

Tribal Engagement in Afghanistan: Challenges and Recommendations

In the seventh year of conflict in Afghanistan, the U.S., NATO, international community and Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) remain frustrated by insurgency and instability. As the Obama Administration commits more than 21,000 new troops to Afghanistan and the GIROA seeks to expand its army and police forces, local security has become a renewed focus. Establishing local security, however, implies not only an increase in troop presence, but a consensus with the local population to accept the troops, take ownership of security and become active in their communities. To promote this policy, the U.S. is looking beyond the limited central Kabul government to enhance credible local structures, such as tribes. Engaging with tribes is a delicate policy, one that the Kabul government and international community have so far avoided. Yet, with the limited reach of the GIROA and international forces, they are coming to the conclusion that sustainable security requires local efforts. Thus, at some level, tribal engagement is a necessary and realistic approach to both security and stability in Afghanistan.

Empowering local structures, such as tribes, to provide security must recognize the unintended impacts it will have on the local communities. Granting powers to tribal leadership effectively concedes that the Afghan state alone cannot maintain a monopoly of force or justice and requires other structures, such as tribes, to provide it. Once armed, organized and authorized, such tribal militias will have the ability to either challenge the Afghan government for control or to resist the government for autonomy. The challenge of tribes for the Afghan government and international community is frustrating: ignoring

them leaves a gap often filled by insurgents/terrorists, while engaging them undermines the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

If the United State's ultimate goal in Afghanistan is to eradicate al-Qaeda and deny them safe haven in Afghanistan, then engaging with the tribes is a necessary component for long-term security. The U.S., GIRoA and international community cannot afford to fight the tribes, the insurgency and al-Qaeda. They will need to determine a counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy that establishes local security to de-link the population from the terrorists/insurgents *and* lays the foundation for broader political stability. It is this last component of political stability that will prove most difficult for the U.S. COIN strategy: Pashtun tribes have endured decades of war and are wary of state-led governance that threatens their way of life.

Yet to de-link the tribes from al Qaeda and the insurgency, GIRoA and the international community must offer some sustainable alternative. To date, GIRoA and the international community believed it was the extension of the Afghan state and the state provision of services, such as electricity and water, which would win over the local Afghans. Earning tribal support during an insurgency is far more complex than delivering these services, however – it requires engaging local communities, discerning their motivations and understanding their 'red-lines' – what they will and will not tolerate. So far, GIRoA has focused too much on promising and delivering services in a one way from Kabul to the field, requiring little response from tribes or local communities. In contrast, al Qaeda and the insurgents have maneuver through the tribal system, not crossing 'red-lines' and responding (even dictating) to local communities, while GIRoA

and international efforts at governance have consistently violated or ignored them. The Pashtun tribes are fighting to preserve a way of life.

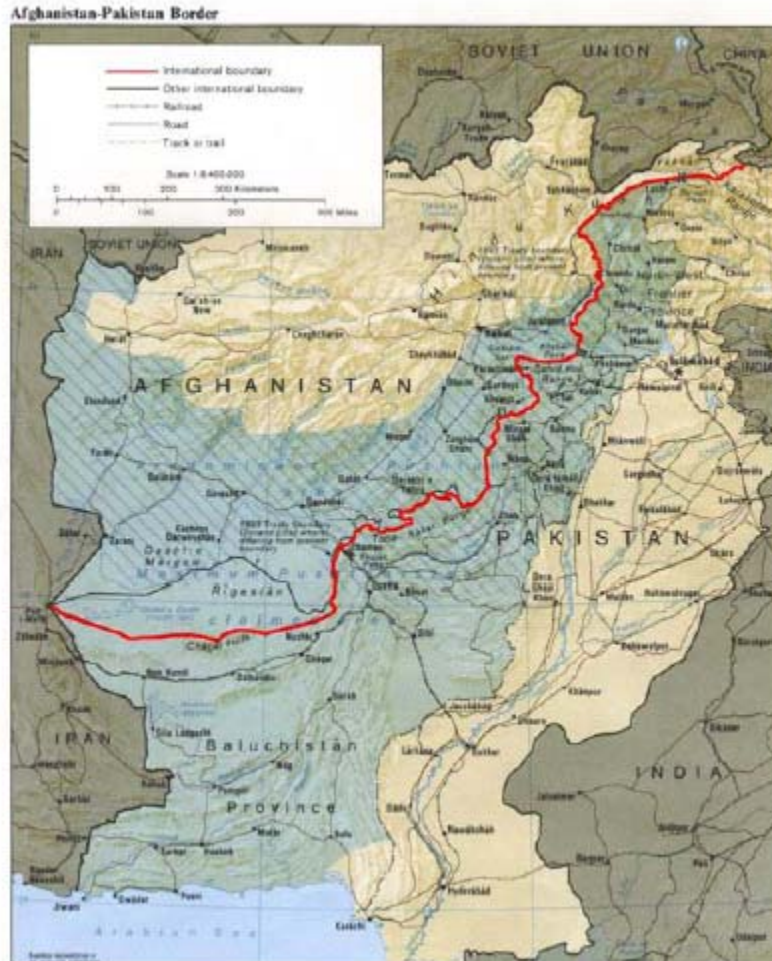
Why the Pashtun tribes of Southeast Afghanistan are important to stability

The Pashtun tribes are a large ethnic group spread across southern and eastern Afghanistan and northern and western Pakistan. Divided by the Durand line – demarcated by the British to specifically divide the powerful Pashtun tribes – the Pashtun tribal structure and values have generally resisted modern institutional government. This resistance to state authority has undermined Afghan central government authority, challenging not only its reach into the tribal areas, but its monopoly on violence, justice, economic trade and social welfare. This tribal resistance not only weakens the state vis-à-vis the tribes, but also entrenches a sectarian attitude in the country, making ethnic motivations more salient.¹ Indeed in Afghanistan, the sectarian identities remain powerful among Pashtuns, Hazaras, Tajiks and others. The powerful collective of the Pashtun in Afghanistan, a slight majority of the population, mean that they have less incentive than smaller groups to incorporate into a multi-sectarian government.

The tendency for tribal autonomy and lack of central government influence is also destabilizing given the entrenchment of terrorist and insurgent networks throughout the area. Al-Qaeda and the Taliban have used their local knowledge of tribes and the lack of state oversight to launch terrorist attacks and brutal insurgencies against the Afghan and Pakistani governments. As a consequence, the policy of the U.S. to eradicate al-

¹Ty L Groh, Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies. Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf, (Accessed: February 7, 2009),1.

Qaeda² is deeply linked to the stability of the Afghan state and governance in the tribal areas.



Durand Line (Not recognized by Afghanistan) with shaded tribal areas, sometimes known as Pashtunistan.³

Main attributes of Pashtun tribes

Prior to the rise of the Taliban and al-Qaeda in the region, the Pashtun tribes were a dominant political, security and economic structure. The Pashtun, unlike many other

² White House. "White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan." March 27, 2009. Accessed: March 28, 2009.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/09/03/27/A-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/>

³ Found at http://www.worldpress.org/specials/pp/afghan_pak_border_map.htm. Accessed March 28, 2009.

Arab or Asian tribes, have maintained a deep commitment to their ethnicity and custom, with strong sense of identity.⁴ They are one of the largest ethnic groups, and possibly the largest tribal society in the world, with an estimated 25 million members in Afghanistan.⁵ Their Pashtun identity derives from a linkage to a common ancestor, but their sense of identity derives from centuries of shared political, social and economic activities. This pervasive sense of identity has remained powerful even as other state-centric identities, such as “Afghan” or “Pakistani,” have developed.

With a strong sense of identity independent of the state, Pashtuns have been a ‘hard case’ for states to incorporate. In addition to this identity, however, specific tribal structures and values distinguish the Pashtun tribes.

Segmentation. The most important structural quality of the Pashtuns is their segmentary nature. The segmentary principle dictates that groups are determined in the order of allegiances: immediate family (sub-section), external family (section), sub-clan (village), clan, and tribe.”⁶ This segmentation is constant and does not conform to institutionalized political power wherein an elder would serve a 4 year term. Instead, the accrual of power often triggers segments to form against it because it means that one person is becoming too powerful within the tribe. Understanding this tribal strive for balance, U.S. support to one leader may not automatically ensure full tribal leadership but could split the tribe. For example, if the U.S. or international forces promoted a specific tribal elder, his growing

⁴ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), Pg. 9.

⁵ B. Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System.” Chapter 10, *Concept of Tribal Society*. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 3. and Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 10.

⁶ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 19.

power may actually trigger other tribal elements to seek greater outside support such as that of the Taliban in order to off-set elderly power.

Segmentation implies that there is no institutional safety net for tribal leaders and they must constantly maintain their position with results so that no other tribal member can gain more allegiances and then displace him.⁷ Working solely with the elder can therefore be unreliable and unrewarding for the U.S. precisely because an elder's loyalty will remain to his constituents and not necessarily to the U.S. or another outside power.

Changing leadership. As the segmentary principle described, tribal leaders are not secure in their tenure. Past attempts by British or Soviet government sought to find a single leader to work through and bestow patronage. Yet tribal structures and elder's leadership do not conform to singular strong leadership and are, in fact, highly democratic and under constant change. Leadership is not determined by birth, although prominent families often retain leadership positions. It is instead determined by one's ability to provide for a tribe or sub-tribe, ensuring their survival. This leadership therefore is based on a form of consensus, wherein the leader garners growing support from tribal members based on his abilities. Moreover, his ability to lead is not guaranteed and rests on his ability to maintain this support, gained by a) controlling tenants; b) attracting many regular guests through lavish hospitality; c) channeling resources from the outside world to one's followers; d) superior rhetoric qualities and regular sound judgments in the *jirgas*; and e) gallantry in war and conflict.⁸ In its own system, tribal leadership is based

⁷ B. Glatzer, "The Pashtun Tribal System." Chapter 10, Concept of Tribal Society. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 8.

⁸ B. Glatzer, "The Pashtun Tribal System." Chapter 10, Concept of Tribal Society. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 8.

on consent but it is also less structured than modern consensual systems. Thus, a tribal leader is constantly pursuing the safest, most rewarding method for his tribe, whether it means supporting the Taliban or taking Coalition support funds or assisting Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in reconstruction. These are short-term survival calculations rather than long-term agreement on principles.

Equality. Working through a single elder may be the correct way to set up consultations, to resolve disputes, administer tribal justice and gain acceptance into tribal areas.

However, the elder is not the sole conduit to the tribe. Given his precarious leadership position, he is also not the primary representative of the tribe to the state (or any outside power). This fluid structure of leadership implies that every tribal member has an important contribution, is equal to his other tribal members and has the ability to decide for himself. As a result, GIRoA and the U.S. should target members of the tribe beyond their elder. From a U.S. perspective, U.S. forces should broadly engage all members of the tribe and illustrate that U.S. forces are available for all members, not merely the “kingmakers” for tribal elders. Elders should maintain their leadership function, communicating with GIRoA and U.S. leadership. However, GIRoA and the U.S. must not choose a specific elder and leave the community; not only could local leadership change based on segmentation, but the sense of tribal equality could be violated, further distancing tribal members from the formal government.

Justice. Related to the sense of equality is the informal governing system of the Pashtun. Decisions of importance for the whole community are often decided and enforced

through *jirgas*. *Jirgas* are community councils where every free and experienced male person of the tribe can attend, speak and vote.⁹ Decisions are reached through consensus among all the members, and once made, are binding. The sense of honor in the tribe ensures that the decision is enforced, and disputes are brought before the *jirga* or, if minor, before the local elder/khan (influential person/leader) for resolution. In dispensing tribal justice, the role of the local elder/khan is to mediate between the parties, rather than decree resolution. Moreover, the honor and equality clauses mean that tribes are more concerned with compensating the victim of the crime, than punishing the offender.¹⁰ This tribal style of justice has often conflicted with modern justice systems, such as those imposed by the British, which punished offenders.¹¹ The result was that tribes rarely used the British justice system and protected criminals, resolving disputes through their informal mechanisms.

Honor. A code of values known as *Pashtunwali* denotes the set of norms recognized by Pashtuns and governing their behavior, even in government positions. In general, tribesmen are intensely focused on their honor and status vis-à-vis others—to the extent that honor has been described as the “tribal center of gravity.”¹² In the Pashtun case, honor is maintained by adherence to *Pashtunwali* legal and traditional authority. *Pashtunwali* norms override religious norms, making appeals to Islamic identity less

⁹ B. Glatzer, “The Pashtun Tribal System.” Chapter 10, *Concept of Tribal Society*. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 7.

¹⁰ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 42.

¹¹ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 42.

¹² Michael Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagements Lessons Learned.” *Military Review*. Sept-Oct 2007.

resonant to Pashtuns, as well as modern legal norms, making a western-style justice system ineffective in Pashtun areas.

Strong independence and anti-institutional forces. The Pashtun system of governance, leadership, justice and honor is fundamentally different and, in some ways, opposed to the institutions and processes required for modern state governance. As a result, the 21st century Pashtun is likely very similar to his ancestors whom the British, the Soviets and the Pakistanis all sought to incorporate – he will likely be grateful to be free of the Taliban but unwilling and uninterested in following the U.S. or new Afghan state mandates.¹³ The traditional response from Pashtun tribes has been to undermine the state and resist it informally rather than challenge it outright. They have not declared independence or seceded – and they are likely uninterested in their own modern state government. While this tribal response is not inherently bad or outright confrontational, the tribes' inability to conform and support the state makes them an unpredictable choice for long- term stability.

Role of tribes in the insurgency

Today's conflict in Afghanistan focuses on the south and east of the country where Pashtun tribal structures and values are most prevalent. The Taliban leaders have exploited their connections to tribal culture in the Pashtun tribal areas to solidify their leadership. At the outset in 2002, the Taliban initially used their knowledge of and connection to tribal structures and norms to infiltrate the region. The Taliban gained

¹³ Ty L. Groh, Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 41.

access to communities precisely because they did not appear as outsiders, they achieved it slowly through traditional religious networks of mosques and kinship links. As their influence grew, Taliban leaders sought to prevent challenges to their primacy by undermining and then eliminating the very tribes who they initially courted.

In the place of tribal leadership, the Taliban imposed strict religious Islamic codes, prizing the role of religious authority in the local *mullah* over tribal leaders.¹⁴ In many areas, the Taliban used violence to intimidate the local population into supporting the local religious leader, forcing families to attend Friday mosque discussions, disrupting tribal shuras and promoting religious over tribal identity. The Taliban felt that they could not trust the tribal leaders to remain loyal, even through appeals to Pashtun nationalism, threat of imperialist invaders or pure and simple security. Only through violence can the Taliban now channel tribal resources in men, money and protection towards them.

In their efforts to detribalize the region, Taliban leaders are now killing tribal leaders and usurping their power.¹⁵ According to one Afghan National Directorate for Security report “The Taliban’s use of recruitment techniques in the ongoing stage is becoming sophisticated. They approach tribes, sub-tribes and communities in the village. They want them to sever their relationship with the government and also preach to the population to support the jihad against the Americans and the government which they consider the infidel.”¹⁶ In addition to coercion, the Taliban are reported to pay \$14/day to

¹⁴ David Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82.

¹⁵ Seth Jones, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2008), 58.

¹⁶ Seth Jones, “Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan,” (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2008), 46.

fight compared to the \$4 for Afghan National Army (ANA) soldiers in some areas.¹⁷ Several Pashtun sub-tribal members (Durrani, Ghilzai) along the Pakistan border are also known to support, raise funds, and recruit militants for the Taliban.¹⁸ Additionally, Taliban leaders are known to threaten reconstruction projects in exchange for security. In Farah province, the Taliban requests 40% of allocated reconstruction funds, draining local government of its ability to provide for the tribes¹⁹ and forcing local tribal members to tacitly support Taliban leadership.

Additionally, this Taliban control has disrupted traditional tribal leadership structures, namely the *jirga* and *shura* councils. Traditionally the *jirga* (community, provincial or all tribe councils) have neither leaders nor chairman, but operate on the tribal value of equality where all decisions are reached through consensus. The Taliban's systematic killing of tribal leaders and imposition of religious decree has muted these councils and subsequently violated the tribal value of equality. Instead of discussion and consensus, political and social decisions are made in accordance with strict Islamic law as understood by the Taliban.

The Taliban fear that tribes will not remain loyal is evidence of the many competing power sources in the tribal areas of southeast Afghanistan. Here, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, local war lords and ISAF troops are all competing for primacy among the tribes. Rather than support one of these competitors, the response from the tribes has been to disperse and spread their risk. Tribes place one member of the extended family with

¹⁷ Seth Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2008), 42. Based on U.S. and NATO military reports in Summer 2006.

¹⁸ Seth Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2008), 46.

¹⁹ Ferat Zarak. "Afghanistan, Taliban taking Cut of Reconstruction Funds." Institute for War and Peace Reporting. March 24, 2009. Accessed: March 27, 2009. <
http://www.alternet.org/warofiraq/133234/in_afghanistan_taliban_taking_cut_of_reconstruction_funds/>

the Taliban, another in a Pakistani refugee camp, another with the Afghan government and possibly another as an immigrant in the West.²⁰ This tactic ensures that tribal families can claim alliance with the winning party and will shift their support according to which faction is winning. For the competitors in the tribal areas, this tactic indicates that tribal support is difficult to cultivate and maintain. For ISAF and U.S. this tactic indicates that the Taliban are not fully in control of the tribes.

The concluding experience for tribes is twofold. The first is that tribes have been weakened and tribal members have adapted to Taliban insurgent, *mullah* and Islamic rule in their areas. With their traditional leaders killed and *jirga* structures dismantled, tribal members find protection, employment and cultural approval through Taliban leaders. Depending on the strength of Taliban in their area, tribal members may find it difficult to trust tribal connections or support tribal structures that could be seen to compete with the Taliban. The second experience is that this weakening by the Taliban is a result of tribal dispersal. By willfully dividing themselves among the various factions, tribal political power is further dispersed and unable to challenge Taliban *mullahs* or militants. Thus, in addition to strong Taliban influence, tribal structures and leaders have weak connections and support and would find it difficult to reconstitute a tribal powerbase. This tribal dispersal coupled with the Taliban's singular focus on tribal areas has empowered Taliban over the last seven years.

Role of tribes in Afghan politics

²⁰ B. Glatzer, "The Pashtun Tribal System." Chapter 10, Concept of Tribal Society. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 3.

Despite their recent choice to disperse, Pashtun tribes have a distinct political ability and historical experience that make them a powerful political force. Even at the very formation of the new Afghan government in 2001/2, it was clear that a Pashtun representative would hold the presidency. Hamid Karzai, interim and later elected president, hails from the Karzai subtribe of the Pashtun and won his majority not only through Pashtun votes but also a clear understanding among Afghans and outsiders that Pashtuns are politically acceptable leaders.

Despite the agreed Pashtun leadership at Bonn, the Pashtun's claim to a democratic majority remains unsubstantiated. According to several informal polls, Pashtuns make up between 35-55% of the population.²¹ In the minds of Pashtuns, however, they constitute 70% of the population.²² This historiography of Pashtun majority and leadership stem from centuries of Pashtun political activism in the Afghan state. The earliest formation of an Afghan state is traditionally heralded by the 1747 tribal *jirga* formed by the various tribes to choose a single leader. With the advent of centralization, however, the interplay between tribe and state in Afghanistan became increasingly complex, leaving authors to disagree on the relationship. For some, the state succeeded in several instances, beginning with Amir Abdul Rahim Khan's seizure of power in 1880. He maintained centralized power by manipulating tribal powers or forced population transfers to break tribal competitors for power among the Hazaras, Aimaqs, Nuristanis and Pashtuns.²³ For other authors, the current rise of tribal power in this decade is a historical constant. For them, tribal power always remained outside the state,

²¹ MAR Data <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar/assessment.asp?groupId=70002>

²² International Crisis Group, "The Loya Jirga, One Small Step Forward?" *Afghanistan Briefing*. (Kabul/Brussels, 16 May 2002), 4-5.

²³ (Goodhand, 195)

maintaining their own security through *arbaki* militias and using the state for resources rather than contributing resources to it.²⁴ Regardless of the constancy of tribal strength in Afghan history, tribal leaders and tribal resources (*arbaki*) have played a key role in Afghanistan's evolution.

With the 1979 Soviet invasion and fragmentation of state power, tribal structures took on increasing importance at the regional and local level. The *Mujahideen* and later the Taliban networks used tribal connections to gain legitimacy, recruit personnel, and maintain protection. Most recently, the Bonn Process recognized the preeminence of tribal legitimacy, convening a tribal *loya jirga* to legitimate the new Afghan central government and state constitution. Finally, Hamid Karzai derives much of his legitimacy from his Pashtun tribal affiliations and was indeed chosen as a concession to vocal Pashtun majority.

Thus throughout modern Afghan history, the Pashtun have seen themselves as defenders and national leaders of Afghanistan. With the Anglo-Afghan wars in the 19th century, the weakness of the Kabuli government empowered the tribal aristocracy to lead the national revolt, securing their power and claims to national leadership.²⁵ Given this strong tribal history, the term tribe in Afghanistan has been a neutral, even positive identifying characteristic, often denoting distinguished and old ancestry, belonging to a genuine people and to be dependable. Indeed current Afghan dignitaries have used their tribal names as a second name or as a clear qualification for their leadership role.²⁶ Yet once a tribal leader, such as Durrani, accedes to the national level, he loses touch with the

²⁴ Seth Jones, "Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan," (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2008), 32.

²⁵ Ghani. Pg. 270.

²⁶ B. Glatzer, "The Pashtun Tribal System." Chapter 10, Concept of Tribal Society. Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies, Vol 5. eds. G. Pfeffer & D. K. Behera, (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 2002), 1.

local tribes who initially empowered him. From the perspective of Kabul, the Pashtun tribes are just one of many constituencies. As a result, Pashtun tribes and their leaders have indicated relatively little interest in joining the central government. From their perspective, they will defend the Afghan state from outsiders, but have minimal interest or incentive to support a central government.

Are tribes the key to counterinsurgency?

Given the historical leadership and their strong social structure, Pashtun tribes appear as natural forces to reject and resist the Taliban. Indeed, many military analysts, including Central Command Commander General David Petraeus, liken the Pashtun tribes to the Iraqi tribes of Anbar, who rejected Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and led a counterinsurgency campaign to defeat AQI.²⁷ Indeed in the eastern province of Wardak, the Afghan and U.S. governments are experimenting with the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), a paramilitary force using the local tribal structure to staff for local security forces. Essentially, local leaders recommend individuals for employment in the APPF, who then come under the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and central government authority.²⁸ Unlike the Iraq model, the APPF is not lead by a tribal leader or based on tribal militias. Yet, the goal is the same: that the APPF will gain the support of the local population and will be able to provide better security given their local knowledge.²⁹

²⁷ Fisnik Abrashi. "Petraeus: Afghan tribes could help to fight militants." *Associated Press*. November 6, 2008. Accessed: March 27, 2009. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=6196370>

²⁸ CJ Radin. "The Afghan Public Protection Force Pilot Program is Underway." *The Long War Journal*. 25 March 2009. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/03/afghan_public_protec.php

²⁹ "Mini-Surge to test out US Strategy in Afghanistan." *Christian Science Monitor*. February 18, 2009. Accessed: March 22, 2009. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0218/p01s03-wosc.html?page=2>>

The APPF is a delicate model because it relies on local tribal support. If the tribal members of the APPF determine that the MoI or Afghan government are not worth working for, they may abandon the system and use their training, relationships and weapons against international forces. The APPF is not the first government attempt to incorporate the tribes through police. The Afghan National Auxiliary Police (ANAP) was a failed attempt to provide community policing, using similar local structures and legitimacy. It is not fully clear why the ANAP program was disbanded in October 2008 only to be quickly replaced by the APPF in March 2009. Some critics point to the fact that, as a local police force, the ANAP was quickly infiltrated by Taliban militants, while others point to the minimal training given the ANAP (10 days).³⁰ Today's APPF receive three weeks of training in addition to close mentoring support.³¹ Moreover, the APPF is confined to a trial program in Wardak province, focusing on developing a viable local police force before expanding nationally.

The key to the APPF and other tribal structures is to ensure tribal honor and respect are first and foremost. Conveniently in Iraq, the Anbar tribes *chose* to reject AQI and *wanted* to join the government, precisely because AQI violated their honor. In Afghanistan, however, it is not clear that Pashtun elders or tribal elements have been dishonored by the Taliban or are pro-actively willing to reject the Taliban and align their honor with international forces. In the APPF model, the Afghan government has a unique opportunity to ensure that the APPF remains an honorable institution that respects its members and grants its members community respect.

³⁰ Scott Cohen. "Auxiliary Police Train in Afghanistan." American Forces Press Service. 8 December 2006. <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=2356>

³¹ CJ Radin. "The Afghan Public Protection Force Pilot Program is Underway." The Long War Journal. 25 March 2009. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/03/afghan_public_protec.php

The second key to the APPF or other security forces is to use local leaders to resolve disputes. The APPF are a *security* force, to protect the population and deter criminal and insurgent activity. They are not a justice or prosecuting function. Currently, justice is officially administered by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) courts. However, the Taliban has already begun a roving court system to dispense and enforce justice quickly. The rapid justice of the Taliban contrasts sharply with the backlog faced by the MoJ. To ensure the second component of “law and order,” a more effective local justice system must be in place to reinforce the local security effort. In the Iraq model, the Anbar tribal militia leader and the local elder were one and the same person – he lead security and justice efforts. For the APPF and Afghan tribal leaders, these functions are separate and will require greater coordination and cooperation to overcome the gap and room for error. Given that APPF recruits are drawn from and work in their tribal areas, this coordination should be possible. The APPF’s success will ultimately rely on the MoI bureaucracy who oversee the force and the MoJ who oversees justice to allow elder-led dispute resolution.

By choosing tribal-based security and justice, the U.S. and Afghan governments perform a difficult balance: create security without creating incentives for traditional tribal autonomy. The choice to empower the tribes will be risky – risks that can be mitigated through flexibility, constant attention and commitment to tribal success.

Making tribal structure and values work in COIN

Given the tribal structures, values, limited interest in the Taliban, and potential role in COIN, it is evident that the tribes are an integral part of the Afghan state and can contribute to the fight against the Taliban. The first consideration, then, must be whether

tribes can be motivated or incentivized to support and fight for the state. In Iraq, the Anbar tribes asked specifically for government employment, tying them to the government. In Afghanistan, however, lack of tribal support for the Taliban does not immediately translate into tribal support for international forces or the GIRoA – the tribes have not yet reached the point of revolt against the Taliban and so will be harder to incentivize away from the Taliban.

Developing these incentives must account for the “center of gravity” of tribes: honor. Tribal members may join the ANA, ANP or other security forces for monetary rewards. But they will only fight effectively and remain committed if their honor is tied to the force. As the Taliban have not sparked a tribal backlash by violating the three critical honors (land, money, women), the tribes may be motivated by gaining increased independence under a new system. For example, offering an independent justice system, access to education or control over local resources. The idea here is based on the British experience, wherein the Pashtun tribes cannot merely be given education or justice systems without changing pro-actively.³² Making their participation in the security services contingent on the provision of services they claim to want will motivate tribal commitment to their security and future role in the state.

Once a possible exchange is developed – fighting in exchange for resources – the international forces will need to begin the slow process of rejuvenating the tribal structures that have been undermined by the Taliban. International forces will need to undertake careful inquiries with local leaders, motivating former or weakened elders to reassert their connections and influence. The international forces must also allow time for

³² Ty L. Groh, Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 114.

these elders to garner the popular support necessary – the support appears there, underneath the Taliban imposition, but requires time and relations to rebuild and reassure.

The elder, however, should not be seen as the sole arbiter between the international forces and his tribesman. As Pakistan's experience in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Pashtun region since 1947 indicates, relying on a single political leader creates widespread corruption and distances the tribes from the government (by creating "Middlemen").³³ Elders should be seen for their strengths: they are coordinators, they are dispute arbitrators but they are not political organizers for collective action nor can they direct action. They should be seen as influencers rather than directors.

The international forces can certainly offer several incentives that empower the tribal elder. The key here is that the force must listen to the elder on what the local Afghans want from their government and be flexible in providing it. Just as the international forces are testing out the credibility of the elder, he is testing out the credibility and reliability of the force's promises. In this relationship-building process, the U.S. and GIRoA may have to undergo a trial and error method, talking to elders, relying on them and moving on when they are no longer reliable.³⁴ Although a difficult and time-consuming method, working with elders provides the most legitimate, effective and, long-term acceptance from the tribe than outside methods.

Once a relationship is established, the key component of the strategy is to ensure that the elder, his tribal group and its members become linked to the Afghan state. Like

³³ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 116.

³⁴ David Kilcullen, *Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 166.

negotiations, the international forces will need to work with the tribes to identify incentives for their security assistance. Based on British experience, the international forces should ask the tribes for an active change in their behavior – actively changing their actions, not just receiving rewards – in exchange for security assistance. For example, tribes who agree to form security groups may be given increased access to their local elected leaders. Often district or provincial governors are not linked with all the local areas given communications and transportation difficulties. Through international forces, however, the tribes can be given access to these leaders, who in turn can be encouraged to support the tribe, building local Afghan political, economic and social connections that strengthen and secure the area.

There are two key components to this negotiation. The first is that the tribes, their leaders and the members must recognize that their security work is in support of the Afghan government. They will see the benefits of the government through the connections, rewards and honor they earn through their security assistance. The second component is that the international forces, who engage in the initial negotiation and management of the tribal security groups, must be extractable. Specifically, the tribes cannot rely solely on the international forces to train, empower and support. In essence, the international forces are the band aid, bringing two portions of Afghan governance back together: elected leadership and tribal leadership – but the band aid cannot become a crutch.

Giving tribes a stake in the Afghan government

Once tribes have become a part of the security framework in Afghanistan, the government must counter tribal tendencies to resist, undermine or ignore the central government. The true success of COIN is not in its security, but in its lasting political stability – bringing the tribes into the Afghan government system will be the final and most essential step in this stability. Mitigating the resistance and the power of the tribes will be a constant challenge, especially as they prove effective and gain honor and credibility.

The subtitle above is important in the term ‘giving.’ In establishing relationships between tribes and the central government, past experience has indicated that the central government must be prepared to give more than receive with tribal groups.³⁵ Several researchers and anthropologists have determined key guidelines in working with tribal structures:

Organizational Structural Factors

1. Government policy based on the tribe’s social organization is more likely to be considered legitimate than those that disregard it.
2. Government policy aimed at segregating or isolating tribes is likely to undermine the state’s authority.

Normative Structural Factors

1. If the tribe’s perception of the state’s policy is unfair in terms of the tribe’s customs and culture, then the tribe will likely resist.
2. Customary norms, not religious beliefs, are what impede state authority.³⁶

Given these conditions, the Afghan government and international community must recognize the “red-lines” of Pashtun culture that will turn them away from the

³⁵ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 45.

³⁶ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 105.

government. In that effort, the Afghan government should consider allowing tribal structures to form the basis of political alliances. This promotion of tribal structures does not necessarily need to violate democratic principles. It is highly likely that the local and provincial governors are able to win democratic election precisely because they are tribal leaders. The key for the Afghan government is to recognize that this leadership is more than a part of the democratic bureaucracy; it is a commitment by the tribes to link with the government.

The Afghan government must be prepared to ‘give more than receive’ in this case, focusing on aid to tribally-led districts and provinces. Rather than pure patronage (or bribery for supporting the government), aid has been shown to be most effective when it asks tribal leaders to actively change to earn the contributions. One initial action could be asking the democratically elected tribal leader to attend structured local and provincial meetings. This would enhance his standing and prestige in the community by showing his connection to wealthy patrons, namely the government, and it will effectively connect him to the government on a structured basis. Side effects may also include improved governance and a growing reliance on the state structure, rather than a tribal structure, to provide for the community.

Like allowing tribal structures to form the basis of political connections, the Afghan government should also consider permitting tribal justice systems to operate more freely. The current craze over anti-corruption mechanisms often leads to a prescription for improved and expanded justice mechanisms – the very mechanisms which could alienate tribal culture. Several countries already operated with dual justice systems, designating the jurisdiction of the two systems. For example, Islamic courts are

often permitted to preside over family and civil matters, while the western-style courts process criminal activity. For Afghanistan, the tribal system has the benefit of producing stability, responding to local customs, and may produce less of a burden on the formal justice sector, whose current inabilities leave room for Taliban justice. More importantly, tribal justice will counter the Taliban roving courts and encourage mediation over violence.

Maintaining engagement with all aspects of the tribe: political, justice, economic, etc. should be the central effort of the Afghan government and international community. Again, 'giving is better than receiving' and in the long-term, the Afghan government should concentrate on giving opportunities.

The most effective tribal incorporation policy, under the Pakistani government, was based around bringing education, economic and political opportunity to the tribal areas. Known as the Forward Policy in the 1970's, it motivated Pashtuns to give up certain Pashtun connections or *Pashtunwali* values in order to receive education or economic benefits.³⁷ Opportunities through increased communications, transportation, education and economic growth will not eliminate tribal structures or values, but it will erode the need of tribal members to seek power through the tribes. With education, jobs and transportation, other means of political, economic and social power are available. The key is not to challenge the tribal structures head on by forcing them into formal political structures. Offering alternatives reduces the attraction of tribal affiliation and expands the power of the central government.

³⁷ Ty L. Groh, *Ungoverned spaces: the challenges of governing tribal societies*, Naval Postgraduate School, 2006. http://library.nps.navy.mil/uhtbin/hyperion/06Jun_Groh.pdf (Accessed: February 7, 2009), 61-62 and 116.

The Afghan government and international community, however, must remain realistic about Pashtun tribes, even in the long-run. Tribal structures and values will not fade quickly and can easily undermine government strength. Yet whether the government engages with them or not, the tribes will continue to exist – the Pashtuns have survived for centuries. In other countries, too, tribes exist under democratic systems in Jordan and Iraq and are not easily replaced or circumvented. The success of the government will depend on its decision to prioritize tribal engagement as a fundamental issue of stability.

Conclusion: A tribal strategy for Afghanistan

Unfortunately, the new Afghan government and the international community have failed to develop a strategy to integrate the Pashtun tribes into the overall counterinsurgency strategy, despite their position at the heart of the Taliban insurgency. The GIRoA and their coalition partners have forgotten that local structures, based on tribal customs and structures, existed for centuries before the creation of an Afghan state. Forgetting tribal structures misunderstands the motivations, incentives and contributions of a significant population which will ultimately decide the fate of the GIRoA and the attainment of coalition goals for Afghanistan

Without doubt, the Pashtun tribes are critical to Afghan stability. Without them, there can be no lasting stability in the country and perhaps the region. They are a mutual center of gravity for both the insurgents and the Afghan government, representing a force and powerful indigenous culture that will not easily disappear or be replaced.

Developing a tribal engagement strategy, however, brings profound risks and enduring commitments to tribal support. Promoting tribal structures to challenge the

Taliban by forming tribal-based security forces is a nascent strategy. It is premised on weakened tribes choosing to reject the Taliban and aligning their honor with international forces and Afghan government in exchange for political, economic and security assistance. Empowered through their increased strength, tribes will pose a political challenge for the Afghan government, as they resist or ignore government control. The constant process to maintain tribal commitment to the Afghan state will add to the burdens of an already overloaded and fragile government. Mitigating the risks of tribal engagement will be both a burden – and a triumph – for the Afghan government and international forces in achieving lasting stability for Afghanistan.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the discussion and cautions highlighted above, the GIRoA and international community must develop and execute a tribal engagement strategy. Such a strategy hinges on one key word: engagement. It requires people, people with the resource to build the relationships, make the commitments and demonstrate the respect necessary to gain tribal support.

Increased civilian and military personnel: For the international community, this means larger civilian and military deployments to non-permissive environments. While military forces must concentrate on providing security in the major population centers and in providing security assistance, the civilians must focus on building local governance and binding the central government to the tribes through relationships. There is simply no substitute for relationship-building. Simply stated, relationships matter.

Focus on local, tribal relationships: The development of enduring relationship between the Afghan government, coalition partners and the tribes will exacerbate cracks in the tribal support for the Taliban and al Qaeda allowing tribes to choose an alternative to these insurgents/terrorists. The development of enduring relationships can win over the tribal members who fight out of honor, not out of ideology. Moreover, as the number of civilians and international forces on the ground increase, they will gain more respect among the tribes as a new element in the social and political landscape. One example of this can be found in Iraq's Anbar province, where some officers stated that the PRT and Marines made themselves into another tribe,³⁸ by adopting tribal custom, they provided a familiar framework for tribes in the area. By becoming part of the political and social landscape, the Marines and PRTs convinced local tribal members that there was a lasting alternative to the insurgents and terrorists. By adopting and respecting tribal structures, they changed the calculations of the local tribal leaders, providing a credible alternative to the insurgents and terrorists.

Demonstrate Engagement through CERP, QRF and PRTs: Once these relationships are established, these individuals, whether military commanders, PRT leaders, or civilians must demonstrate the value of the Afghan government by rewarding tribal members through a performance-based framework informed by the unique situation of each tribe. For the international community this reward structure will require flexible response, with greater contributions to Quick Response Funds (QRF), Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds and other discretionary spending. CERP is

³⁸ Author's personal experience with Embassy Baghdad and State Department personnel.

already in place, but QRF has not been instituted. Such funds, however, give the international community an additional tool to engage quickly and demonstrate the value to the tribes of working with the GIRoA and international community.

Connect Afghan governance from local to national: The ultimate goal of this engagement and funding is to link the tribes to the Afghan government, rather than to the international community. This distinction is often difficult for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and international forces who want to win “hearts and minds” in support of their own forces. But achieving security that is sustainable once international forces leave depends precisely on strengthening the ties between GIRoA and the tribes. For Afghanistan, this focus on governance shifts the mandate of the PRTs away from reconstruction, towards building engagement between the tribes and the Afghan government. This requires that the international community reassess their PRT strategy. Rather than reconstruction, the PRT should encourage tribal elders to talk to their district governor, using Afghan processes to achieve their goals. For example, schools should be the result of tribal engagement with GIRoA and should demonstrate the relationship between the tribe and the Afghan government. Ultimately, PRTs strengthen governance rather than directing reconstruction projects.

The current effort of the APPF is a good example of demonstrating GIRoA governance. Tribal leaders recommend recruits to the APPF who then become Ministry of Interior (MoI) employees. As a result, tribal members gain respect from their local tribe by being nominated for a position, they gain a paying job with the government and they become linked to the MoI command and control structure. With the APPF, tribal

members remain part of their tribal community, but begin building relationships outside the tribe and through the Afghan government.

Develop long-term opportunities that reduce tribal relationships: In the long-term, it is these government relationships that will slowly incorporate tribal members into the Afghan government. Developing relationships outside the tribe, through educational opportunities, job opportunities, communication and transportation will lessen the power of tribal relationships. But this will not eliminate tribal identity or connections, instead lessening the tribal members' need to use the tribe to represent them politically, economically and militarily. Like the Forward Policy of the Pakistani government, the GIRoA and the international community must plan for a long-term strategy of political, economic and security assistance in the tribal areas providing opportunities for tribal members. It is essential for the international community and GIRoA not to challenge the tribes directly by imposing governance or social structures that do not match tribal custom – instead, through development opportunities, tribal members will not feel threatened but will slowly rely less and less on their tribal community in favor of other, diversified communities.

In the end, a strategy of tribal engagement is neither quick, nor is it cheap. Instead it is a difficult, time-consuming and relationship-driven approach that will require the GIRoA and international community to make significant commitments to ensuring its

success. In the end, nothing can substitute for committed relationship building by both the Afghan government and international community.

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