* (New York: The New Press, 2013), 23.

analyzing success or failure at the tactical and operational level allows senior leaders to modify strategy. Senior military leaders receive input from the political domain as well as intelligence from lower echelon commands that both feed that process. The assessment of counterinsurgency operations is inherently challenging because it often incorporates input along lines of effort that military units do not traditionally train.

In 2012, RAND published *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*, authored by Ben Connable. The purpose of the book was to assist staffs, commanders, and policy makers in their effort to improve assessments in counterinsurgency operations.⁶⁷ Connable recommends that assessment processes strive to meet seven standards of rigor: transparent, credible, relevant, balanced, analyzed, congruent, and parsimonious.⁶⁸ He concludes that in 2010, ISAF could not adequately achieve any of them.⁶⁹ Connable, a former U.S. Marine intelligence officer, is a well-respected researcher for the RAND Corporation and conducts research on assessments and metrics.⁷⁰ He believes an assessment “serve[s] a dual purpose in that it tells the story of a campaign while also helping to shape ongoing operations by informing operational and tactical commanders.”⁷¹ Connable addresses the condition of Afghanistan strategy assessment in particular, that “a thorough review of the assessment literature available

⁶⁷ Connable, iii.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 169.

⁷⁰ RAND Corporation, “Ben Connable, Senior Political Scientist,” accessed 4 March 2018, https://www.rand.org/about/people/c/connable_ben.html.

⁷¹ Connable, 1.

through early 2011 revealed no effort to comprehensively address COIN assessment.”⁷² This does not mean that military planners did not use assessment criteria, but highlights shortcomings in their use from the strategic to tactical levels.

Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency is a definitive work on campaign analysis and counterinsurgency assessments. In the book, Connable “argues that the already daunting challenges faced by military staffs assessing conventional war are exacerbated many times over in COIN.”⁷³ He goes into great detail about assessment and intelligence analysis, how conventional and unconventional assessments differ, and how those efforts often fall short in counterinsurgencies. The United States Army utilizes the effects-based operations process, which is “an approach to military planning and operations that focuses on the precise and accurate production and assessment of effects with the intent of improving military performance.”⁷⁴ Effects-based operations feed the effects-based assessment (EBA) process which “is a system of quantitative measurement. It measures effects and performance by collecting and then sorting indicators.”⁷⁵ This method of collecting, analyzing, and assessing information is intended for conventional high intensity conflict. Connable dissects the shortcomings of

⁷² Connable, 1.

⁷³ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 66.

applying EBA to counterinsurgencies. He concludes that “complexity, chaos, and the absence of clear and comprehensive data” limit the effectiveness of EBA in COIN.⁷⁶

Connable’s *Embracing the Fog of War* skillfully links American assessment efforts in Vietnam to those in Afghanistan. It details the paths that both conflicts experienced with respect to assessments and their reliance on statistics, limited narratives, and public perception. *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* will be a valuable starting point and guide to analysis of surge forces in Afghanistan. The book minimizes bias and is derived from years of experience in academia, service on assessment panels and staff, and personal experience in Afghanistan and the greater Middle East. Connable incorporates research derived from interviewing and working with key military leaders, ISAF staff members, embassy and interagency officials, and Afghan representatives into his analysis of assessment processes. His findings balance the tenets of joint and service doctrine with recommendations for improving the sub-set of counterinsurgency analysis.

Stephen Downes-Martin is a professor at the Naval War College with extensive experience observing and assisting assessment staffs and commanders from the tactical level to ISAF and ISAF Joint Command headquarters.⁷⁷ In 2011 he authored a report on the state of ISAF’s efforts titled “Operations Assessment in Afghanistan is Broken: What is to Be Done?” Downes-Martin and Connable offer similar evaluations of the ISAF process and often appear cited in the same works. Downes-Martin is quick to clarify that

⁷⁶ Connable, 77.

⁷⁷ Stephen Downes-Martin, “Operations Assessment in Afghanistan is Broken: What is to be Done?” *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 4 (Fall 2011): 103.

“it is extraordinary how well” military leaders and staffs have done creating assessment processes under combat conditions, but that it is imperative “to identify and fix the flaws . . . without apportioning blame or criticism.”⁷⁸ The article is pertinent to this research because it details the process and shortcomings associated with the District Assessment Model (DAM) that is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. The DAM was used by ISAF headquarters during the early stages of the surge and relied heavily on overly aggregated shaded maps that reduced the “transparency and accuracy” of information.⁷⁹

In the conclusion of “Operations Assessment in Afghanistan is Broken,” Downes-Martin argues for more rigorous analysis of commander’s intent and the connections between subordinate objectives and a desired end state.⁸⁰ To increase the utility of assessments, higher headquarters must be attentive to the capabilities of the lower echelon and provide broad guidance for monitoring and collection versus overly specific metrics. Ideally, the process should be comprehensive and disseminate initiative as far as possible. In turn, higher headquarters can then make more informative recommendations to commanders through narrative reports.⁸¹

Another excellent source of first-hand ISAF knowledge is a very insightful article titled “A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency” authored by Dr. Jonathan

⁷⁸ Downes-Martin, 104.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 120.

⁸¹ Ibid., 121.

Schroden and a team of researchers in 2013. The research was based on Schroden's personal involvement to develop a new assessment process under GEN Allen, the Commander of ISAF, in 2011.⁸² This scholarly article will prove to be very beneficial to the research due to its relatively recent application at ISAF, comprehensive viewpoints from multiple contributing authors, and perspective of professionals that were personally involved in the process development. Schroden and his counterparts clearly explain the ISAF assessment paradigm leading up to 2011, what elements they sought to change, and if that change was helpful to the commander. The team of researchers, scientists, and consultants applied GEN Allen's guidance to be "revolutionary, vice evolutionary" and modified former Afghan Assessment Group (AAG) processes.⁸³ They increased the role of the commander's narrative to add context to any products used by subordinate commands. The team also incorporated graphics that more clearly communicated causal relationships of data across lines of effort. The primary drawback of this piece is that it could potentially be biased, as Schroden seeks to advance his personal assessment paradigm. It appears to rely heavily on the positives of the assessment process and only briefly mention the drawbacks. Despite this partial bias, the resource is extremely detailed, insightful, and offers a first-hand account of ISAF assessments in 2010 and 2011.

⁸² Jonathan Schroden, Rebecca Thomasson, Randy Foster, Mark Lukens, and Richard Bell, "A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency," *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (2013): 5.

⁸³ Ibid.

Jones, a former RAND senior political scientist details counterinsurgency metrics and evaluations in his work *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*. His book is not only worthwhile for the historical context, but it offers a counterpoint to theorists such as Galula while evaluating effective counterinsurgency metrics. Jones discusses the “fallacy of external actors” in detail. The fallacy of external actors states that “most assessments of counterinsurgency operations tend to ignore or downplay the role of indigenous forces” and focus almost exclusively on what will make the “outside forces” better able to combat the insurgency.⁸⁴ The book does not attempt to detract the important work and experience of Galula, Kitson, and others, but seeks to reconcile the importance of balancing external and internal counterinsurgent capabilities. A practical reason for increasing host nation capabilities is statistical evidence offered by the author. He notes that “approximately 25 percent of insurgencies won by the government and 11 percent won by insurgents last more than 20 years.”⁸⁵ Insurgencies are not easily won, especially when the focus is on the external power. Metrics and assessments must offer a clear picture of indigenous capabilities in training and fielding a force that can combat insurgent forces long after an external force has removed direct support.

An additional source on assessments is “Strategic Assessment and Adaptation: The Surges in Iraq and Afghanistan” by Frank G. Hoffman and G. Alexander Crowther. “Strategic Assessment and Adaptation” offers a very comprehensive look at the history of the assessment process in the American military, focusing primarily on parallels with the

⁸⁴ Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 10.

Vietnam War. The authors determine that the American process in Vietnam “was oversimplified in one sense by body counts and kill ratios but was also confused by an overabundance of sources and myriad metrics.”⁸⁶ This document highlights challenges common to COIN assessment, including external and internal actors (regular and/or irregular forces), the civilian population, and governance capability.

Hoffman and Crowther determine that President Obama made a deliberate decision to create a “hybrid” course of action for adapting the Afghan surge option, blending the need to affect the Taliban and al ’Qaida, protect the population, and increase governance. Surge forces would number 30,000, with an option for 3,000 additional troops, there would be a timetable of July 2011 for a conditions-based withdrawal, and most importantly, the mission was no longer the “defeat of the insurgency” but a “disruption of the Taliban and its effectiveness.”⁸⁷

The American experience in Afghanistan has an extensive body of knowledge, ranging from historical works and personal accounts to policy and strategy reviews. Counterinsurgency theory is also well represented in academia with a wide range of opinions and beliefs. Campaign analysis and assessments is the area with the least robust body of knowledge. Although there is less written about analysis and assessments, the sources which I discuss are very timely, well-researched, and comprehensive. Writings on counterinsurgency are often based on personal experiences and can therefore be biased

⁸⁶ Frank G. Hoffman and G. Alexander Crowther, “Strategic Assessment and Adaptation: The Surges in Iraq and Afghanistan,” in *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, eds. Joseph Collins and Richard Hooker (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2015), 91.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 120.

at points. The war in Afghanistan in particular can evoke partisan views from authors, requiring thoughtful and deliberate interpretation by the researcher. Overall, the large amount of previous work on the history of Afghanistan, counterinsurgency doctrine, and campaign analysis is well done and beneficial to clarifying the overall research question.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The ultimate purpose of American forces in Afghanistan has not changed since the war began. American operations are ultimately intended to disrupt terrorist organizations aimed at inflicting harm on the homeland and its people. With this truth in mind, American and international partner forces have shifted their approach over time due to factors such as national strategic goals, resources, leader turn-over, and enemy situation. Troop numbers ebbed and flowed and their focus shifted between protecting the Afghan population and targeting insurgent and terrorist networks.

This chapter will detail the qualitative case study methodology as well as the oral history process. It will provide clarity on the process for selecting individuals, types of questions asked, and how the researcher plans to arrive at conclusions. The researcher will utilize a qualitative case study method for this research topic. As noted by respected author Robert E. Stake, “the case is an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system.”⁸⁸ A qualitative case study offers the researcher the ability to define the situation in Afghanistan as an internal system with components, parts, actors, and influences, each of which can be observed. Within the larger scope of qualitative case studies, this particular research fits into the realm of intrinsic case study. In an intrinsic case study, the researcher has curiosity about a specific issue. My experiences in Afghanistan with the United States Army helped

⁸⁸ Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 2.

shape my adult life, and for that reason I want to learn more. This is opposed to an instrumental case study where a researcher studies a case specifically to learn about a different system.⁸⁹ The goal of this case study is not to make a staggering discovery that changes the nature of counterinsurgency warfare, but to achieve better personal understanding of the specified time period, and possibly share that knowledge with the professional military. In case study research, “seldom is an entirely new understanding reached but refinement of understanding is.”⁹⁰ Operations in Afghanistan are currently ongoing and the body of knowledge regarding the primary research question is large and complex. Through this case study, the researcher aims to improve future operational analysis and measurement.

The primary role internal to the research of this work is constructivist. This role “does not require the researcher to avoid delivering generalizations. But a constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing.”⁹¹ Throughout the course of research, it is critical to maintain subjectivity despite my personal experience. Experiences can assist by creating passion for a topic and clarifying understanding of the case in general, but it can also unintentionally limit the scope of topics, findings, and conclusions.

The researcher will strengthen the findings of a qualitative case study analysis with oral history. Interviews with knowledgeable civilian and military leaders will

⁸⁹ Stake, 3.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁹¹ Ibid., 102.

provide context to recent experience that is lacking in other primary and secondary sources. Participants in the oral history interviews will be classified into one of four categories, Military Leaders (mid-level), Military Leaders (senior), Political/Interagency Leaders, and Academic/Researcher. For the purpose of this research, mid-level leader is defined as Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel between January 2010 and July 2011. Senior leader is Brigadier General and above between January 2010 and July 2011.

The goal is to interview two to four individuals per category. The sample size for each category does not affect outcome of the research. During the course of preparation for oral history interviews, all questions were reviewed and ultimately approved by Dr. Thomas E. Hanson, Director of the Military History Department at the Command and General Staff Officer Course. Hanson provided overarching guidance that interviews were considered Oral History as long as information obtained was not used to make recommendations for future COIN strategy. Ms. Bobbie J. Murray, the Human Protections Administrator, also reviewed the lines of questioning to ensure they satisfied International Review Board standards.

Every participant in this oral history research signed a waiver outlining their rights and expectations. An individual can choose to contribute anonymously or for-attribution and can retract their participation in the study at any time. Questions are open ended to allow more detailed responses that can naturally cover larger areas of focus. I will store all interview data to include video or voice recordings and written material and not release it to any third party. The only personally identifiable information collected is the participant's name, current rank and duty position, rank and duty position at the time of participation in policy, strategy, or tactical contribution, and email address. As outlined

in the prospectus this research is strictly UNCLASSIFIED in nature. Regardless of a participant's background and duty position, questions and answers are limited to UNCLASSIFIED information. During interviews research will cease and questions will be redirected if answers appear to be CLASSIFIED. In the event a participant informs me that a question cannot be answered due to the sensitive nature of the content, I will redirect the question or move on to other questions altogether.

The following individuals were interviewed during this research: MAJ Jason Adler (former commander, C Company, 2-87 IN), COL Kimo Gallahue (former commander, 2-87 IN and 4th BCT, 3rd Infantry Division), MG Brian Mennes (former commander, 1-508th PIR, 1st Ranger Battalion, and 4th BCT, 82nd Airborne Division), LTG James Terry (former commander, 10th Mountain Division/commander, Regional Command-South, this interview was conducted by the Combat Studies Institute in 2013), COL Bret Van Poppel (former Deputy Director, AAG), Ambassador Ronald Neumann (former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan), Ben Connable (Senior International Policy Analyst, RAND Institute), Dr. Seth Jones (Harold Brown Chair, Director, Transnational Threats Project and Senior Adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies), and Dr. Adam Shilling (Operations Analysis Division, Center for Army Analysis).

The individuals mentioned above were selected for several reasons. MAJ Adler, COL Gallahue, and MG Mennes are personal mentors and officers that I have had the opportunity to work with in the past. Their collective experience clarified the nature of assessments at the tactical level of war during the pre-surge and surge period. COL Van Poppel graciously agreed to provide insight into the inner workings of the AAG. His experience working for GEN Petraeus at ISAF offered a perspective that is not observed

enough. The researcher was privileged to meet Ambassador Neumann during an engagement at the Command and General Staff Officers Course. He and his father both served as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan during very different periods in its history. Ambassador Neumann offered invaluable insight from his first trip to Afghanistan in 1967 to his tenure in Kabul from 2005 to 2007. Connable, Jones, and Shilling all offered their time selflessly to relate personal experiences and current insights into the world of assessments and counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. Their knowledge and commitment to improving operations assessments is both impressive and highly respected.

The purpose of this case study is to determine to what extent assessment processes in Afghanistan were able to inform military and political leaders. Doctrinal and practical purposes for the assessment process include relaying information from the tactical level to senior leaders to measure the effectiveness of surge forces. The quality and completeness of those assessments either did or did not help leaders utilize surge forces effectively. The primary research question asks how did senior military leaders assess progress in Afghanistan during the troop surge of 2010-2011 and how did the assessment process improve over time? Using qualitative case study methods, I will attempt to make some order to the complex system of operational analysis during the force increase of 2010-2011.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

The more statistics you assemble the greater your appetite becomes for even more statistics. Somehow—somehow you feel that, in the end, you can solve the whole damn problem if you just had enough statistics.

— General Creighton W. Abrams, quoted in Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency*

GEN Abrams' quote highlights a challenge in attempting to report progress in Vietnam that carried over to current trends in Afghanistan and Iraq; senior leaders make decisions informed by “inaccurate, decontextualized, and aggregated numbers or thousands of pages of lengthy narrative.”⁹² Assessment in counterinsurgency is inherently difficult and made even more challenging given that conditions in a theater of operations change over time. The goal of this research is to explore the state of assessment in Afghanistan during the surge period from January 2010 to July 2011. The primary research question asks how did senior military leaders assess progress in Afghanistan during the troop surge of 2010-2011 and how did the assessment process improve over time?

This research is important to the professional force for two reasons. First, our military continues to fight violent extremists in Afghanistan while simultaneously working to build a more capable, self-sufficient Afghan security force. Despite seventeen years of war, the United States military only began a process of deliberate and wide-ranging assessment in 2008.⁹³ Assessment in Afghanistan changes continually, generally

⁹² Connable, 100.

⁹³ Ibid., 153.

in line with the shuffle of commanders, staffs, and units on the ground. Second, warfare in general, and insurgencies in particular, will not cease in the future. There is a practical reason for studying the state of assessment in Afghanistan during the surge. It would be foolish to think that studying this topic can eliminate friction or difficulty in assessing future counterinsurgencies. Rather, the aim is to apply mental rigor now to better prepare for those campaigns and begin with a better process in place than forces used previously in Afghanistan.

The goal of this research is to assist educating the professional force and anyone interested in the assessment processes during this specific snapshot of the American military experience, inform future leaders, and minimize the repetition of any failures. It is not intended to make recommendations for current assessment in Afghanistan or any other contemporary campaign, nor will it advance recommendations for future policy, strategy, or doctrine. Nor is it the aim of this project to hold individuals or agencies accountable for real or perceived shortcomings in the war effort. On the contrary, the hope is that readers better appreciate the complexity and difficulty of waging effective counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and the astounding responsibility of those selected to manage it.

In the process of examining this topic, the research question changed slightly from “Did military and political leaders establish clear measures of effectiveness with a coherent, centralized system to collect, track and analyze data during the troop surge of 2010-2011?” to “How did senior military leaders assess progress in Afghanistan during the troop surge of 2010-2011 and how did the assessment process improve over time?”

The content and goal of the project was unchanged, nor was it negatively impacted by refining the research question. The original question was framed in a way that required a simplistic “yes or no” response and ultimately appeared convoluted and lengthy. The research, oral history interviews, and conclusions were not affected.

There are several secondary research questions that will be answered in the process of researching the primary. To understand the assessment process in 2010 and 2011 we first have to know the state of the insurgency and associated assessment process leading up to that point. The secondary questions that will help answer the research question are:

1. What were the conditions of the counterinsurgency in Afghanistan prior to President Obama’s decision to deploy 50,000 (21,000 agreed to initially with 30,000 surge forces) additional forces to the country?
2. Prior to the increase in troop presence did the United States employ centralized measures of effectiveness to gauge efforts and successes?
3. Were measures of performance nested to clearly demonstrate success or failure of measures of effectiveness?
4. What success was achieved through the new strategy, and was it built upon or squandered with future policy changes?

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first, “Assessment and Counterinsurgency According to Doctrine,” establishes a baseline understanding of several key U.S. doctrinal references. These references are the starting point used by staff officers and commanders as campaigns are built, but can be augmented by outside expertise, commander’s judgement, and innovation. The second section is “Afghanistan

Assessment Prior to the Surge.” This increases awareness of the ISAF assessment process as it existed leading up to arrival of the first surge brigades in early 2010. The early process changed often and consisted of almost purely quantitative data.⁹⁴ The last section is “Afghanistan Assessment During the Surge.” This portion highlights significant changes made to the assessment model and attempts to evaluate the level of usefulness for commands from the tactical level up to the strategic level.

Assessment and Counterinsurgency according to Doctrine

Doctrine is used as the foundation for professional military education and training the force. It serves as the starting point for planning and executing operations and “promotes mutual understanding and enhances effectiveness.”⁹⁵ There are several key doctrinal documents used in this research, including FM 3-0, *Operations* (October 2017), FM 5-0, *The Operations Process* (May 2012), Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0-1, *Army Design Methodology* (July 2015), FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (December 2006), *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (May 2014), and Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (October 2009).

According to the Army’s newest version of FM 3-0, *Operations*, assessments exist to “ensure the right decisions and actions are taken at the right time to get positive

⁹⁴ Jonathan Schroden, “Operations Assessment at ISAF: Changing Paradigms,” in *Innovation in Operations Assessment: Recent Developments in Measuring Results in Conflict Environments*, eds. Andrew Williams, James Bexfield, Fabrizio Fitzgerald Farina, and Johannes de Nijs (The Hague, Netherlands: NATO Communications and Information Agency, 2013), 39.

⁹⁵ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, March 2010), ix.

outcomes.”⁹⁶ As stated in JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (dated October 2009), “effective assessment in COIN operations is necessary for counterinsurgents to recognize changing conditions and determine their meaning.”⁹⁷ Regardless of the type of conflict in question, commanders and staffs develop methods to aggregate a specified type and quantity of information, conduct the appropriate level of analysis, and use the information to confirm or deny progression toward a condition.

The assessment process contains three subordinate events: monitoring, evaluating, and recommending or directing action.⁹⁸ For an assessment process to provide meaningful recommendations or directions, it must monitor conditions and evaluate information effectively. If those events are nested properly along lines of operation or effort, they will help shape understanding, inform the commander, and identify when the end state is reached, or a problem must be reframed. Monitoring is an activity that occurs from origin of a plan, to termination of operations, and often, beyond. The staff is responsible for maintaining accurate information on current operations from friendly units, host-nation forces, interagency partners, non-governmental organizations, and any other elements that operate in the battlespace.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ HQDA, FM 3-0, 3-4.

⁹⁷ US Department of Defense (DOD), Joint Publication (JP) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2009), xxvi.

⁹⁸ HQDA, FM 5-0, 6-2.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

As the staff builds common understanding using staff reports, reconnaissance assets, and other means, it begins to conduct relevant analysis. The act of analyzing relevant data using pre-determined criteria is called evaluation. In evaluation, it is important to “judge progress toward desired conditions” and create linkages to “why the current degree of progress exists.”¹⁰⁰ The commander must establish criteria such as measures of effectiveness and measures of performance to gauge progress toward the end state. A measures of effectiveness is defined as “a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect.”¹⁰¹ A measures of performance is defined as “a criterion used to assess friendly actions that is tied to measuring task accomplishment.”¹⁰² Indicators are then integrated to judge the “status” of assigned measures of effectiveness and measures of performance.¹⁰³

Throughout the staff process to monitor and analyze, there will be some level of *variance* between the situation on the ground and what they anticipated during design and planning.¹⁰⁴ The level of variance determines the extent to which a plan must be modified. Planners can change many aspects of a plan to account for the actual conditions determined through the use of indicators. Options range from doing nothing and

¹⁰⁰ HQDA, FM 5-0, 6-2.

¹⁰¹ HQDA, ADRP 1-02, 1-61.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ HQDA, FM 5-0, 6-3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 6-4.

continuing to monitor the situation, to re-tasking subordinate units, changing assessment methods, adjusting resources, and potentially drastically changing the course of action.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, the staff creates options and provides recommendations to the commander, who integrates experience and judgement to determine how best to achieve the desired end state. The three activities of monitoring, evaluating, and making recommendations is continuous throughout an operation and can significantly impact the direction of a campaign plan.

The challenge of establishing an effective assessment process generally increases in counterinsurgency operations because of many internal and external factors. The staff and commander attempt to monitor and analyze a host of metrics including intricate tribal or ethnic relationships, support or opinion of the population, partnered security force capability, governance and economic conditions, backing of coalition partners, rule of law, education, essential services, enemy activity, freedom of maneuver, safe havens, and external support. Because of these factors, doctrine recommends incorporating qualitative and quantitative data into assessment process but offers little specifics to planners other than integrating subjective assessments.¹⁰⁶

A commander may use centralized, decentralized, or a combination of both assessment methods. The centralized methodology relies on subordinate units to “collect and report information requirements to their higher headquarters for analysis” and

¹⁰⁵ HQDA, FM 5-0, 6-4.

¹⁰⁶ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 2006), 5-26.

integration into the common operational picture.¹⁰⁷ This methodology commonly uses quantitative data in COIN assessment because of the sheer amount of enemy and population-centric information requirements that can be collected. Two processes that Joint Force and Army doctrine propose under the centralized method are EBA and pattern and trend analysis. EBA “requires the availability of plentiful and accurate data that can be used to develop a near-comprehensive picture of the battlespace,” compared to the more flexible pattern and trend analysis.¹⁰⁸ EBA is better used in conventional warfare where battle damage assessment can help predict the enemy’s doctrinal-based counteraction. For example, if friendly forces observe concentrations of enemy breaching capability in a specific location along a division front and destroy it, the commander can assume that the enemy’s advance into a given engagement area may be delayed or disrupted. Doctrinally, that result would cause the enemy to reinforce the breaching element or advance along a different axis. The primary difference between EBA and pattern and trend analysis is that the latter “tend[s] to accept that data on COIN campaigns will be incomplete and inaccurate.”¹⁰⁹

In a decentralized method, subordinate units have more flexibility to determine what will be monitored and how that information will be analyzed. A challenge with decentralized assessment lies in the higher headquarters’ accurate understanding of the

¹⁰⁷ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 2014), 12-2.

¹⁰⁸ Connable, 37.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

situation across multiple subordinate areas of operations. Although a decentralized assessment “gives the best picture of a local situation, [but] it lacks the context of how it compares to other locations.”¹¹⁰ In this research the focus is on the assessment process at the strategic level. Although the operational and tactical levels are discussed, they are generally highlighted to illustrate the compounding nature of complexity in a counterinsurgency environment and how improvements at ISAF enabled or hindered the tactical level.

A critical issue with assessments in counterinsurgency arises from the political nature of the campaign, and decentralized nature of the execution. Because doctrine identifies that “at its core, a counterinsurgency environment is a political problem,” higher headquarters (ISAF in this case study) must have an incredibly accurate picture of the nation-wide effort.¹¹¹ However, due to the complexity inherent to counterinsurgency, doctrine also stresses the importance of mission command as it “is ideally suited to the mosaic nature of COIN operations.”¹¹² Mission command is important to successful COIN operations in order to “push as many capabilities as possible down” to lower echelons and allow a force to “adapt and react at least as quickly as the insurgents.”¹¹³ The commander must reconcile centralized reporting to track a “political problem” while allowing for decentralized execution and assessment necessary for effective

¹¹⁰ HQDA, FM 3-24, (2014), 12-2.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² HQDA, FM 3-24, (2006), 1-26.

¹¹³ Ibid.

counterinsurgency. Unfortunately, “in the absence of a credible numbers-based theory of counterinsurgency there can be no objective, numbers-based assessment for Operation Enduring Freedom.”¹¹⁴

Afghanistan Assessment Prior to the Surge

Surprisingly, deliberate and wide-ranging assessments did not begin in Afghanistan until 2008.¹¹⁵ In the two years leading up to President Obama’s announcement of increased troop commitment, ISAF did not have a “formal strategic and campaign assessment paradigm.”¹¹⁶ Through the research conducted for this thesis, no rational explanation was found for that void in planning or execution. The first of two significant assessment reviews began with a change of leadership. On 30 August 2009, General Stanley McChrystal, the newly appointed ISAF Commander (COMISAF) submitted an initial report on conditions in Afghanistan to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.¹¹⁷ The primary purpose of *COMISAF’s Initial Assessment* was to inform and influence President Obama’s decision regarding policy and strategy changes.¹¹⁸ The document was essential to shape the national strategic approach to “eventually defeat al-

¹¹⁴ Downes-Martin, 103.

¹¹⁵ Connable, 153.

¹¹⁶ Schroden, 41.

¹¹⁷ Stanley McChrystal, “Commander’s Initial Assessment,” *American Diplomacy*, 30 August 2009, accessed 27 March 2018, http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2009/1012/iar/iar_commininit.html.

¹¹⁸ Ben Connable, interview with author, 28 March 2018.

Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan.”¹¹⁹ It was submitted at a time when final debates regarding troop surge numbers were occurring amongst senior political and military leaders as detailed in earlier chapters. It also informed Secretary Gates and other senior leaders on the state of the ISAF effort and provided recommendations for improvement.

GEN McChrystal made his position known that Afghanistan must be ‘properly resourced’ but expressed the view that “resources are not the crux. To succeed, ISAF requires a new approach—with a significant magnitude of change—in addition to a proper level of resourcing. ISAF must restore confidence in the near-term through reassured commitment, intellectual energy, and visible progress.”¹²⁰ GEN McChrystal’s summary offered a foreboding message. It warned that “[T]he stakes in Afghanistan are high . . . [T]he situation in Afghanistan is serious . . . [S]uccess is achievable, but it will not be attained simply by trying harder or ‘doubling down’ on the previous strategy.”¹²¹ The assessment affirmed that to reverse “negative trends” of the Afghan situation, ISAF must improve as a fighting force and the strategy must be modified.¹²²

The detailed findings within the 66-page report appear to offer a comprehensive approach to improve conditions, at least in comparison to the system that existed prior.

The challenge of fixing the assessment process remained a high priority. GEN

¹¹⁹ McChrystal, 1-1.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2-1.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1-1.

¹²² Ibid., 2-1.

McChrystal recognized that to employ newly authorized resources appropriately and adjust course effectively,

ISAF must develop effective assessment architectures . . . to measure the effects of the strategy, assess progress toward key objectives, and make necessary adjustments. ISAF must identify and refine appropriate indicators to assess progress, clarifying the difference between operational measures of effectiveness critical to practitioners on the ground and strategic measures more appropriate to national capitals. Because the mission depends on GIRoA [Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan], ISAF must also develop clear metrics to assess progress in governance.¹²³

As mentioned earlier, assessments exist to “help[s] the commander determine progress toward attaining desired end state conditions, achieving objectives, and accomplishing tasks.”¹²⁴ In early 2009, ISAF underwent several structural and philosophical changes to create unity of effort and improve the assessment process. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan was established to centralize training and outfitting of ANSF to include the police.¹²⁵ The ISAF Joint Command (IJC) was established as an operational headquarters to relieve COMISAF of many tactical and operational-level concerns, allowing him to manage long-term strategy.¹²⁶ The IJC headquarters controlled six Regional Commands (RCs), North, East, Central, South, Southwest, and Capital. To improve the whole-of-government approach, control of Provincial Reconstruction Teams shifted to the RC commanders. The ISAF Joint Command Information Dominance

¹²³ McChrystal, 2-20.

¹²⁴ Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA), Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0-1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, July 2015), 6-1.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 2-14.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Center (IJCIDC) was created in early 2009 specifically to assist the IJC commander and headquarters. The IJCIDC served as the for IJC and focused almost entirely on quantitative data collection.¹²⁷

Prior to GEN McChrystal taking command of ISAF, the (AAG was created in 2009 solely to direct and improve the quality of assessments at the strategic and operational levels.¹²⁸ Based out of ISAF headquarters in Kabul, the AAG received guidance that processes “should be both transparent and credible.”¹²⁹ There were several joint and multi-national contributors that staffed the AAG with highly trained civilian and military analysts. These contributors included NATO Consultation, Command, and Control Agency, Germany and Turkey, the Center for Army Analysis, TRADOC Analysis Center, and the U.S. Air Force.¹³⁰ The IJCIDC and AAG worked closely, holding a weekly video teleconference to compare information, refine data streams, share trends, and ensure briefing products were nested.¹³¹ Teams of analysts and staff officers at the IJCIDC and AAG were overwhelmed and forced to spend much of their time “managing data, rectifying errors in databases, and producing time-series charts” to answer questions for the commander, senior political advisors, media outlets, and many

¹²⁷ COL Bret Van Popple, telephone interview with author, 1 May 2018.

¹²⁸ Schroden, 41.

¹²⁹ Connable, 155.

¹³⁰ Van Popple interview.

¹³¹ Ibid.

other consumers.¹³² Analysts and supervisors from the two elements communicated daily and worked determine trends.¹³³ Reports flowed up from the tactical level to the IJCIDC and the AAG in various forms, on different timelines, targeting different sets of data, making data management a challenging task.

After reviewing the quality of the assessments, GEN McChrystal determined that the ISAF plan lacked objectives, decisive points, decisive conditions, and indicators and relied almost entirely on quantitative data.¹³⁴ The system had to improve to employ current and surge forces effectively, and monitor progress toward the desired end states. It remained to be seen if the surge would benefit from a reformed campaign plan but preparing to transition districts and provinces to Afghan control required a new model. Current procedures were overly dependent on quantitative data, lacking the credibility that GEN McChrystal sought. In late 2009, in an attempt to create a more complete assessment, ISAF initiated the DAM. The DAM would not last through 2010.¹³⁵ The new process combined shaded maps, commander narratives, and operational assessments across three lines of effort: governance, development, and security (reference figure 1).¹³⁶ The information depicted by the DAM was essential to assist commanders, but the product failed to stimulate discussion at higher levels.

¹³² Connable, 157.

¹³³ Van Popple interview.

¹³⁴ McChrystal, 1-1.

¹³⁵ Connable, 155.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 200.

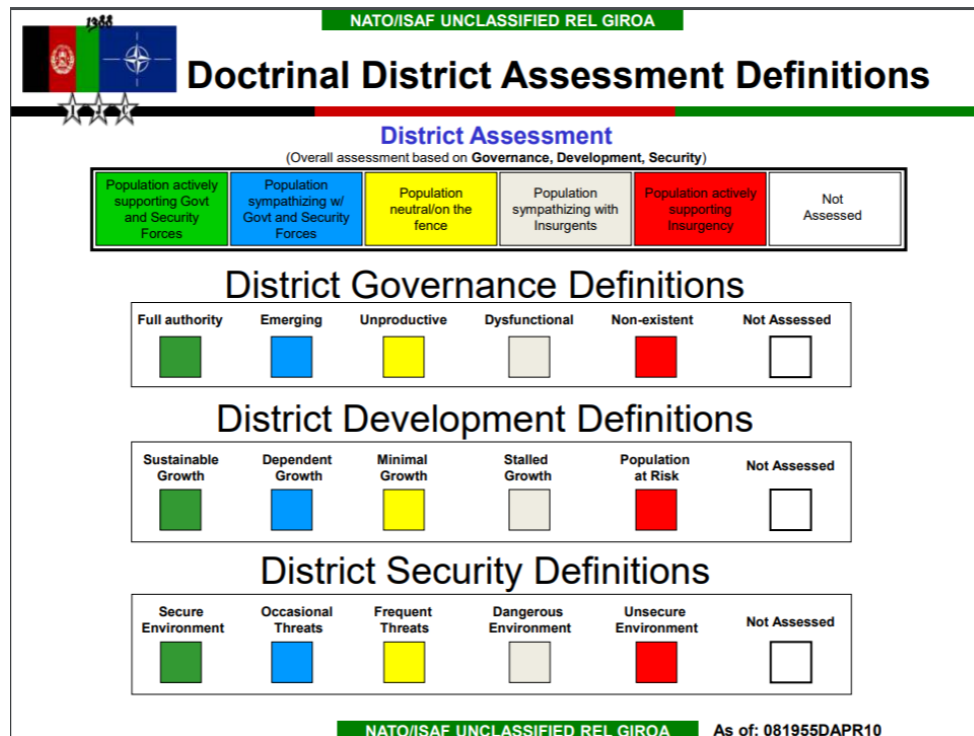


Figure 1. Doctrinal District Assessment Definitions

Source: International Security Force Assistance (ISAF) Joint Command, “ISAF Joint Command District Assessments: 100408,” ISAF, accessed 7 April 2018, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/ISAFdistrictassessments.pdf>, slide 11.

It is possible that the assessments were of some utility to a tactical-level leader with more knowledge of an area, but it was unsuitable to inform upper-operational and strategic-level leaders. The absence of contextual detail was often bad enough that commanders made decisions based on judgement calls derived from color codes and brief summaries.¹³⁷ Data was collected through multiple intelligence sources, combat patrols, SIGACT databases, and brief commander narratives, to name a few. The data was then aggregated at each echelon and forwarded to the next level. As information progressed

¹³⁷ Dr. Seth G. Jones, interview with author, 5 April 2018.

from company, to battalion, and so on, it became diluted because staffs were forced to pick key trends or data streams to highlight on briefing products. One officer spoke of the frustration of centralized assessments conducted by higher headquarters, saying “what bothered me was what happened to reports after we submitted them. We would submit long narrative reports with lots of detail, and . . . some clerk along the way must have cut out information he thought was unimportant.”¹³⁸ This example highlights the tenuous relationship that existed between reporting units and higher staffs; units often endured dangerous mission conditions to provide quality reports, only to find that much of the detail was stripped out due to limited space or understanding by higher headquarters. Using figure 2, Zharay District Assessment Model, the reader need only look at the bulletized comments under each line of effort to realize that causal relationships are absent, greatly reducing the utility to a strategic commander.

¹³⁸ Connable, 162.

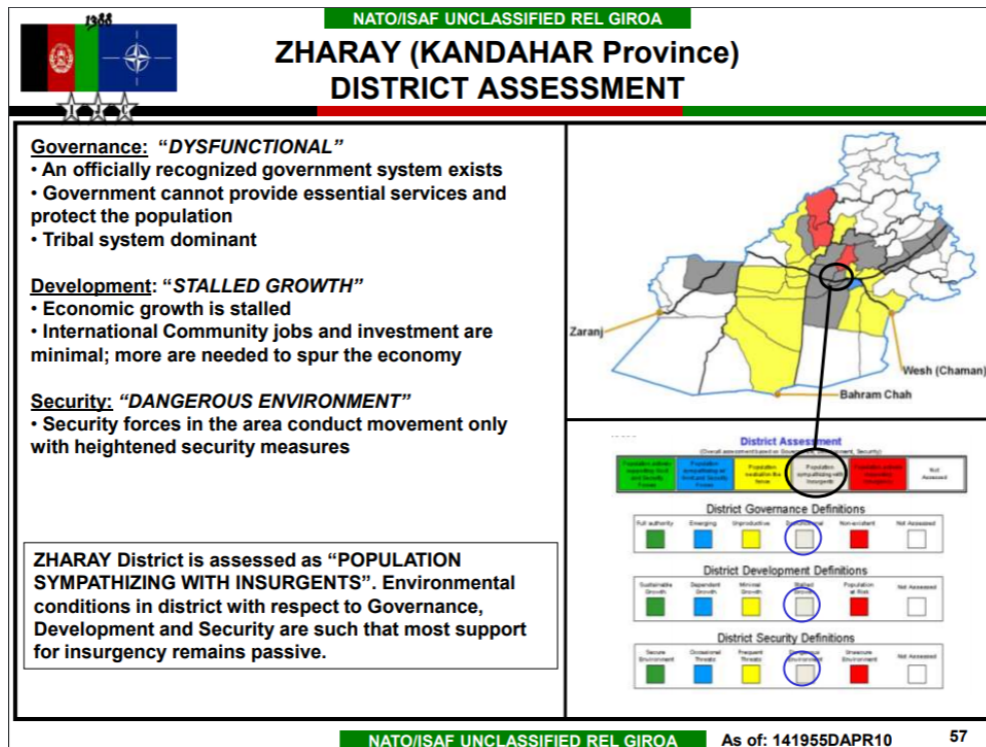


Figure 2. Zharay District Assessment Model

Source: International Security Force Assistance (ISAF) Joint Command, "ISAF Joint Command District Assessments: 100408," ISAF, accessed 7 April 2018, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/ISAFdistrictassessments.pdf>, slide 57.

The resulting product of the DAM was exactly that; a product. Although it was an improvement from earlier iterations of collection and assessment, it did not "reflect a methodical or comprehensive process that might tie requirements to objectives" or provide critical rigor needed to shape decision-making.¹³⁹ It also relied heavily on the experience, skill, and motivation of the staff that was assembling the product. Ultimately,

¹³⁹ Connable, 156.

when each RC's assessments were combined at the IJCIDC, the overall assessment (reference figure 3), offered little.

ISAF's DAM was similar in construct to the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES) used extensively in Vietnam.¹⁴⁰ The HES was a comprehensive patchwork of subjective reports to determine the level of "pacification" across the Vietnamese countryside.¹⁴¹ Although the HES was helpful in mapping American progress over time, it was very time and effort intensive for reporting elements and staffs tasked with processing data. It is estimated that the HES "produced approximately 90,000 pages of data" each month.¹⁴² The overall credibility of the HES was challenged because most of the data was provided by South Vietnamese collectors and most indicators reported were not distinguishable with direct observation.¹⁴³ Ultimately, shortfalls of Vietnam-era assessments reappeared during Operation Enduring Freedom.

¹⁴⁰ Connable, 200.

¹⁴¹ Jones, *Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan*, 125.

¹⁴² Connable, 120.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 123.

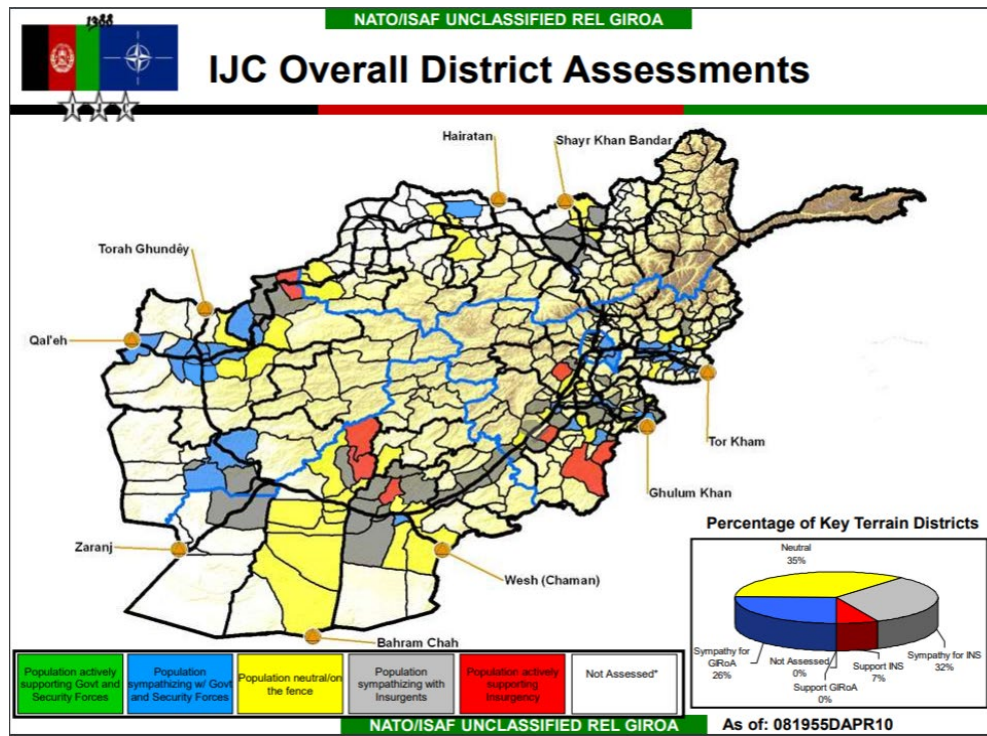


Figure 3. IJC District Assessment Model Overview

Source: International Security Force Assistance (ISAF) Joint Command, “ISAF Joint Command District Assessments: 100408,” ISAF, accessed 7 April 2018, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/ISAFdistrictassessments.pdf>, slide 4.

The DAM was short-lived, as ISAF assessment transitioned to the District Deep Dive. The goal of the District Deep Dive was to achieve better understanding across the country in preparation for transferring to Afghan-led control.¹⁴⁴ The District Deep Dive reports were necessary to align efforts toward GEN McChrystal’s priority of increasing the size and capability of Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) forces. If the United States was to attain long-term success and set the conditions to reduce force numbers,

¹⁴⁴ Connable, 204.

increased ANSF size and capability was critical.¹⁴⁵ To set the conditions for successful control of key population centers and expand government influence, resources would have to be allocated equitably across the ANSF as a whole.

The assessment process in Afghanistan prior to the surge was not comprehensive enough to inform senior military commanders. The process was immature, overly reliant on quantitative data, and excessively top-down in nature. As mentioned, several important changes were instituted prior to the arrival of 33,000 additional U.S. troops that would lay the groundwork for improved assessment. The developments included the creation of the IJC and AAG, and focused commander's guidance to improve transparency and credibility.

Afghanistan Assessment during the Surge

The ISAF assessment process in place during the surge in Afghanistan was not mature or comprehensive enough to adequately depict conditions on the ground or inform the commander. Identifying shortcomings in the overall process led to gradual improvements over time, however "as of September 2010, it was unclear to a group of 150 experts, including many NATO and ISAF officials, exactly how many or even what types of assessment existed."¹⁴⁶ The assessment process in counterinsurgency is complex,

¹⁴⁵ LTG James Terry, Operational Leadership Experiences Project, Interviewed 12 June 2013 by Anthony Carlson, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 5-6, accessed 3 April 2018, <http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4013coll13/id/3150/rec/1>.

¹⁴⁶ Connable, 156. [The 150 experts mentioned either worked alongside Dr. Connable in assessment workshops or were interviewed by him during operations in Afghanistan in 2010.]

dynamic, and challenging to articulate. In the case of Afghanistan in 2011, assessments of the campaign were ineffective due to flaws in data analysis and unreasonable reporting requirements. GEN McChrystal noted that to effectively implement the new “properly resourced” strategy, ISAF must provide as much operational freedom to tactical-level leaders as possible. He articulated that, due to the challenges in achieving shared understanding in COIN, “ISAF must strike the right balance between control and initiative, but err on the side of initiative.”¹⁴⁷

This section seeks to apply three standards—transparency, credibility, and relevance—to ISAF assessments down to the tactical level. The three standards were chosen from a list of seven developed by Connable and other RAND researchers. The three used in this thesis are based on GEN McChrystal’s specific guidance to the AAG and their importance to subordinate tactical echelons. As previously mentioned, GEN McChrystal’s focus on assessments was transparency and credibility. By achieving those two aspects, the coalition could start to shore up confidence levels among the Afghan population, coalition partners, American political leaders, and the American people.

The standard for transparent assessments is that a product clearly articulates the process and figures presented, and ideally, can be released for public consumption with no limitations.¹⁴⁸ Achieving transparency is important as it helps prevent negative perceptions from growing and allows subordinate commands to use the finalized product at their level with full understanding of the process that was used. The need for protecting

¹⁴⁷ McChrystal, 2-13.

¹⁴⁸ Connable, 14.

information in COIN assessments must be balanced and may change during a campaign. Information should be available to subordinate echelons at the tactical level and other interested parties, such as the domestic population, media, and political leaders.

Transparency is required up and down the chain of command to prevent far reaching consequences. Unfortunately, reporting elements across Afghanistan felt inclined to produce multiple products to depict what some referred to as a “parade of progress” in their area of operations.¹⁴⁹ Everyone interviewed for this research relayed the effect of over-optimism in reporting and analysis during the surge period. According to COL Bret Van Popple, former Deputy Director of the AAG, transparency became increasingly important as discrepancies between assessments from ISAF and other organizations grew.

To improve transparency to the outside world, GEN Petraeus opened ISAF and the AAG to reporters during his tenure as COMISAF. Toward the end of his assignment with the AAG, COL Van Popple hosted international reporters daily who “believed ISAF was cooking the books.”¹⁵⁰ As the media was allowed to see the inner workings of the AAG and experience the complexities of the mission, they became increasingly more supportive, and less openly hostile. Despite the best efforts of leaders and staffs at all levels, there was “an institutional drive to produce ‘good-news stories.’”¹⁵¹ Quite often, there may not be good news stories to report, and higher headquarters must accept that. In

¹⁴⁹ Schroden et al., 8.

¹⁵⁰ Von Popple interview.

¹⁵¹ Downes-Martin, 108.

general, negative trends represent a turn from achieving a desired end state. When negative trends occur, it is important for a staff to use intellectual rigor and unbiased analysis to determine potential causes of the trend for the commander.

GEN McChrystal lost a battle to lessen the classification of ISAF briefings to improve transparency with ANSF partners, media, and others.¹⁵² Subordinate commands at the tactical level would be forced to increase partnering operations while providing minimal intelligence and assessment feedback to ANSF leaders. There was, however, a requirement for some information to remain classified during the surge to protect targeting tactics, techniques, and procedures, intelligence capabilities, and specifics of the campaign plan. Jones, a former senior advisor to President Obama for Afghanistan and Pakistan and to the Commander, Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan, highlighted the importance of transparency in assessments for use by senior political leaders. From his perspective as an advisor to political and military leadership he noted the importance to balance what information is published “but [he] can understand why information is classified” in the cases of protecting American forces and specialized capabilities.¹⁵³ Considerations for protecting sensitive information did not require the lack of “transparency of process,” experienced at that time.¹⁵⁴

In the case of General McChrystal’s classified August 2009 Initial COMISAF report to President Obama and Secretary Gates, author and editor Bob Woodward

¹⁵² Schroden, 42.

¹⁵³ Jones interview.

¹⁵⁴ Connable, 221.

received a photocopy from an unidentified staff member.¹⁵⁵ The bleak assessment contained in the 66 pages left “little doubt in [his] mind that the report should be published immediately.”¹⁵⁶ Considering the political and military implications of publishing the document, Woodward worked closely with Pentagon and White House officials to ensure publication would not increase risk to future tactical operations, American lives, or national security considerations.¹⁵⁷

Transparency was not a new issue for the United States during the surge in Afghanistan, as one need only look back to the Vietnam War. Summers argued that the United States won a tactical victory in Vietnam while experiencing a strategic defeat at the hands of the communist north.¹⁵⁸ Operations assessors in Vietnam made the process of deducing important conclusions from assessment extremely challenging. The HES was incorporated into the assessment process to depict the span of control of the American-backed south. The HES fed off an overabundance of quantitative data, sometimes to the one-hundredth of a percentage point, to depict the level of control of every hamlet and village.¹⁵⁹ The American use of assessments in Vietnam and Afghanistan in 2010 appeared eerily similar. From 1965 to the Tet Offensive of 1968, the HES showed

¹⁵⁵ Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 175.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁵⁸ Summers, 90.

¹⁵⁹ Connable, 128.

generally positive increases in control and stability of wide areas of Vietnam.¹⁶⁰ The events of Tet Offensive seemed to clash violently with the mathematical trends indicated in the HES. This gap in public reporting and ground-truth actions decreased public trust in military planners. Former *Washington Post* reporter Don Oberdorfer noted that a lack of transparency “led to misconception and erroneous conclusions about the war and was a major factor in the erosion of public confidence. Nevertheless, the ‘numbers game’ may be now so deeply imbedded in military, press and public thinking that it will persist in future military conflicts.”¹⁶¹

The standard of credibility relies on the transparency of reports and the degree to which the reports explain context, processes, and biases involved.¹⁶² The level of credibility in the ISAF assessment process at the start of the surge in 2010 did not meet necessary thresholds to adequately advise commanders and political leaders.¹⁶³ In late 2010, it was clear that the AAG had to increase credibility of analysis. COL Van Popple noted that at Connable and Schroden’s insistence, the AAG sought to incorporate more commander’s discourse and limit “overengineering” a set of data.¹⁶⁴ Credibility is an important ingredient to meeting the purpose of an assessment. As credibility declines,

¹⁶⁰ Connable, 129.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 150.

¹⁶² Ibid., 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 204.

¹⁶⁴ Van Popple interview.

subordinate units lose faith in the process, receive little back in return, and “consumers have no reason to trust the reporter.”¹⁶⁵

When GEN Petraeus replaced GEN McChrystal as COMISAF in June 2010, he made modifications to the assessment process, improving it slightly (reference figure 4). Campaign objectives were identified, each with a distinct line of operation. Intermediate objectives were nested within each distinct line of operation and served as indicators of positive or negative change over time.¹⁶⁶ Although the process improved, and organizations such as the AAG matured, the larger system remained reliant on quantitative data. Also, the AAG and IJCIDC used very broad, general descriptions for subordinate commands to select when describing conditions in their area of operations. The standards used for measuring progress were “behind,” “on track temporary,” “on track enduring,” and “goal achieved.” The paradigm also utilized highly subjective color-coded metrics, known as thermographs, that served little purpose other than a quick visual aid.¹⁶⁷ Credibility with this assessment paradigm was quickly lost. Jones highlighted a grave shortcoming from his perspective at the senior advisor level. He noted that “there was a lot of data [but] I don’t ever remember seeing . . . a primary military document that looked at causal relationships.”¹⁶⁸ The failure to link intermediate objectives with a causal relationship for change over time negated the utility of this

¹⁶⁵ Connable, 174.

¹⁶⁶ Schroden et al., 7.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶⁸ Jones interview.

evolution of assessments. The importance of a causal relationship cannot be understated. The causal relationship targets factors that help or hinder reaching a desired outcome, and if progress is not adequate, to adjust resources or operations accordingly.

One example that highlights the challenge of determining causal relationship is the decline in improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on a given route. Once it is determined through patrols, SIGACT reporting, human intelligence and other means that the number of IEDs declined over a period, there are many possibilities for why the decline occurred. The change could have happened due to time of year (colder weather naturally causes decline), movement of an IED cell to a safer district, lack of IED components, loss of key IED manufacturer, etc. The assessment process during this period focused primarily on the raw data depicting a drop in IED activity. A “green” color would be assigned to the indicator on the chart, with little emphasis on the cause.

Overreliance on simplified color-codes highlighted the need for narrative reports along command channels to pinpoint why a system changed. Based on Jones’ observation and frustration, it appears that the assessment paradigm remained ineffective for senior decision-makers and tactical-level leaders. COL Van Poppel echoed that assessment, noting that in late 2010, the AAG should have been focused on the effects on systems, not purely the numbers of events or indicators.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Van Poppel interview.

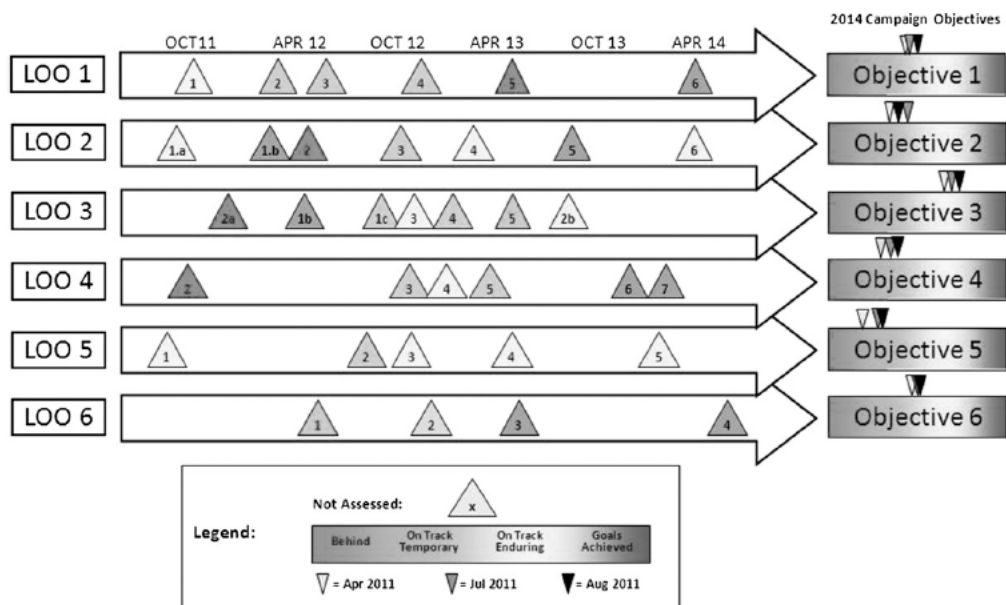


Figure 4. ISAF Assessment Paradigm circa 2010-2011

Source: Jonathan Schroden, Rebecca Thomasson, Randy Foster, Mark Lukens, and Richard Bell, “A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (2013): 7. NOTE: Triangle numbers, locations, shading are notional.

When GEN Allen assumed command of the ISAF in July 2011, he was the third leader to serve in that capacity during the surge in Afghanistan. Within two months of taking command, he initiated the second major overhaul of assessments during the surge period. He ordered the AAG to review the current process, and develop a new, more effective one.¹⁷⁰ The goal of ordering the creation of *another* assessment process was to increase credibility, not just to senior military and political leaders, but to commanders at the tactical level. His end state was to achieve a process that was “holistic” (increase subordinate echelon contribution) and “comprehensive” (account for a wider range of

¹⁷⁰ Schroden et al., 5.

inputs).¹⁷¹ GEN Allen instructed the AAG staff to be “revolutionary, vice evolutionary” and wanted a product that would “stimulate discussion” not “just present information.”¹⁷²

To improve the credibility of surge-time assessments, GEN Allen’s AAG sought to increase the use of candid input and analysis from tactical-level commanders. This “holistic” approach sought to integrate information from leaders and staffs at the battalion and brigade-level. COL Kimo Gallahue, a former battalion and brigade commander in Afghanistan, noted that his biggest challenge in conducting assessments was defining the problem and identifying the tools required to solve that problem.¹⁷³ After time, a battalion commander could provide much more detailed narratives required to inform RC and ISAF leaders.

COL Gallahue also highlighted that at the battalion-level, staffs and commanders were able to achieve relatively good situational understanding of the area of operations through hundreds of platoon and company patrols, ANSF partnering activities and battlefield circulation.¹⁷⁴ MAJ Jason Adler noted that his battalion and brigade commanders maintained very robust battlefield circulations that allowed them to achieve very good understanding of the battlespace.¹⁷⁵ Beyond the brigade-level, challenges such as tribal networks, local leader personalities, and compartmentalized terrain prevented

¹⁷¹ Schroden et al., 6.

¹⁷² Ibid., 5.

¹⁷³ COL Kimo Gallahue, interview with author, 5 April 2018.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ MAJ Jason Adler, telephone interview with author, 2 May 2018.

commanders from clearly understanding and visualizing their areas of operation.¹⁷⁶

Despite this, the amount of data being consolidated by battalions before undergoing centralized analysis at the brigade and RC-levels was overwhelming.¹⁷⁷

In addition to transparency and credibility, ISAF leadership sought to increase the level of relevance to the assessment process. The standard of relevance relates to the level of effectiveness of a process at informing senior military and political leaders.¹⁷⁸

Relevance is important to an assessment process because if a commander is not provided the type or quality of information needed to make changes in operations or resourcing, that assessment process is inappropriate. During the surge period, ISAF was commanded by three different officers, leading to important iterative, albeit disruptive, progress in assessment design. GEN McChrystal, GEN Petraeus, and Marine GEN Allen each implemented change due to issues with the relevance of the assessment process when they assumed command. GEN Petraeus became so frustrated with the relevance of the information he was receiving that he quickly ordered the AAG to process anything entering or leaving his headquarters.¹⁷⁹ Early on during his command, it was possible for two different agencies to brief him wildly opposing assessments of the same SIGACT.¹⁸⁰ Each commander understood the need for decentralized assessment and reporting in

¹⁷⁶ Adler interview.

¹⁷⁷ Downes-Martin, 118.

¹⁷⁸ Connable, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Van Poppel interview.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

COIN as recommended in FMs 3-24 and 5-0, but the effort was disjointed and disunified across the theater. Frequent changes in leadership were a challenge to staffs, but nonetheless, over time the assessment paradigm improved in clarity, increasing human discourse and judgement, and the ability to make timely decisions.¹⁸¹

This trend began at the lower tactical level and gained momentum as the rank of the briefing audience became more senior. However, other issues prevailed at the ISAF level that impacted tactical and operational units. Assessments were not holistic, meaning RC and brigades were not offered the opportunity to contribute to refining reporting criteria.¹⁸² This shortcoming in the process risked relevance and credibility with subordinate units, as the finished reports lacked contextual assessment. Uncontextualized reports also risk missing the mark on assessment altogether. Simply briefing a collection of products aggregated from subordinate elements requires no intellectual rigor and does not sufficiently “promote[s] nuanced understanding of [the] OE.”¹⁸³

Another effort to increase relevance culminated in August 2012, when NATO completed a nearly-two-year project to determine how to assess districts and provinces using improved Deep Dive reports. The report, “Allied Information Sharing Support to ISAF and Support to Afghanistan Transition Metrics” was a comprehensive effort by a myriad of agencies, nations, and commands but took exceedingly long to publish its

¹⁸¹ Van Poppel interview.

¹⁸² Schroden et al., 7.

¹⁸³ Adam Shilling, *A Quick Reference Guide to the New Paradigm of Operation Assessment* (Fort Belvoir, VA: Center for Army Analysis, May 2016), 4.

findings.¹⁸⁴ Although the report integrated many contributors, it failed to solicit input from tactical-level leaders, analysts, and staffs that could have improved the overall relevance. Despite the best intentions of the working group, it focused too heavily on principles of EBA, recommending “over 200 metrics with suggested data sources” meant to assist staffs in determining governance capability and economic potential in a given district.¹⁸⁵

Unfortunately, the recommendations in the 2012 NATO study conflicted directly with findings from Downes-Martin, an instructor at the U.S. Naval War College. He asserted that at the RC-level, assessment processes were “riddled with highly visible flaws that emanate from the improper use of numbers and flawed logic,” and those shortcomings “[are] sufficiently egregious that they seriously reduce the value those assessments provide to commanders’ decision support.”¹⁸⁶ Much of the context and weight of assessments from the tactical level, specifically battalion and brigade-levels was lost at the RC and IJC level. This phenomenon was due to it being “aggregated, averaged, and opaque (to at least some degree).”¹⁸⁷

Naturally, battalion commanders had intimate knowledge of their areas of operation and were eager to provide more contextualized assessments. The context varied

¹⁸⁴ Jim Bexfield and Dr. Cy Staniec, “Allied Information Sharing Support to ISAF and Support to Afghanistan Transition Metrics” (NATO Research and Technology Organization, System Analysis and Studies Panel, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, August 2012), slides 3-5.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., slide 24.

¹⁸⁶ Downes-Martin, 103.

¹⁸⁷ Connable, 204.

from province-to-province and across RCs, but decentralized reports were still able to show trends. MG Mennes, a former brigade commander that served in Zharay District in 2011, lamented that “it didn’t matter how we were measuring, because we were measuring the wrong things. We were on the wrong azimuth.”¹⁸⁸ At the time MG Mennes and his brigade were in RC-South, an analyst from the 82nd Airborne Division informed COL Van Poppel that units were tasked to report nearly 2,000 metrics daily.¹⁸⁹ Metrics ranged from number of broken windshields in a market, to enemy small arms attacks, IED strikes, night letters, wells built, cold storage units built, money spent, and women running in local elections.¹⁹⁰ MG Mennes advanced the need to have an apparatus to honestly evaluate the populations desire to commit and work toward self-determination through long-term polling and dialogue.¹⁹¹ Through daily interactions with the population across the district, MG Mennes defined self-determination as local, grass-roots control, not necessarily representation in Kabul.¹⁹² This comment, and many others like it, led the AAG to create a more balanced assessment plan to achieve the “holistic” and “comprehensive” nature sought by GEN Allen.

Regarding the overwhelming level of requirements from higher headquarters, Downes-Martin discussed the self-inflicted wound of overwhelming the system with too

¹⁸⁸ MG Brian Mennes, telephone interview with author, 5 April 2018.

¹⁸⁹ Van Poppel interview.

¹⁹⁰ Compilation of interviews with various officers.

¹⁹¹ Mennes interview.

¹⁹² Ibid.

many reports in too many forms. There were two primary issues with the volume and frequency of reports required of tactical units. First, the amount of data required to complete the quantitative assessments took valuable time from staff sections and tactical practitioners unnecessarily. Often, a staff was forced to sacrifice the *process* of assessment for the product.¹⁹³ Dr. Adam Shilling of the Center for Army Analysis, noted that the true product of successful assessment is better understanding of an operational environment for the staff and commander, not a lengthy PowerPoint briefing.¹⁹⁴ Secondly, it was uncommon to receive timely feedback, if any, from any of the myriad reports that were submitted.¹⁹⁵ While assessments do provide a valuable tool to higher commanders, the full purpose of the process is not complete until refined analysis is conducted, and feedback disseminated to tactical maneuver elements. Subordinate tactical maneuver elements were the action arm of the IJC and RC, and to operate effectively in a complex COIN environment, those elements required feedback.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Shilling, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ McChrystal, 2-13.

¹⁹⁶ Shilling, 2.

Table 1. Notional Example of Campaign Assessment Standards for a Campaign Essential Task

Campaign Essential Task 1: Secure areas XXXX and YYYY					
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Security	Stated areas are not secure	Stated areas are partially secured but with significant risk of reversion	Stated areas are partially secured but with moderate risk of reversion	Stated areas are partially secured but with minimal risk of reversion	Stated areas are fully secured with minimal risk of reversion
Governance	Key government actors are not present in the stated areas	Some key government actors are present in the stated areas and/or their actions are significantly undermining security	A majority of key government actors are present in the stated areas and/or their actions are moderately undermining security	All key government actors are present in the stated areas and/or their actions are minimally undermining security	All key government actors are present in the stated areas and they are actively working to enhance security
Socio-Economic	Security conditions in/around the stated areas are significantly hindering legitimate socioeconomic activity	Security conditions in/around the stated areas are moderately hindering legitimate socioeconomic activity	Security conditions in/around the stated areas are having minimal impact on legitimate socioeconomic activity	Security conditions in/around the stated areas are having no impact on legitimate socioeconomic activity	Security conditions in/around the stated areas are enhancing legitimate socioeconomic activity
Regional Relations	Other countries are playing an overall significantly negative role with respect to security in the stated areas	Other countries are playing an overall moderately negative role with respect to security in the stated areas	Other countries are playing an overall minimally negative to minimally positive role with respect to security in the stated areas	Other countries are playing an overall moderately positive role with respect to security in the stated areas	Other countries are playing an overall significantly positive role with respect to security in the stated areas

Source: Jonathan Schroden, Rebecca Thomasson, Randy Foster, Mark Lukens, and Richard Bell, “A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (2013): 11.

The AAG realized it had to pursue a non-doctrinal paradigm that combined necessary quantitative data, with increased context from tactical commanders, to depict causal relationships.¹⁹⁷ To reduce the variance of responses from subordinate commands, the AAG created more defined standards of conditions for the intermediate objectives (listed above in table 1). The approach was also extended along four domains (security, governance, socio-economic, and regional relations—interactions with regional powers, such as Pakistan and Iran) as opposed to the three domains used in the model during GEN

¹⁹⁷ Schroden et al., 10.

Petraeus' tenure.¹⁹⁸ Regional relations applied strictly to the strategic level, as mission scope at the tactical level was limited to districts inside Afghanistan. The base assessment with notional data, seen in figure 6, was not intended to be all-inclusive for commanders and staffs. The aim was to standardize what ISAF considered positive, neutral, and negative across the domains and allow subordinate commands to provide context in the accompanying Campaign Assessment Template (figure 6).¹⁹⁹

Two other components made this paradigm a better product. The empty fields to the left of the slide depicted the overall assessment of the domains in the area of operations. To the right, the empty field allowed commanders to write a more detailed narrative that supported the assessed standard level. Unlike McChrystal and Petraeus' models, this paradigm more effectively depicts relationships among data sets. The radar graph method allows for successive reports to be overlaid, depicting any changes in trends.²⁰⁰ A key element of this radar graph is that subordinate commands were not forced to make an assessment. The AAG felt that some lower echelons may not be able to make a determination because a specific metric or event was not prevalent in that unit's area of operations.²⁰¹ By allowing subordinate units that freedom to not report on non-applicable data, the AAG tried to maintain relevant data and prevent staffs from fabricating numbers.

¹⁹⁸ Schroden et al., 10.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 13.

The resulting assessment paradigm for RC's to consolidate and submit to ISAF can be seen in figure 7. It is important to note that this process continued to change and adapt in an attempt to support the dynamic environment both internal and external to Afghanistan.

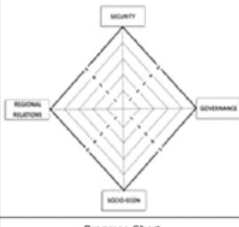
Security	LEVEL XX	 Progress Chart	Instructions Each subordinate/supporting command should complete the assessment template for each of the campaign essential tasks. This consists of: • Completing the progress performance chart, using the rating levels for each domain. When putting marks on the chart for each domain, restrict placement to the hash marks provided as these correspond to the rating levels (i.e. do not assess "between the levels"). It is recognized that the rating levels and their associated definitions cannot possibly capture all nuances of each command's assessment; therefore choose the "most applicable rating level" and note exceptions (positive and negative) in the narrative fields. Connect the four marks on the progress performance chart to form a light gray shaded area with red outline. Ensure that last quarter's assessment is included in the form of a dark gray shaded area with black outline. • Providing a narrative explanation of the rating levels chosen for each domain. In particular, focus on justifying the particular rating level chosen along with positive/negative exceptions as discussed above, as well as comparison to the last quarter's assessment and an expectation of future trends. • Providing an overall assessment narrative highlighting the most important points for the Commander to consider in regards to progress or setbacks in accomplishing the essential task. Recommendations for mitigating setbacks or exploiting successes should also be included.
Governance	LEVEL XX		
Socio-Economic	LEVEL XX		
Regional Relations	LEVEL XX		
Overall Assessment			

Figure 5. ISAF Campaign Assessment Template

Source: Jonathan Schroden, Rebecca Thomasson, Randy Foster, Mark Lukens, and Richard Bell, "A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency," *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (2013): 12.

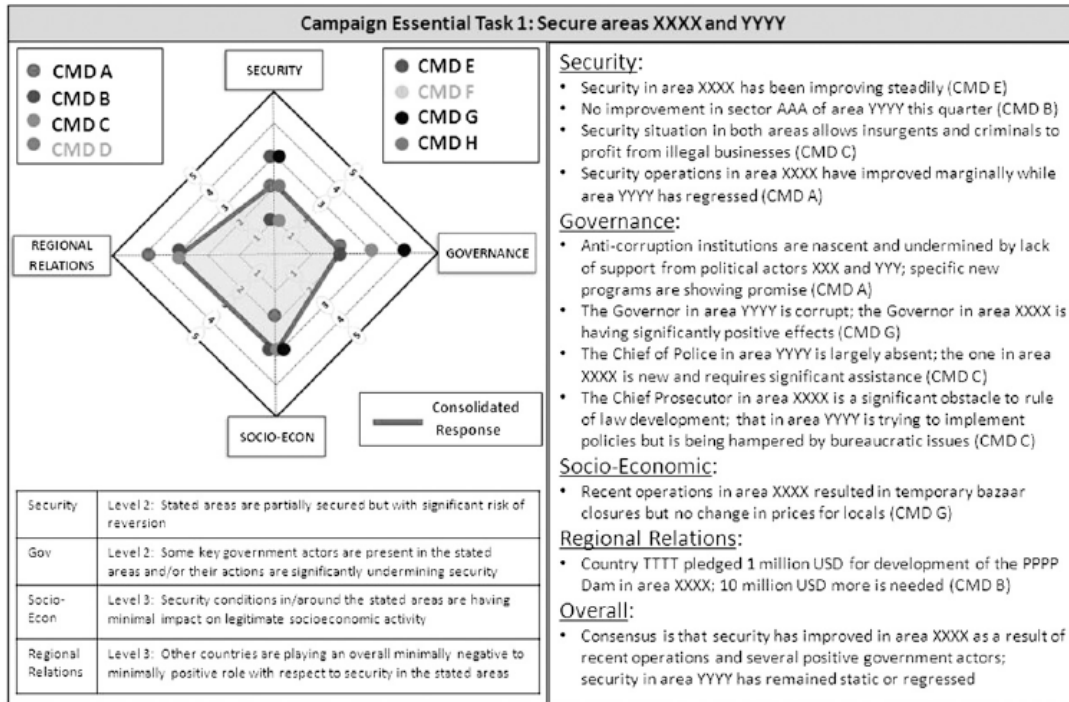


Figure 6. Notional Campaign Assessment Summary Slide for One Campaign Essential Task

Source: Jonathan Schroden, Rebecca Thomasson, Randy Foster, Mark Lukens, and Richard Bell, “A New Paradigm for Assessment in Counterinsurgency,” *Military Operations Research* 18, no. 3 (2013): 15.

The new comprehensive strategy focused on the growth and capability of the ANSF, reach of Afghan government institutions, coalition reversal of insurgent momentum, and support of threatened population centers.²⁰² Arguably, re-committing vast resources and effort to Afghanistan, “the U.S. military was . . . attempt[ing] to

²⁰² McChrystal, 2-13, 2-2.

transform Afghanistan into a modern, liberal state.”²⁰³ MG Mennes confirmed that the local Afghan population was less inclined to desire centralized government influence than the average American. As previously stated, it was a common opinion in his area of operations for people to want self-determination at the local level, with little regard for the situation in Kabul.²⁰⁴ He went on to detail a specific measure of performance, the number of female Afghans on local councils, that was tracked and discussed at higher levels. This piece of data was not used to determine necessary positive change in local governance, but rather as a briefing point to align progress in relation to American values.²⁰⁵ Americanizing assessment metrics is not ideal, but often they pushed their way into the process by default due to a lack of cultural understanding.

Given the above theater-specific challenges at increasing transparency, credibility, and relevance in the ISAF assessment process, one can see that counterinsurgency creates a complex environment to evaluate. Through the course of this research it became apparent that necessary information was present, through literature and oral history interviews, to answer the primary research question. ISAF experienced no less than two significant shifts in operational assessment during the two-year period of the surge. The first occurred under GEN McChrystal and attempted to incorporate qualitative and quantitative data to increase transparency and credibility. The second major shift

²⁰³ Aaron B. O’Connell, “The Lessons and Legacies of the War in Afghanistan,” in *Understanding The U.S. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan*, eds. Beth Bailey and Richard H. Immerman (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 312.

²⁰⁴ Mennes interview.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

occurred when GEN Kelly replaced GEN Petraeus. Under GEN Kelly, the AAG worked to create a system that would continually provide holistic and comprehensive assessments to senior commanders. According to Dr. Jonathan Schroden, the assessment paradigm that was established under GEN Kelly “should serve as a seminal example of how to assess progress and inform decision-making in a counterinsurgency.”²⁰⁶

Agencies such as the AAG and IJCIDC made positive change in the face of a herculean task, increasing the situational awareness of COMISAF and COMIJC and allowed them to make better informed decisions. According to doctrine, that is the goal of assessments, to “ensure the right decisions and actions are taken at the right time to get positive outcomes.”²⁰⁷ Despite those improvements at the strategic-level, the researcher contends that generally the improvement was not experienced at the tactical-level. Platoons and companies continued to monitor and collect vast amounts of data to feed analysts at the operational and strategic-levels with little in return. Based on interviews, personal experience, and research, staffs and maneuver units at the tactical-level rarely received feedback from completed assessments. Upon reflecting on the AAG’s performance, COL Van Popple identified that “there should be a responsibility of the analyst at the highest level to provide reports back down to the user level,” however the “folks at the RC’s were criminally overtasked.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Schroden, 40.

²⁰⁷ HQDA, FM 3-0, 3-4.

²⁰⁸ Van Popple interview.

There was much focus placed on improving the upper level of the assessment process to achieve its doctrinal function, but that must be pushed to every echelon. To maximize the success of the greater assessment process and aid tactical formations, information must flow down as well as up. By late 2011 and early 2012, the AAG and IJC sent a small team of “expeditionary analysts” to visit remote operating bases across Afghanistan to fix the problem.²⁰⁹ Despite the best intentions of those analysts, the effort and resources committed were too minute, and the scale of the problem too large. The issue of closing the information loop across all three levels of war needs to be reconciled to fully realize the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency assessment paradigm.

Opportunities for future study in the field of assessments are many based on the changing nature of assessment paradigms in the complex COIN environment. Generally, COIN must include some level of nation building and stability operations, a challenge when balanced with effects against the insurgent. Former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann astutely noted that “nation building is a dirty word. If you want to control an enemy, you need an army. To have an army, you need a government. To have a government, you must have an economy.”²¹⁰ Each of those elements requires deliberate assessment, tied to the campaign plan and strategic end states.

There is a gap in assessments in doctrine that has been closing slowly, as is evidenced by the 2006 and 2014 versions of FM 3-24. The 2006 edition included a three page section on assessments, whereas the 2014 publication increased to eight pages.

²⁰⁹ Van Poppel interview.

²¹⁰ Neumann interview.

Although a simple page count does not mean the content regarding assessment is suitable, it does highlight increased attention and focus. Military planners and doctrine writers continue to integrate civilian academics in the fields of operations analysis, mathematics, modeling, scientists, and knowledge managers.²¹¹ This trend should help improve the overall effectiveness of assessments as they relate to military operations.

Another area that requires further study is the role and effectiveness of Special Operations Forces during this period. Special Operations Forces contributed greatly to the surge in Afghanistan providing extensive pressure on the enemy through precision raids and other means. The impact on the enemy cannot be understated and integration with conventional surge forces supported aggressive targeting of insurgent networks. However, due to classification restrictions still surrounding much of the Special Operations Forces community's role, it was not possible to integrate their important contribution to the mission. Perhaps future researchers would be able to produce a classified or redacted unclassified document that aptly tells the story of the Special Operations community in Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012.

Commissioned and non-commissioned leaders must also balance education, training, and experience to increase the transparency, credibility, and relevance of assessment processes in the future. Leaders are vital to the operations assessment process and carry significant influence.²¹² A system that does not change to meet the needs of living, breathing political and strategic-level leaders to make informed decisions appears

²¹¹ Bexfield and Staniec, slide 24.

²¹² Downes-Martin, 121.

to be a doomed one. To prevent this, iterative progress and rigor should be applied to the study and implementation of comprehensive assessment processes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

GEN McChrystal made a very prophetic statement in his 2009 *COMISAF Initial Assessment* on Afghanistan: “Patience will see the mission through, but to have that chance, real progress must be demonstrated in the near future.”²¹³ That statement initiated much needed change in the ISAF task organization and assessment process; however, it also contradicted the July 2011 draw-down date announced by President Obama. The changes that occurred to the assessment process during the surge, namely, creating the IJCIDC and AAG slowly increased transparency, credibility, and relevance at the strategic level. Despite improvements at the strategic level, however, improvements were not as significant at the tactical level.

Ultimately the improved centralized assessment process used by ISAF at the close of the surge was more effective at helping the COMISAF better understand the operating environment. Though the system still depended on large amounts of quantitative data and failed to push finalized assessments down to tactical units, it provided GEN Allen a more robust picture than GEN McChrystal received two years prior. At the strategic level transparency improved through embedded international media, credibility increased with new emphasis on command narratives and discourse, and relevance grew by allowing RCs some flexibility in choosing reporting metrics.

Although the focus of this research concludes that the processes used by the AAG and ISAF headquarters improved, it is worth noting that those improvements had little

²¹³ McChrystal, 2-2.

effect on requirements placed on tactical elements. From personal experience, platoons were tasked to conduct combat patrols along Afghanistan's most highly mined route daily to gather data such as the number of billboards along the roadside, cords of fire wood delivered to mosques, and number of wells (almost always empty) in nearby villages. Many of these patrols often resulted in direct fire contact with the enemy or significant IED blasts. The data that was collected on these patrols was packaged at the company and battalion level, sent to higher headquarters, and rarely followed by any top-down assessment or feedback.²¹⁴

Beyond the observations of the improved ISAF assessment paradigm, debate surrounding the success of the surge itself will most likely never be resolved, although several things are certain. President Obama's goal of "reversing Taliban momentum" was achieved in the south, albeit it temporarily.²¹⁵ The effort and resources allocated toward the Afghan National Army and Police allowed for significant growth of nearly 72 percent during that time. Along with the increase in Afghan security force size, insider attacks spiked, accounting for 15 percent of coalition deaths in 2012.²¹⁶ Despite some quantifiable successes of the surge effort, 1,227 Americans were killed from 2010 to

²¹⁴ Experiences of the researcher in Afghanistan.

²¹⁵ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan* (New York: Random House, 2012), 327.

²¹⁶ Javid Ahmid, "Dress Like Allies, Kill Like Enemies: An Analysis of 'Insider Attacks' in Afghanistan" (Report, Modern War Institute at West Point, West Point, NY, April 2017), 8.

2012, compared to 947 total in Afghanistan during the previous eight years combined.²¹⁷

Although the assessment process improved iteratively leading up to, and during the surge, it was still deficient to effectively measure the extensive mission assigned to the ISAF.

Dr. Seth Jones, a senior-level advisor to both the Pentagon and White House lamented about assessments, saying “I’m stunned with how little there [was] in Iraq and

Afghanistan. There has been so pathetically little done. Shame on us.”²¹⁸ This view shows that assessments were not prioritized during the planning and early phases of execution of campaigns.

In a report produced by the Central Intelligence Agency near the end of the surge period, the conclusion was that Afghanistan was “trending to stalemate.”²¹⁹ The cause for this, Central Intelligence Agency officials argued, was due in part because of the adaptability of the enemy. While many surge forces were employed across the southern provinces of Kandahar and Helmand achieving success in the security line of effort, the Taliban and associated groups moved to less-contested areas in the north and east, ultimately destabilizing those regions.²²⁰

In contrast to the dreary report published by the Central Intelligence Agency, the semi-annual *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* briefed to

²¹⁷ iCasualties, “Operation Enduring Freedom,” accessed 7 April 2018, <http://icasualties.org/oef/>.

²¹⁸ Jones interview.

²¹⁹ Chandrasekaran, 327.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Congress in December 2012 was full of nuanced conclusions about the effectiveness of the surge. The Department of Defense's overall assessment of the surge stated that:

Many security metrics have improved during the last two years. The comparison in violence between 2012 to date and 2010 (the first year with surge-level forces present for the same nine month period) is stark: EIAs (enemy initiated attacks) have declined by 12 percent, IED explosions have declined by nine percent, ISAF-caused civilian casualties have declined by 28 percent (insurgent-caused civilian casualties increased by 11 percent), Direct Fire (DF) attacks have declined by nine percent, and indirect fire attacks are down by 24 percent. The ANSF has grown by 88,464 personnel and has dramatically increased its capabilities. The areas of the country influenced by the insurgents and the ability of the insurgency to attack the population have been significantly diminished. Although challenges remain and progress in Afghanistan has been uneven in many areas, the security gains resulting from the surge are clear.”²²¹

Although it is visible that the report briefed to Congress was heavily reliant on quantitative data and lacked causal relationships it does convey the security increases made in certain regions of Afghanistan. Those security gains contributed in part to the “drawdown of all 33,000 U.S. surge forces” by October 2012.²²²

Counterinsurgency is, by nature, a very dynamic and complicated environment. As Nagl noted, “one of the advantages fleas enjoy in their attacks on much larger creatures is their autonomy.”²²³ There is no definitive account for number of insurgents or criminals killed, but that matters little, as U.S. effort in Afghanistan continues with no end in sight and increasingly violent attacks across Kabul. At the time of this writing, the

²²¹ US Department of Defense (DOD), *Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, December 2012, 2, accessed 28 April 2018, https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/November_1230_Report_FINAL.pdf.

²²² Ibid., 13.

²²³ John A. Nagl, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 25.

American war effort is going into its 17th year. The cost in blood and treasure has been high; 2,411 Americans killed, with tens of thousands more wounded, and nearly \$1.07 trillion (2017 estimate) spent on a myriad of efforts.²²⁴

Whether an army operates in the complex world of the insurgent described by Nagl, or high intensity conflict against well-trained peers, assessments are an important, yet often forgotten piece of the campaign. They must be deliberately planned, resourced, and integrated into the fight before conflict even begins. As with the operations that are conducted and the tactics that are applied, assessment processes will slowly change iteratively over the course of a conflict, they must, the practitioners require it. Future planners and commanders must strive to apply the most comprehensive, bottom-up process possible from the start.

²²⁴ Niall McCarthy, “The Financial Cost of U.S. Involvement in Afghanistan [InfoGraphic],” *Forbes*, 24 August 2017, accessed 8 April 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2017/08/24/the-financial-cost-of-u-s-involvement-in-afghanistan-infographic/#5e015a6a1ee3>.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Troop Surge Effect on American Operations in Afghanistan

What is the study about? You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a Masters of Military Art and Science at the United States Army Command and General Staff College. This is a case study regarding a significant period in the recent American military experience. The study is interested in your perspective about the role surge forces played in carrying out revised strategy in Afghanistan in 2010-2011. This research looks to link operational-level ways and means with strategic-level ends. There is no deception in this study.

What this study will NOT do. This study will not make policy, strategy, doctrine, or tactical recommendations for future conflicts. Details from initial interviews and any follow-on research will not be used to degrade or erode credibility of past political or military leaders. Your experiences and thoughts will be used in an effort to put a personal perspective to military doctrine as it applies to the situation in Afghanistan during the proscribed time period.

What will be asked of me? You will be asked open ended questions concerning your role in Afghan strategy or operations leading up to, during, or immediately following the surge. It is estimated that the interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Who is involved? MAJ Christopher Wallgren is the researcher and author of this study. The academic committee that may be present during interviews or involved in synthesis of the content are: Mr. Ronald Staver (Committee Chair), Mr. David Loch (Advisor/Reader), and Dr. Scott Stephenson (Ph.D., Advisor/Reader). Contact information for all members is listed below.

What is the classification of this research? This study is UNCLASSIFIED. All questions and discussion must be UNCLASSIFIED in nature. If either party feels that the questions or responses drift toward a CLASSIFIED designation, either party can stop or redirect the conversation.

Are there any risks? There are no known risks to participating in this study. You may elect to stop the interview at any time. You may also choose not to answer a specific question for any reason, and you may choose to end participation in the study at any time after the interview was conducted.

What are some benefits? There are no incentives for participation. It is possible that the research may be published, used by CGSC, or read by some across the United States Army, especially those with personal experience in Afghanistan.

Is the study anonymous/ confidential? The data collected in this study may be attributed to you. The only personal information that may be used (unless you decline) is your name and duty position as it applied to the time period covered. There is an option below to select anonymity.

Can I stop participating in the study? Yes. You may end your participation at any point during or after the interview without penalty.

What if I have questions about my rights as a research participant or complaints about the process?

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, any complaints about your participation in the research study, or any problems that occurred in the study, please contact the researchers identified in the consent form. You may also contact the Command and General Staff College Human Protections Advisor, Ms. Bobbie Murray, at (913) 684-7311 at any point.

The researcher is always available to answer questions regarding this study and its final product. If questions, issues, or recommendations arise at any point prior to, or after the interview please do not hesitate to communicate those to MAJ Christopher Wallgren. Please direct your questions or comments to: christopher.j.wallgren.mil@mail.mil, (978) 855-1307, or Mr. Ronald Staver, Department of Distance Education, (913) 684-2449.

Signatures

I have read the above description for the Troop Surge Effect on American Operations in Afghanistan Case Study. I understand the intent of the study and how my participation will advance the research. My signature indicates that I agree to participate in the study. If I decide to end participation at any point, I will notify the researcher, MAJ Christopher Wallgren. All information is UNCLASSIFIED.

Participant's Name : _____ Researcher's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Researcher's Signature: _____

Current Rank/Duty Position: _____

Rank/Position during studied period (January 2010-December 2011): _____

Status: Do you wish to remain anonymous? ☐ No ☐ Yes

Date: _____

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