Chapter 8

Measuring Success: A Canadian Perspective of Red Teaming Operations in Afghanistan [1]

Dr. Paul Dickson, Dr. Anton Minkov, and Heather Hrychuk

What does victory look like? How could we tell if we were winning? How should we measure progress? No questions were more central to the conduct of the international coalition's Afghanistan campaigns - whether counter-insurgency (COIN), counter-terrorism (CT) or nation-building and stability - or better highlight a critical challenge facing states in twenty-first century conflicts. Crises across the globe continue to prompt demands for military intervention, but the post intervention status of Afghanistan and Iraq loom over every policy maker's calculations over whether to provide aid and what kind. The experiences in those countries suggest that for western democracies, commitments must be tied to clear end states - or end dates - but how to best identify those remains elusive, despite a considerable effort, then and now. To try and address these questions, military and political commanders in Afghanistan accessed a range of military as well as public and private civilian analytical and intelligence support. The following paper is based on the work and observations of three Defence Research Development Canada's Centre for Operational Research and Analysis strategic analysts deployed over the course of 2011-13 in support of the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) Red Team at HQ ISAF in Kabul. The team provided analysis and recommendations for senior ISAF military and civilian decision-makers, working with, and drawing on, the multiple staff and analytical organizations responsible for the direction and execution of the campaign. Approached from the perspective of the coalition headquarters, an assessment of the main issues addressed by the Red Team during the period 2011 through the first half of 2013 provides insights into how successive ISAF commanders and their staffs approached the

execution of their missions and the implementation of coalition strategy and the concurrent COIN and CT campaigns (including nation and capacity-building). It also sheds some light on the challenges of commanding and pursuing sometimes conflicting objectives within a coalition environment. This assessment does not directly address the issue of whether and why future interventions will occur; rather it speaks to the complexity of assessing them against stated ends and thus some critical considerations shaping future coalition efforts and decisions for military interventions.

The Red Team was one of three headquarters analytical groups providing the Commander, ISAF/US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A), the Deputy Chief of Staff Intelligence (J2) and other senior commanders with in-depth analytical products to support decision making and avoid strategic surprise. The establishment of the Red Team was part of the evolving analytical assessment architecture that reflected refined ideas for executing the operational concepts and strategy. Arguably, by 2008, it was clear that an international intervention, with its origins in the US-led Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), that was attempting to deliver security to some parts of the country as well as fragmented and uncoordinated reconstruction and stability efforts to rebuild an Afghan government and economy was insufficient to meet the challenges posed by a resurgent Taliban insurgency, a corrupt government considered by many Afghans to represent one faction among many competing for power, a stagnant economy, and a robust narcotics trade. ISAF and USFOR-A conducted separate, and sometimes contradictory, operations, while within ISAF, operations and goals fractured along national lines, fissures hardened by national caveats on rules of engagement as well as genuine differences in capabilities and approaches.[2]

Many ISAF-contributing nations reached this conclusion separately, but it was the election of Barack Obama in 2009 that prompted a serious adjustment of the scale and scope of the intervention.[3] In March 2009, and following much internal debate, again in December 2009, the new president revealed a shift in strategy predicated on creating the conditions to withdraw coalition forces and transition to an Afghan-led security. Obama's "Af-Pak" strategy reduced the scope of American ambitions to "disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future." To achieve this aim, he announced an increase in US forces, a civilian surge and a goal of taking the fight to the insurgency while growing Afghan security forces and engaging Pakistan.[4] The emphasis of western intervention shifted from combat to support, but in order to create those conditions it would execute two missions, the coalition counter-insurgency (COIN) mission and the US led counter-terrorism mission (CT) mission, both proving security to enable a third mission, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, a UN effort devoted to political and economic development.[5]

The Evolution of COIN in Afghanistan

In 2009, General Stanley McChrystal was appointed with a specific mandate to execute this latest US version of COIN, and, over the course of the next two years, COMISAF was provided with the resources – military, civilian and financial – to undertake it.[6] In general, the US counter-insurgency doctrine that emerged from its experience in Iraq prescribed several inter-related lines of operation: combat operations, civil security, development of essential services, governance capacity and economic development, with the primary focus or centre of gravity securing the safety (and support) of the population.[7] McChrystal's report on the COIN campaign stressed the

centrality of the population, as well as an effective assessment architecture to measure the effects of the strategy, assess progress towards key objectives and, make necessary adjustments.[8] McChrystal was replaced by General David Petraeus in 2010. He refined the approach, shifting to "enemy-centric" counterinsurgency, focused on fracturing the insurgency through kinetic operations as well as reintegration programs.[9] He also established the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force (CJIATF)-Shafafiyat ("transparency") to foster a common understanding of the corruption problem in Afghanistan and to coordinate ISAF anti-corruption efforts. [10]

Over the course of 2009-13, the resources devoted to the campaign in Afghanistan also changed materially. The international military commitment reached its apex in 2011, with US forces surging from 32,800 at the end of 2008 to approximately 100,000 in the June 2011, including special operating forces (SOF) increments to OEF. ISAF contributing nations deployments were approximately 42,500 around the same time, peaking in April 2012 at an estimated 44,900. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) grew, on paper, to a mandated ceiling of 352,000.[11] American government civilian support to governance and development tripled, focusing on developing Afghan government and economic capacity, a gap that other countries had also tried to address.[12]

Command and control was also restructured. In 2008, in attempt to create unity of command and mitigate the incoherent approaches to operations, the US appointed COMISAF General McKiernan as Commander, USFOR-A to ensure synchronization of US and ISAF forces as well as proper coordination of COIN operations and ANSF capacity-building efforts.[13] An ISAF Joint Command (IJC) was stood-up to act as an operational level headquarters. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A) was established to manage ANSF generation and institutional capacity. A sixth regional command, Regional Command-Southwest (RC-SW), was

stood up to address the excessive span of control and the operational tempo in Regional Command-South (RC-S). New structures were also established to emphasize key elements of the USFOR-A CT effort. The CJIATF-435 managed detention operations and rule of law. This created three levels of command in theatre. HQ ISAF reported to Joint Forces Command (JFC) Brunssum and USFOR-A to CENTCOM. The COMISAF had command responsibility over the operational level Commander of IJC, the NTM-A and Special Operations Forces. The tactical level Regional Commands (RCs) reported to IJC.

Coalition efforts followed US COIN parameters to greater or lesser extents, but differences in scale and emphasis mattered. Not all agreed with COIN theory and the need to shift away from the combat mission.[14] There was ongoing debate about whether COIN was a strategy, operational approach or concept, or a substitute for them.[15] There was also disagreement within ISAF as well as within national contingents about how it should be executed, resulting from serious disagreements about the nature of the conflict, and what was driving it.[16] Multiple "factions" within HQ ISAF promoted an emphasis on one aspect of campaign instead of another; and, the apportionment of regional commands by nationality diffused this effort even further. Because nations had responsibility for discrete regions, execution varied across the country.[17] These distinctions in concepts, combined with real constraints imposed by national caveats on combat and varying capabilities, exacerbated the challenge of understanding progress and success.

How the Campaign was Analysed and Assessed

As others have argued, COIN proved very analysis - and intelligence - intensive.[18] COIN doctrine had emphasized the importance of ongoing analysis and assessment. It defined

assessment as the "continuing monitoring and evaluation of the current situation and progress of an operation [against established criteria]." The US COIN manual provided modest insights into what indicators should be used, but drew on the Iraqi experience to distinguish between "measures of performance" and "measures of effectiveness." Performance measures addressed task accomplishment against intent – are we doing things right? – while effectiveness measures addressed change against expectations – are we doing the right things?[19]

Analysis and assessments evolved in response to these demands, both in structure, focus and in method. There were attempts to distinguish the role of analysis from campaign and, later, strategic assessment.[20] From early 2009, a new campaign analysis architecture was established, both to address the shortfalls highlighted later that year by McChrystal, and as part of the effort to bring coherence to the campaign assessments. Over eight years of the campaign, individual contributing nations had developed their own assessment models and methods resulting in, by one analyst's estimate, over twenty different campaign assessments.[21] The stand-up of the Afghan Assessment Group (AAG) at HQ ISAF in early 2009 was recognition that analysis was an essential element of counter-insurgency. It was also the first step towards a centralized strategic and operational assessment process. McChrystal refined the analytical architecture, expanding the AAG mandate to include quantitative assessments, and changed the reporting structure, minimizing charts and graphs, and calling for more interpretative reports. He also established a COIN Advisory and Assistance Team (CAAT) to "operationalize intent in the ongoing counterinsurgency campaign" to support the effort outside the capital.[22] Data and qualitative assessments were organized along three lines of operation (LOO) that reflected McChrystal's population-centric COIN: protecting the population, building the ANSF and increasing the capacity of the Afghan government.

McChrystal also introduced a reporting structure that, in an attempt to ensure a holistic perspective to overcome the stovepipes of the LOO analytical bins, used the RCs to implement a District Assessment Model to measure and report on security, governance and development. The unit of measure was considered appropriate, but the colour-coded method of reporting was considered too limited to be of use. There were also ongoing concerns that the assessment methods led to impressionistic evaluations, with too great an emphasis on performance rather than progress, and analysis by analogy, with commanders drawing on their experiences in Iraq.[23] It was also hampered by the reality that US leadership, at least, had little real understanding of the complexity of the country, and they realized it.[24] There were ongoing questions surrounding the type and reliability of the data and whether the appropriate metrics – or observable indicators – were being used.[25] And what did it all mean? Even when behaviours were identified, what did they signify? McChrystal leaned heavily on outside experts to identify metrics and assess their significance.[26] He also pressed, unsuccessfully, to have the narrative assessments unclassified, and subject to scrutiny by academics, journalists and other organizations.

When Petraeus assumed command in 2010, he changed the assessment philosophy to match his approach to Afghan COIN and CT. He established sets of objectives based on identifiable and measurable effects. He further refined campaign assessment, changing the focus to quantitative data to measure the interim effects of his policy. To some observers, the emphasis on effects came at the expense of understanding outcomes, even if it gave the illusion of progress.[27] The introduction of an element of ambiguity, resulting from the limited data and poor metrics, proved to have a political benefit beyond that envisioned by many critics: no clear indication of success or failure held out the possibility of success, and therefore the continuation of the surge, and the fight. Observers of the political infighting surrounding the scale and timing

of the surge suggest that this ambiguity worked in favour of those who hoped to keep US troop levels high for as a long as possible.[28] This ambiguity also highlighted another important element of the COIN strategy (and strategy in general) that would emerge as a core metric: perceptions of who was winning were as important as the reality on the ground. Real results were necessary, but not sufficient.

General John Allen's assumption of command in July 2011 did not alter the trajectory of a campaign already transitioned to capacity-building, although he re-prioritized efforts to focus on security forces. However, the start of the drawdown of the US surge that same month and subsequent announcements over the next year of formal timelines for the transition to Afghan-led security, and the consequent debates over the scale and timing of troop withdrawals all increased the complexity of assessing the campaign as well as the variables to be considered.[29] There was increased pressure to understand how the campaigns were progressing relative to established timelines, decreasing resources and ever-changing threats to success. There was a growing appetite and need for analysis and data even as the number of analysts, staff and intelligence gatherers declined. The political context for the end of the ISAF mission was in place by the spring of 2012.[30] The decision to declare an end to the mission reshaped the idea and evaluation of progress. Victory was not simply a function of transitioning security to the Afghan's, but a successful transition itself. Identifying conditions for the transition exacerbated the challenges of measuring success.[31]

Within a few months of assuming command, Allen changed the assessment architecture. Most of his initial concerns centred on the explanatory power of the assessment and reporting methods, and their limited utility to facilitate discussion amongst senior leaders or provide clarity on the areas where changes could and should be made. The shift in emphasis was on trying to

explain behaviours rather than simply identifying them, a complicated analytical task itself. AAG initiated a review with the aim of creating a system of assessment that was both holistic and comprehensive.[32] To address the former, two levels of assessment were developed: a strategic and a campaign assessment. The former was the more innovative of the two, built as it was on strategic questions designed to ensure NATO and US policy and strategic goals were being met. The latter was a refinement on existing metrics, with the notable introduction of "regional relations," and one which would drive much effort in terms of policy and analysis at the headquarters. These changes prompted a re-balance between quantitative and qualitative analysis to inform the assessment process. From an analytical perspective, this manifested itself in a number of ways.

District assessments evolved into "Deep-dive" District assessments, stressing the importance of context to interpret the quantitative measures, a result increasingly important as transition to Afghan leadership became the primary target. These were facilitated by an increased emphasis on quantitative assessment methods that shed light on trends such as time-series analysis, but required data acquired over time, baseline data, and (in some cases) a threshold to assess progress.[33] There was no consistent or comprehensive capture of the required data before 2009.

The new COMISAF also tried to introduce a more systematic approach to coordinating the analytical efforts across the headquarters, as well as enhancing the capacity to provide contextual and qualitative analysis. The renewal of the Red Team (originally stood-up in 2011) was one example. Its mandate was decision-support Red Teaming, or alternative analysis as currently styled by NATO, as distinct from Red Team (or Red Force) analysis that emulates the enemy or threat. Decision-support Red Team applies a range of methods to offer decision makers

qualitative and contextual analysis. The COMISAF Red Team was also built to provide a range of perspectives as a multi-national team of military and civilian analysts. The products (papers and briefs) provided alternative and strategic perspectives and recommendations on key issues (as identified by COMISAF and J2), examining underlying assumptions, seams, adversary motivations, regional dynamics and social, cultural and economic factors surrounding issues.[34] Allen also changed the remit of the CAAT, renamed the COMISAF Advisory and Assistance Team, with a new mission to provide directed observations and reporting to COMISAF on strategic priority areas. In practice, the CAAT was focused on the development of Security Force Advisory Teams, the aim of which was to advise, mentor and train Afghan security forces at the unit level.[35] The third team charged with providing context and assessments was the Commander's Action Group (CAG) a small multinational staff working directly to support COMISAF.[36]

While there was overlap in the remits of each team, and those remits were fluid, influenced by crisis and the immediate requirements of COMISAF (and, in the case of the Red Team, of the priorities of the Deputy Chief of Staff Intelligence), over the course of 2012, an equilibrium was established that assigned the CAG more immediate and short term assessments, and the CAAT specific tasks related to campaign execution. The Red Team focused on contextual and narrative analysis. There were other groups of analysts providing analysis on similar topics and issues. The CJ2 intelligence officers provided 'deep dives' and daily assessments. Some analysts worked to support their national contingents; others worked for other layers of command, notably the IJC and the RCs. Desk officers in the various divisions also produced analysis and assessments. The Senior Civilian Representative had its own analytical pools. Commanders also brought their own advisors or brought in outside experts and specialists.

There was no shortage of analysis being undertaken, representing a wide range of opinions and conclusions, and of varied quality and impact. The cacophony of analysis created a need for a few trusted pools of analysts, as well as prioritized efforts, a goal articulated by COMISAF and his deputies in CJ2 Intelligence.

Allen left unchanged Petraeus's focus on effects rather than outcomes. The operational plan listed tasks, but not objectives, reflecting the challenge of objectively determining when "security" had been achieved or when governance was "good." Given the challenge of describing the various aspects of effectiveness in absolutes, defining proper indicators and explaining them became the focus of analysis. Under General Allen there was an increased effort to define what success meant from an Afghan perspective, to provide both campaign and strategic assessments, and to explain behaviour in order to both more effectively address it, and to prioritize the coalition's effort. Understanding the issue of corruption provides a good example. CJIATF took a legalistic approach to the issue. However, in 2012, General Allen directed that some of the underlying assumptions surrounding the approach be examined, with the focus on re-conceptualizing patronage and corruption, and trying to understand corruption in terms of it being legitimate or illegitimate rather than legal or illegal. Treating all levels of corruption the same failed to account for the role of "functional" corruption in Afghan society, particularly in the absence of well-paid employment and social services.[37] As an example, too often the legal system apprehended local officials, while leaving senior government leaders who were "capturing" the state untouched, further degrading faith in the rule of law and good governance.

Marine General Joseph Dunford assumed command in February 2013. He established headquarters priorities as managing the ISAF drawdown and the transition to the post-2014

RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission.[38] The change of command, which included a new DCOSINT, also brought about a change in decision-making culture and a new analytical support paradigm. The new leadership favored greater interaction to formal analytical products. The Red Team's analytical contributions gradually shifted from papers to briefings only as well as direct support to staff and operational planning. The production list remained, however, with the papers becoming increasingly shorter and reactive to short-term priorities.

Much of this reflected the conviction that the time for deepening ISAF understanding of Afghanistan was over, and, with decreasing data collection and analytical resources, effort would be better expended focusing on more immediate transition related issues. Ironically, this had the effect of breaking down some stovepipes in the analytical architecture. For example, the "limited distribution" restriction on Red Team papers was removed and the papers were accessible across the headquarters, still classified but not sensitive.

Red Team Production Insights

Through 2011 and 2012, analysis began to focus on prioritization in an effort to determine where best to put limited resources. Much of the focus for our team – and the headquarters' staff – was on rationalizing command and control.[39] This was a contentious issue, highlighting the relative costs of maintaining unity at the expense of efficiency. Priority setting became an issue when examining options for merging or revising HQ tasks and functions. While the idea of reducing the number of General and Flag Officer positions and functions for efficiency was appealing to some, others argued that the political considerations of the number of General Officers employed and national representation were of paramount concern. And the division was not always along national lines. Later in 2012, when the operational level was examined for efficiencies, the

sequence of rationalizing the various HQs became a contentious issue between the US and coalition General Officers, with COMISAF effectively moderating. This was in part due to the complicated nature of the mission itself, but was exacerbated by the dual command structure. This was further complicated in the multinational environment where national interests and national conceptions or interpretations differed. For example, national conceptions of command structures did not always align, and often provoked contentious discussion. It did allow COMISAF to receive a variety of views before making a decision – ensuring he was as informed of all possible repercussions for the coalition.

'Hedging' and 'factionalism' were also key areas of effort for the Red Team during the first half of 2013, reflecting growing concerns about Afghan responses to the end of the mission. Hedging – in this context, providing qualified support to a number of options to reduce risk – was identified as a major threat to the transition to Afghan security, both because of the potential loss of the best educated and wealthy segments of society, as well as the signal it sent to the international community which was being asked to make some commitments post-2014. Conversely, COMISAF characterized these activities as direct evidence of uncertainty regarding the future, but increasingly believed that the short-term solution was political.[40] Hedging became shorthand in media and even headquarters' discourse to suggest Afghans' lack of faith in their country's future following the withdrawal of coalition forces. However, the concept was not well understood, nor measured. Subsequent studies of the concept and regional case studies helped to clarify it.[41]

Hedging studies were a good example of the progress made in taking a more nuanced approach to measuring and understanding Afghan attitudes as well as an example of how national interpretations of factionalism challenged the underlying assumptions of COIN.

Opinions on factions and the threat of factionalism varied across the coalition, differences that

were highlighted with the appointment of a new Deputy Commander, British Lieutenant-General

Sir Nicholas Carter in October 2012. Carter was not convinced the insurgency was the main, or

only, existential threat to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA).[42]

Drawing on his recent experience Afghanistan as Commander Regional Command South in

2009-10, and reflecting the British interpretation of COIN, he believed the conflict was not

binary between GIRoA and the insurgency, but one with multiple and overlapping factions and

fractures, a view shared by many but difficult to address militarily. There were also many

divisions within the insurgency, and varying degrees of ideological and religious motivation.[43]

From that perspective, the destruction of the insurgency was not necessarily central to the

mission or even realistic in all parts of the country. In essence, Carter wanted instead to elevate

challenges like hedging, concerns about regional powerbrokers and ethnic and tribal divisions to

ISAF priorities to threats of the first order because they challenged national stability and the

state's monopoly on the use of force. He promoted analysis and assessments framing the issue as

one of competing factions.[44] He also implemented a strategy to convince GIRoA that factions

and factionalism were existential threats, and, that GIRoA itself was, unfortunately, perceived as

one faction among many. Carter's initiatives shaped debate across the headquarters, displacing

some analysis of the campaign.[45]

Indeed, how to engage the insurgents proved a challenge throughout this period. Obama

identified the need to engage in a political dialogue with the Taliban, if not other insurgent

groups. The animating theory behind this goal was that the insurgents represented a part of the

body politic. This was incrementally realized through 2012 as the headquarters examined

insurgent responses to the campaign as well as the announcements to end the mission. For

example, an assessment as to whether the insurgency might stop operations in response to ISAF 2014 end of mission challenged and informed commanders' perceptions of potential insurgency leadership response. Fundamental assumptions about the utility of trying to divide the Taliban while concurrently trying to negotiate were also addressed.[46]

Campaign priorities were of course subject to changes in insurgent tactics and the strategic situation. For example, through 2012, the 'insider threat' posed a significant threat to the unity of the coalition at a time when member nation-states – considering timetables for troop –withdrawals – were weary of the conflict and particularly sensitive to casualties. Between January 2008 and August 2014, attacks by ANSF against ISAF soldiers – known as 'green on blue' – killed 143 ISAF personnel and wounded another 183. Incidents peaked in 2012, when forty-four attacks killed sixty-one (out of a total 402 coalition dead) and wounded another eighty-one.[47] Through 2012, significant analytical and staff resources were devoted to identifying causes, and explaining behaviours as well as recommending mitigation strategies. This issue was further complicated by the Afghan narrative that the 'foreign elements' were responsible for the attacks, a result of the stated Afghan political leadership's preference for the coalition to equip and train it for conventional conflicts against regional threats, rather than for counter-insurgency operations.[48]

Through the course of 2012-13, the increased focus on Afghanistan's geo-strategic situation was also evident in the growing demand for analysis of regional relationships, their potential impact on Afghanistan, and what, if anything, ISAF or USFOR-A could do to influence those relationships. While Obama had specifically directed that engagement with Pakistan become an US priority, it was under Allen that ISAF HQ turned to regional relations in real terms and relative to other priorities. There were deep differences of opinion on responses and

engagement. Even security issues that were clearly within ISAF's mandate were problematic. One of the main issues through 2012 was the border, both the growing number of incidents of cross-border artillery fire between Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as the question of regulation and interdiction activities. The issues were contentious. Concepts of corruption and patronage proved to be complicating factors in coalition efforts to improve control of the border, particularly given patronage networks that extended from border guards to government officials. Red Team and SCR analysis, among others, suggested that, among many factors in enforcing border regulations, these complicated patron-client relationships needed to be understood as a political as well as a legal issue. It took time to fully understand the historic affiliations, the dynamics of political and economic relationships, and balances of power within them as well as the respective roles of individuals in the context of the broader national political settlement. The shape of proposed border strategies in general remained a divisive issue between military and civilian leadership.[49]

Cross border 'fire' (exchanges of gunfire between ANSF and Pakistani forces) were equally complicated. COMISAF staffed analysis on the pros and cons of a public statement as well as an exploration of other options in response to fires in northeast Afghanistan. This reflected divisions between ISAF and Afghan political and military leadership as well as an issue where Allen's command of USFOR-A was in potential conflict with his command of coalition forces. The issue continued to unsettle senior decision makers through 2013 as they were drawn into supporting Afghan-Pakistani relations over the Durand Line, a border that Afghans refuse to recognize.[50]

Iran-Afghanistan relations were another troublesome issue. ISAF leadership and western policy analysts in general perceived Iran's objectives in the region as malign, therefore the focus

of the Iran's engagement in Afghanistan was most often assessed through the prism of its support for the Taliban and other activities that may have presented a direct threat to the military campaign, or were damaging the relations between ISAF and GIRoA.[51] Iranian leadership considered ISAF a direct threat to its security, especially after 2003, when the US invasion in Iraq placed US troops on Iran's borders. Consequently, Iran initiated a dual strategy of securing its eastern border by supporting reconstruction and economic activities in the traditionally Iranian sphere of influence in Western Afghanistan, reinforcing linkages with the Shia Hazara population, and, at the same time, seemingly assisting subversive activities against ISAF troops to prevent success of the mission.[52] COMISAF directed his analysts to focus on evidence of the latter. Red Team analysis attempted to address what some at headquarters considered an evolution of Iranian interests and offered more comprehensive evaluation in view of the changing regional environment, in particular the Syrian conflict, and the broader Iranian objectives in Afghanistan, not simply those threatening ISAF efforts.[53] Whether views at the headquarters changed is unclear, but the UK embassy requested a meeting to further discuss the assessment, suggesting some national divisions over Iran.

The support of deeper analysis also allowed for more nuanced approaches to assessments of Afghanistan's neighboring countries as a group rather than individually. Such an approach was critical to assess the regional impact on the mission. For example the Red Team focused on estimating the impact of joint policies in Russia's and Iran's overlapping areas of interest and positions of influence in Afghanistan, such as the security environment, the energy sector, foreign trade and others.[54]

Analysis of Pakistan, technically considered a major US ally in the region and a recipient of significant military and economic aid from Washington, was another challenge. Pakistan

played a double-sided game since the Taliban was potentially one of its instruments in post-ISAF Afghanistan and did little to prevent the insurgents from using its territory as a save-heaven. From 2009, the US administration began to consider the Afghan-Pakistani border area as a single theatre of operation and introduced the term Af-Pak.[55] Given the new strategic focus on Pakistan's role in solving the Afghan quagmire, Pakistan was increasingly prominently in HQ ISAF analytical efforts. It is notable that as late as 2013, HQ ISAF formulated its Af-Pak strategy by asking for assessments of Pakistan's views towards Afghanistan,[56] avoiding the wider regional context, particularly the role of India in Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan.[57] The growing focus on regional dynamics included Russia and China, reflected a belated acceptance of the complexity of the region but also the challenges of addressing the full range of strategic and operational issues with limited resources.[58]

The mission drawdown deadline had implications not only for ISAF but for Afghan political environment as well. President Karzai portrayed the deadline as abandonment and sought to increase its own legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan public by building a perception of political influence over ISAF. In addition to increased anti-American rhetoric, his seemingly antagonistic behaviour and actions threatened to derail essential mission elements and negotiations surrounding the Bilateral Security Agreement. Managing relations with the Afghan government became entangled with mission planning and analysis.[59] Another key element of to the success of the drawdown was the smooth transition of power after the 2014 presidential elections; fears of unexpected circumstances were abundant.[60] Red Team analysis focused on how, or if, ISAF could support the Afghan election process.

Conclusion: Considerations for Future Operations

What do the insights of the Red Team production and experience suggest about future western interventions and missions? In general, the lessons of the period under review suggest that information and the ability to systematically transform it into useful assessments are key enablers. At the same time it is not a capability that can be built at the last minute. Context matters, and metrics will change as operations change, but analysis and concepts should be used to make sense of a complex mission as early as possible. These concepts affect how the conflict will be interpreted, operations conducted and resources prioritized.

The capability to properly identify and understand the measures of successes – and recognize failure – became a critical enabler in the Afghan COIN operation. Where success was not measured in ground gained, casualties inflicted, or regime change, then nuanced campaign analysis and assessments of a range of indicators were essential to decision-makers. However, organizations measure what their leaders tell them to report on. Thus, one key way for a leadership team to shift an organization's focus was to change reporting requirements and the associated measures of performance and effectiveness. These changes also provided insights into the leader's intent and the execution of his concept. Looking at the execution can also provide insights into the distance between goals and reality in allied operations.

Under McChrystal and his successors, unity of command was nominally achieved, but it was messy, and inefficient, although, arguably, it prevented a run for the exits by coalition partners. This came at the cost of unity of effort: national representatives had different perspectives on the utility of policy and execution and how to best measure effects. Unity of command is likely to continue to be an issue in future coalition operations, but this analysis suggests that achieving unity of effort is by far the more challenging. ISAF behavior – that is unity of effort – needs to be understood first and foremost as a balancing act between individual

ISAF participants, and those who represented the ISAF headquarters and the responsibility for the execution of the theatre strategy and the operational concepts and missions. ISAF command culture was a work in progress, and the issue was often whether the imperatives of maintaining the coalition outweighed the pursuit of unity of effort. The demands of the analytical architecture provided some consistency in terms of shared ideas on execution, but as emphasis and effort changed, so too did measures and metrics. Balancing the needs of the coalition (primarily NATO, but also various bi-lateral relations like US-Australia) with those of the campaigns was at times detrimental to achieving the unity of effort required to set and reach reasonable goals.

The introduction of a counterinsurgency framework was meant to clarify the nature of the problem, in order to achieve the coalition aims, but, as the analytical program suggested, there was always confusion as to what COIN was and how it should be executed. Approaches varied not only among contributing nations, but also between different schools of thought within the HQ ISAF, thus making the understanding of progress and success very difficult. In that context, the challenge and strategic assessment functions provided by the Red Team were important. While the team's work was only one small portion of the overall analytical effort, it provided an important service to the Commander by providing analysis that was not subject to revision by the chain of command or aligned with functional staffs. The Red Team provided, in theory, objective advice, which could be used in conjunction with other staff analyses to ensure COMISAF was making the most informed decision possible.

The period under analysis was also marked by the challenges of high turnover among military and civilian personnel, with the concurrent loss of corporate memory, continuity and expertise. This was exacerbated by the decreasing numbers of staff and analysts as the effort wound down. There was also a consistent shortfall on the civilian side, which created a vacuum

that was filled by military staff at HQ ISAF, a trend illustrated by the range of topics under study. The civilian effort was never sufficient to achieve coalition goals for capacity building, a challenge for any government considering interventions of this nature in the future.

Maintaining the momentum of lengthy campaigns will always be a challenge, and exacerbated by some mix of the factors described above. In this case, there was no easy means to analyze progress, and determine where the weight of effort should be made, or whether some aspects of the campaign were more successful than others, a characteristic that, from a historical perspective, is not unusual. The coalition only slowly groped its way towards understanding the limits of COIN in general, and specifically as executed by a very diverse coalition. In the end, setting a hard target for the transition to an Afghan-led process was one of the few objective goals, and arguably created conditions and a focus that had been missing.

Notes

[1] The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not represent, or otherwise reflect, any official opinion or position of the Government of Canada, or any of its departments and agencies.

[2] See, for example, David P. Auerswald and Stephen M. Saideman, *NATO in Afghanistan: Fighting Together, Fighting Alone* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[3] See, for example, Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, *Final Report* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, January 2008); Sultan Barakat, *A Strategic Conflict Assessment of Afghanistan* (University of York, November 2008), a report commissioned by the Afghan and British governments; HQ ISAF, General Stanley McChrystal, *COMISAF's Initial Assessment: Initial United States Forces – Afghanistan (USFOR-A) Assessment*(26 June 2009) Available at: http://www.au.af.mil/au/aupress/digital/pdf/paper/ap_brand_mcchrystals_assessment.pdf ; Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 341-59. Gates provides a useful perspective on the debates surrounding the changes to Afghanistan campaign.

[4] "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary (1 December 2009).

[5] USFOR-A was initially tasked with two missions: direct the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan to focus on force generation and institutional and ministerial development and, second, to transfer OEF units to Operations Control COMISAF, thereby placing them on the ISAF Combined Joint Statement of Requirements—see "Command and Control and Command Relationships," McChrystal, *Initial Assessment*, D-2. In March 2010, the

Pentagon announced its intention to integrate nearly all of the remaining 20,000 US troops operating in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom into ISAF. Only small detachments of US Special Forces and a detention unit remain outside of the NATO command structure, see "Most US Enduring Freedom Troops to Join NATO's Afghan Wing," *Agence France Presse* (16 March 2010).

[6] Hy Rothstein, "Chapter 4: America's Longest War," Hy Rothstein and John Arquilla, ed., *Afghan Endgames: Strategy and Policy Choices for America's Longest War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), 59 – 81; Stanley McChrystal, *Initial Assessment*.

[7] The US Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual FM 3-24 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Celeste Ward Gventer, David Martin Jones and MLR Smith (Editors), *The New Counter-Insurgency Era in Critical Perspective* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

[8] Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 305-8; McChrystal, *Initial Assessment*.

[9] He established an HQ ISAF Force-Reintegration Cell for Afghan-led reintegration and reconciliations programs. Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, National Security Council, *Peace and Reintegration Program,* Programme Document (July 2010); COMISAF/CDR USFOR-A, HQ ISAF, "COMISAF's Counter-insurgency (COIN) Contracting Guidance" (8 September 2010).

[10] COMISAF/CDR USFOR-A, HQ ISAF, "COMISAF's Counter-Insurgency Guidance," (1 Aug 2010), Available at:

http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/stories/File/COMISAF/COMISAF_COIN_Guidance_01Aug10_

.doc; US Department of National Defence *Report to Congress: Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (November 2010), 11-17; Kagan, *The Insurgents*, 342-44; Paul Dixon, "The British Approach to Counter-Insurgency," in Paul Dixon, ed., *The British Approach to Counter-Insurgency: From Malaya and Northern Ireland to Irag and Afghanistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 40 – 2.

[11] NATO ISAF "Placemat" Troop Numbers and Contributions, 2009; 2010; 2011; 2012; Brookings Afghanistan Index: Troop and Security Forces in Afghanistan (2001-2012). http://www.brookings.edu/about/programs/foreign-policy/afghanistan-index; Last accessed 15 July 2014; US Department of National Defence *Report to Congress: Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (December 2012), 13 – 14.

[12] Canada's Strategic Advisory Team was one example of many. By most accounts, the civilian surge failed, although there have been few serious assessments. See Toby Dodge, "Domestic Politics and State-building," in Toby Dodge and Nicholas Redman, ed., *Afghanistan: 2015 and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2011), 69 – 96; See also Rajiv Chanrasekaran, *Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012) for a harsher journalistic investigation and assessment of the civilian surge.

[13] This issue of streamlining command and control were raised in the *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan Report to Congress* in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1230, Public Law 110-181), (January 2009), 27. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/OCTOBER_1230_FINAL.pdf. For a discussion of these issues see Ian Hope, *Unity of Command in Afghanistan: A Forsaken Principle of War* (Army War College: Carlisle Barracks PA, 2008).

[14] See, for example, Chanrasekaran, *Little America*, 152-165, and his account of Col Harry Tunnel, CO of the Fifth Brigade of the US Second Infantry Division deployed in and around Kandahar from August 2009; David H. Ucko and Robert C. Egnell, "Options for Avoiding Counterinsurgencies," *Parameters* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 11 – 22.

[15] See for example, Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Colin S. Gray, "Concept Failure? COIN, Counterinsurgency, and Strategic Theory," *PRISM* 3, no. 3 (2012), 17 – 32.

[16] See, for example, Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 5 – 14.

[17] For example, see Ministry of Defence (MOD), *British Army Field Manual,* Volume 1, Part 10, *Countering Insurgency*, Army Code 71876, Chapter 4 (October 2009).

[18] Walter L. Perry and John Gordon, *Analytic Support to Intelligence in Counterinsurgencies* (Washington: RAND Corporation, 2010); Observers had been suggesting the centrality of analysis, information and intelligence to successful prosecution of "wars among the peoples" for a decade. See, for example, Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2004); General Rupert Smith*, The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2008 Edition), 377 – 85.

[19] *FM 3-24*, 188 – 91.

[20]Analysis and assessment are distinct in form, even if they can both perform the same function. Analysis is best characterized as a focused process that uses an identified method. Assessment is a decision support function that might *or might not* include one or more analytic processes and methods. An assessment can include analysis, and the latter can serve as the assessment. For example, a military commander can provide a campaign assessment based on

personal reading of the data with no formal analysis, or they can incorporate a time-series analysis of similar data over time, which requires the focused application of a method. The latter could serve as the assessment, or could be one of a series of analytical studies that inform an assessment of the campaign. See Ben Connable, Walter L. Perry, Abby Doll, Natasha Lander, Dan Madden, *Modeling, Simulation, and Operations Analysis in Afghanistan and Iraq Operational Vignettes, Lessons Learned, and a Survey of Selected Efforts* (Washington: RAND Corporation, 2014), 5 – 9.

[21] Jonathan Schroden, "Why Operations Assessments Fail: It's Not Just the Metrics," *Naval War College Review* 64, No. 4 (Autumn 2011), 89 – 102.

[22] Power Point Brief to NATO HQ, Brussels, "ISAF COIN Advisory & Assistance Team (CAAT)," (29 October 2009).

[23] Schroden, "Why Operations Assessments Fail," 89-102; Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 345; For issues related to analysis by analogy see Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 34 – 57.

[24] McChrystal entitled the chapter of his memoirs covering the summer and autumn 2009 "Understand." General Stanley McChrystal (US Army, Retired), *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Edition (Updated), 2013); "An Interview with Lieutenant General Mike Flynn," *PRISM* 4, no. 4 (2014), 181 – 89.

[25] On data see Etienne Vincent, Philip Eles, and Boris Vasiliev, "Opinion Polling in Support of Counterinsurgency," *The Cornwallis Group XIV: Analysis of Societal Conflict and Counter-Insurgency* (Cornwallis, Nova Scotia, 2010), 1-25; On both see William Upshur, Jonathan Roginski, and David Kilcullen, "Recognizing Systems in

Afghanistan: Lessons Learned and New Approaches to Operational Assessments," *PRISM* 3, no. 3 (2012), 87–104; S. Downes-Martin, S., "Operations Assessment in Afghanistan is Broken: What Is to Be Done?," *Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2011), 103 – 125; Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War: Assessment and Metrics in Counterinsurgency* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012); Jonathan Schroden, "Why Operations Assessments Fail," 89 – 102.

[26] Primary among those shaping the COIN debate was David Kilkullen, an Australian officer who was instrumental in promoting COIN, and then shaping the debate about metrics. His standard brief - "United States Counter-insurgency: An Australian View," was considered the catalyst for a US reconsideration of the campaign. See Kilkullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[27] Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 344-5; Schroden, *"*Operations Assessment at ISAF: Changing Paradigms," in Andrew Williams, James Bexfield, Fabrizio Fitzgerald Farina and Johannes de Nijs, ed., *Innovation in Operations Assessment Recent Developments in Measuring Results in Conflict Environments* (Norfolk Virginia: Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, 2013)*,* 43 – 4.

[28] Kaplan, *The Insurgents*, 294-348; Gates, *Duty*, 478-502.

[29] In December 2010, following a lengthy assessment of the war, Obama announced that the US would start withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in July 2011, however, there were no specifics as to the potential size or pace of withdrawal.

[30] In April 2012, NATO finalized agreements to wind down the war in Afghanistan by formalizing commitments to move the Afghans gradually into a lead combat role, to maintain a military presence in Afghanistan beyond 2014, and to finance the Afghan security forces.

[31] Chicago Summit Declaration on Afghanistan, Issued by the Heads of State and Government of Afghanistan and Nations contributing to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) (21 May 2014).

[32] 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 – 6.

[33] Ben Connable, *Embracing the Fog of War*, 205; Jonathan Schroden, *"Operations Assessment at ISAF,"* 39-67; Schroden, Thomasson, Foster, Lukens and Bell, "A New Paradigm," 5 – 20.

[34] Matthew A. Lauder, Phil Eles and Katherine Banko, **"The Glaucus Factor: Red Teaming as a Means to Nurture Foresight,"** *The Canadian Army Journal* 14, no. 1 (2012), 45 – 59; North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *Alternative Analysis Handbook* (13 June 2012); NATO, TSC FEF-0040/TT-8108/Ser: NU 0018, *Bi-Strategic Command Concept for Alternative Analysis* (23 April 2012).

[35] Power Point Brief "ISAF COIN Advisory & Assistance Team (CAAT).

[36] The CAG was formerly known as the Commander's Initiative Group (CIG). In 2011, it had acted as a support staff preparing files and briefing books for COMISAF, but its role was expanded in 2012 to include some analysis.

[37] Discussion with, COMISAF General John Allen on Brief "Re-conceptualizing Corruption and Patronage" (13 August 2012); Interview with Carl Forsberg, analyst with CJIATF-Shafafiyat (10 June 2012); Analysts who worked exclusively on this issue believe this is a key lesson for future interventions, see Tim Sullivan and Carl Forsberg, "Confronting the Threat of Corruption

and Organized Crime in Afghanistan: Implications for Future Armed Conflict," *PRISM* 4, no. 4 (2014), 157 – 73

[38] United States Senate, Statement of General Joseph F. Dunford Commander U.S. Forces-Afghanistan before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Situation in Afghanistan (12 March 2014).

[39] Papers produced during the period included Ross Boyd, Heather Hrychuk and Ben Jensen, "Optimizing Campaign Management" Red Team Paper (16 November 2011); Kevin Ellson and Heather Hrychuk, "Downsizing HQ ISAF: Reducing the Footprint but Maximizing the Effect," Red Team Paper (1 March 2012); Heather Hrychuk, Neil Chuka, Don Neill, and CAPT (N) Heidi Berg, "No Peace to Keep: Implications of a Shifting UN Mandate" Red Team Paper (17 April 2012); and SQN LDR Steve Ponting "Combining HQ ISAF, IJC and NTM-A: The Way Ahead" Red Team Paper (December 2012).

[40] General John Allen (retired), "General Allen Speaks about the Day the Afghan Campaign Almost Ended," *Foreign Policy* (21 Feb 2014).

[41] Paul Dickson, Liz Abbott, and Tom O'Neill, "Understanding the Impact of Hedging," Red Team Paper (27 Nov 2012); Will Hall, John Ivory and Paul Dickson, "Hedging and Uncertainty in RC-North," Red Team Paper (2 Jan 2013); COMISAF, "Commander ISAF's Afghanistan Update, Winter 2014," ISAF (Winter 2013-14).

[42] Interview with LGen O. Bavinchove in "Les talibans n'ont plus le soutien des Afghans," *Le figaro* (9 September 2012). http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2012/09/17/01003-20120917ARTFIG00574-les-talibans-ont-perdu-le-soutien-des-afghans.php.

[43] See Robert Johnson, *The Afghan Way of War: How and Why They Fight* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[44] Carter's approach and views had highlighted distinctions between coalition approaches to COIN, See Jonathan Owen, "British Army chief risked soldiers' lives,' says US colonel," *The Independent* (25 Nov 2012); Emma Graham Harrison, Interview with Carter, "We Should Have Talked to the Taliban," *The Guardian* (28 June 2013); Abdullah Sharif, Round table with Red Team (8 February 2013); See also Chandraserkaren, *Little America*, 145 – 6.

[45] "The Threat to GIRoA," Red Team Paper (January 2013). Translated into Dari for distribution to GIRoA.

[46] Red Team group authorship, "Taliban Strategy: Alternative Courses of Action," Red Team Paper (18 November 2012) and "Should We Divide the Taliban?" Red Team Paper (18 February 2013).

[47] This violence generated a new term, 'green on blue', from the US military colour designation for friendly and US forces (the enemy is typically red). More recently these attacks were referred to as 'the insider threat' or 'insider attacks', in part because most of the attacks are carried out against Afghan security forces ('green on green'). Statistics drawn from Bill Roggio and Lisa Lundquist, "Green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan: the data," *The Long War Journal* (23 August 2012). Data last updated on 5 August 2014. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/08/green-on-blue_attack.php. Casualty figures vary. The Brooking Institute Index claims ISAF fatalities were 399 for 2012. The discrepancy is explained by the inclusion of private security personnel in the US figures—see Ian S. Livingston

and Michael O'Hanlon, *Afghanistan Index, Also including selected data on Pakistan* (Washington: Brookings Institute, April 2013).

[48] Roggio and Lundquist, "Green-on-blue attacks in Afghanistan."

[49] Discussion with Red Team by NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Simon Gass (July 2012); Paul Dickson and CAPT (N) Heidi Berg, "Comprehensive Cross Border Strategy Responses," Red Team Paper (July 2012); On patron-client relations see, for example, James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Durham, NC: Yale University Press, 1998).

[50] The Durand Line is the name given the boundary between Afghanistan and Pakistan, established in 1893 by treaty negotiated between the Afghan Amir and British representative for British India (the Raj), Sir Mortimer Durand, While the Durand Line has international recognition, it is unrecognized by Afghanistan, and remains a source of contention, splitting as it does several tribal areas, notably Pashtun and Baloch. Will Hall, Anton Minkov, and John Ivory, "Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the Durand Line" Red Team Paper (April 2013).

[51] See for example, Thom Shanker, Eric Schmitt, and Alissa J. Rubin, "U.S. Sees Iran in Bids to Stir Unrest in Afghanistan," *New York Times* (4 April 2012). Discussions in June 2012 with Ambassador Gass, seconded from British foreign service indicated divisions in views of Iran's intentions. See DoD, Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan (December 2012), 18, for COMISAF assessments of Iran.

[52] The duality of Iranian approach to Afghanistan can also be explained with divergence of opinions between its political and military leaders, see Marlène Laruelle, "Iran's Regional Quagmire," *FRIDE Policy Brief* 135 (September 2012), 4.

[53] Anton Minkov, "Reconsidering Iranian Engagement in Afghanistan" Red Team Paper (April 2013).

[54] Anton Minkov, "Russia-Iran Cooperation in Afghanistan: Myth or Reality" Red Team paper (July 2013).

[55] Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. December 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan. Accessed June 2014.

[56] SQN LDR Nick Hall, "Pakistan's Strategic Goals in Afghanistan" Red Team Paper (April 2013).

[57] One of the weaknesses of the Af-Pak strategy was it failed to appreciate the larger regional context for Pakistan, namely the role of India in formulating Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan—see for example, Stephen Cohen, "Failure in Af-Pak: How the U.S. Got It Wrong," *The National Interest* (15 July 2011); The Red Team paper "Indian Military Aid to Afghanistan" tried to address this gap in analysis.

[58] Richard Cappelli, "Impact of Iranian Elections on Afghanistan," Red Team Paper (May 2013) and Jonathan Prue "Can the SCO and CSTO help NATO in Afghanistan," Red Team Paper (January 2013).

[59] "Karzai's Evolving Reconciliation Strategy," Red Team Paper (8 March 2012); and "Supporting Karzai's Sovereignty Narrative, While Protecting the Mission," Red Team Paper (23 March 2013).

[60] Valarie Rabideau, "How Karzai Can Derail the Elections," Red Team Paper (March 2013).