

History

The CIA did not start from scratch in Afghanistan. On the contrary, HUMINT networks with roots in covert action against the USSR and its puppet Afghan government from 1980 to 1992 provided continuity in intelligence collection. Although the network deteriorated as the U.S. government lost interest in Afghanistan and the CIA lost funding and support in the 1990s, CIA officers maintained sufficient links for regeneration. In 1999 the CIA, with the approval and support of the National Security Council (NSC), renewed its collection efforts in Afghanistan as a sanctuary for al-Qaeda, the group responsible for the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Specifically, the CTC pushed hard to deploy intelligence officers into Afghanistan, knowing there is no substitute for direct HUMINT collection. From February 1999 to March 2001, the CIA sequentially deployed five teams into the Panjshir Valley of Afghanistan to rebuild an intelligence liaison relationship with the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance was a loose coalition of various militias, including Tajik, Uzbek, and a few Pashtun tribal groups, generally located in the northern part of the country. The alliance between the Taliban and al-Qaeda pushed anti-Taliban elements and the CIA together. The budding partnership between the Northern Alliance and the CIA included information sharing, funding, training, and joint operations. Joint operations also included the deployment of reconnaissance teams and the recruitment of intelligence sources.

Starting in 1999 the CIA redoubled its recruitment efforts throughout Afghanistan, especially in the Pashtun tribal areas in the south and east. This was part of the CTC's broader strategic plan to penetrate al-Qaeda and its sanctuaries; local sources could report on al-Qaeda and its host environment. The CIA acquired sources that provided useful intelligence and initiated modest covert-action campaigns. These HUMINT assets formed complex webs that stretched across tribal strata and included powerful warlords, Taliban functionaries, al-Qaeda support staff, soldiers, businessmen, and self-proclaimed criminals. This network ranged from fully vetted, reliable, well-trained, courageous foreign nationals to transient, unscrupulous mercenaries. Some of the sources served as singletons who answered directly to CIA officers via covert communications, while others were part of clan-based networks, some not knowing their ultimate employer. Significantly, the assets covered most of Afghanistan and various levels of society. Their reporting supported U.S. diplomatic, military, and covert-action initiatives.¹ Diplomatic efforts focused on pressing Pakistan and other Islamic state partners to influence the Taliban and on constructing counterterrorist coalitions in the region. By September 10, 2001, the CIA had more than one hundred sources and subsources operating throughout the country.

T E N
 Intelligence and War
Afghanistan, 2001-2002

HENRY A. CRUMPTON

IN THE WEEK after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the president ordered the director of central intelligence (DCI) to launch a covert war against al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters in Afghanistan. This campaign, wedded to covert and overt U.S. military operations, depended upon all-source intelligence. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), therefore, collected and analyzed intelligence for policymakers, diplomats, warfighters, its own covert-action operators, allied forces, and Afghan covert-action partners. Human intelligence (HUMINT) served as the foundation for the plan outlined by the CIA's counterterrorist center (CTC) chief, Cofer Black, to the DCI and president. Moreover, the CIA's operations officers and assets provided not only the HUMINT for the covert-action plan and military campaign, but also the means for its execution. This interdependence of intelligence, covert action, and war folded into a broader policy strategy offers lessons for future counterterrorism conflicts. So do the examples of leadership and partnership, which grew from understanding the passions of men, the fundamentals of conflict as taught by strategists throughout the ages.

By the second week of December 2001, three months after the president's directive, all major Afghan cities had fallen to U.S. and coalition forces and allied tribal militias. Several teams of CIA and U.S. Army Special Forces personnel, scores of clandestine U.S. military raiders, and U.S. airpower had destroyed the Taliban regime and disrupted al-Qaeda, killing or capturing approximately 25 percent of the enemy's leaders. More than twenty al-Qaeda training camps had been secured, providing hundreds of documents, videos, phone and e-mail accounts, and other global operational leads. Exploitation of al-Qaeda weapons of mass destruction (WMD) testing sites had begun. Five to ten thousand enemy troops had been killed, while U.S. casualties remained extremely low. More than five thousand prisoners had been captured, some of intelligence value. Surviving enemy forces were on the run. The collapse of the Taliban denied al-Qaeda a pseudo-nation-state partner and reduced al-Qaeda's sanctuary to ragged pockets along the Pakistani border, pushing other members into Pakistani cities, where many were captured. The Afghan people began reclaiming their country, and the United States began constructing a partnership with an emerging legitimate government.

Strategy

This intelligence allowed the crafting of a strategy that relied upon a center of gravity not found in a single geographic point, a specific enemy battalion, or the Taliban command, control, and communications. Rather, the center of gravity resided in the minds of those widespread tribal militia leaders, who were allied with the Taliban and al-Qaeda out of political convenience or necessity. The CIA understood this political dynamic and could therefore define the enemy in the narrowest terms—for example, as al-Qaeda and intransigent Taliban leaders—while viewing all other Taliban or Taliban-allied militia as potential allies. In other words, the enemy was not Afghanistan, not the Afghan people, not the Afghan army, not even the Taliban per se. The enemy was al-Qaeda, foreign invaders who had hijacked the Afghan government from the Afghan people. The CIA strategy depended upon persuading militia forces allied with the Taliban of this view, and convincing potential allies that their future rested with the small CIA and U.S. military teams, although they were heavily outnumbered and sometimes surrounded. In short, the CIA and the U.S. military, with the help of Afghan tribal allies, would recruit tribal armies among erstwhile enemy forces.

Executing this strategy required superior intelligence and superior intelligence officers on the ground, which would in turn be used to support superior U.S. military force. There were three levels of application. First, the United States needed a demonstration of force enhanced by speed, stealth, and precision. On October 7, 2001, the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy launched the air campaign. Thanks to the professionalism of the U.S. military and its advanced technology, these bombs hit their targets with unprecedented accuracy. Moreover, munitions arrived with no warning, and target markers shifted at the turn of a laser-designator manned by Special Forces on the ground. CIA officers and Afghan assets, armed with global positioning systems (GPS) and covert communication, specified many other targets, especially those deep behind enemy lines. These assets were especially effective in targeting urban sites, then verified through other HUMINT, signals intelligence (SIGINT), or imagery sources. Enemy concentrations throughout Afghanistan were obliterated, and survivors were confused and afraid. Within days, stationary enemy air defenses were destroyed. The success of this attack also affected the morale of U.S. allies and of Taliban allies not yet under fire. The former were encouraged and the latter began to reconsider the viability of their alliance with the Taliban.

The formula for the application of power depended upon binary elements, CIA officers, and U.S. Special Forces, which together created the glue that held the operation together. The CIA's paramilitary officers, with their deep knowledge of special operations and intelligence, provided the most adhesive element of this mixture. This was especially critical because there was no previous joint planning or training; the blended glue emerged

from professionalism rooted in a sense of collective mission and personal relationships built on mutual respect. The result was a war of supreme coordination between Afghan tribal allies and U.S. firepower. The CIA delivered the HUMINT and the Afghan tribal armies. The Special Forces brought tactical skills and linked the ground to the air. Sensor and shooter merged, producing teams that delivered uniquely accurate and awesome force. The weapons and delivery systems included joint direct-attack munitions, Afghan cavalry, long-range snipers, AC-130 gunships, individual saboteurs, Afghan artillery, and thermobaric munitions. Intelligence provided the aim point for this force, concentrating its impact and enhancing its efficacy. Power, as defined by Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz and English historian John Keegan, is the ultimate arbiter of war.² The United States is the world's undisputed military leader, which is reflected in its kinetic power; in Afghanistan, intelligence afforded speed, stealth, and precision that enhanced the power exponentially. But power alone did not win the war.

The second level of the application of military force, more complex and less appreciated than raw power, was the attack on the enemy's strategy. The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu stressed this in his classic text, *The Art of War*. Unlike Clausewitz and Keegan, Sun Tzu viewed espionage as essential to war, because victory rests upon knowing the enemy and thereby gaining "strategic advantage" (*shih*).³ Intelligence informed the CIA of the enemy's plans and intentions and also about the Afghan allies' preferences and capabilities. Al-Qaeda expected either a tepid response, such as cruise missiles scattered around Afghanistan, or a slow concentration of U.S. military forces followed by an invasion. The first option would pose little real threat. The second, while a greater challenge, also offered the enemy greater opportunity, given that a heavy invading army would provide clear targets in an environment well suited to insurgent warfare. Al-Qaeda's assumptions were not unreasonable given the precedents of U.S. disengagement from Somalia and the Soviet retreat from Afghanistan. In this reasoning al-Qaeda made one of the most common mistakes of military reasoning: they were "prepared to fight the last battle." Al-Qaeda incorrectly assumed that the United States would not learn and not adapt, and it was therefore prepared for a battle similar to the one in Mogadishu.

Between September and December 2001 Western pundits held up the Soviet defeat in the 1980s and the British rout in the 1840s as warnings to U.S. military planners. These experts, however, like al-Qaeda, considered only the possibility of a conventional U.S. response. The notion of inserting small teams of clandestine collectors and warriors into various sectors of Afghanistan, subverting the enemy, rallying local militia, supplementing this with bold air and commando strikes, and integrating all of this into an overarching policy goal of establishing a viable Afghan government never entered their calculus. The element of surprise enhances power geometrically.

Speed was essential, not only because it can reinforce surprise but also because of the

al-Qaeda threat. Given the terrorist group's global network, demonstrated capabilities, confirmed efforts to acquire WMD, and preference for multiple attacks, the U.S. intelligence community and policymakers feared more attacks in the immediate wake of September 11. The United States had to strike rapidly, to disrupt the al-Qaeda command structure and perhaps prevent the next attack. There was no time to plan and execute a conventional military response. Again we quote Sun Tzu, who wrote, "War is such that the supreme consideration is speed."⁴ This was true in Afghanistan and will be the case in future counterterrorist wars.

Learning the right lessons from history, especially local history, is important, in a war dependent more on local political dynamics than conventional Western perceptions. In the summer of 1997 elements of the Northern Alliance controlled Mazar-e-sharif and established a land bridge to Uzbekistan. They cut Highway 1, which runs from Kabul through the Salang tunnel north to Konduz. Northern Alliance forces, under the overall command of the brilliant Ahmed Shah Masood, trapped the Taliban in a pocket around Konduz; but Taliban air resupply and the eventual subversion of Uzbek militia subcommanders in Mazar-e-sharif saved the Taliban from potential disaster.⁵ Learning from this lesson and listening closely to HUMINT sources and Afghan allies, the CIA outlined a similar military plan to U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) on October 3, 2001. CENTCOM commander General Tommy Franks, innovative and bold, recognized the potential and assigned navy SEAL Admiral Bert Calland to partner with the CIA. Shortly thereafter, Franks, accompanied by Calland and CIA officers, met with Northern Alliance commanders and intelligence officials to forge an agreement for attack. Later, Calland and more CIA operatives were deployed into Afghanistan to work with Northern Alliance intelligence officials and generals to listen, learn, refine, and execute.

By late September 2001 Uzbek tribal leader Dostam, part of the loosely structured Northern Alliance, aimed to recapture Mazar-e-sharif and eventually expand his small patch of turf to the borders of Uzbekistan. Tajik Panjshiri Northern Alliance commander Fahim hoped to attack from his northeast mountain strongholds to the west, toward Talaqan and Konduz, and to the south, toward Kabul. Ismail Khan wanted to attack from his base in central Afghanistan to the west, cutting the ring road and eventually taking the western city of Herat. Hazara Shia leader Kalili focused on the capture of Bamian and the surrounding area, to the west of Kabul. Pashtun tribal leader Karzai thought he could establish an enclave near his home village of Torin Kowt, and then move south to capture Qandahar. Pashtun tribal leader Shirzai also wanted to capture Qandahar but preferred to attack from the Pakistan border area and drive westward toward this urban enclave of Taliban leaders. Because the CIA had links of trust and confidence with these tribal allies, knew their strengths and weakness, and understood the expectations of the enemy, CIA leaders crafted a plan that reinforced the Afghan allies' own inclinations. The CIA and the U.S. military worked to pull these autonomous

Afghan allies into a single, coordinated, offensive effort. Within seventy-two hours Mazar-e-sharif and Kabul had both fallen, to be quickly followed by Bamian and Herat. With the land bridge established to Uzbekistan in the west, Highway 1 cut between Kabul and Konduz in the south, Northern Alliance Tajik-dominated mountains in the west, the Amur Darya River blocking escape to the north, and with allied forces attacking from all sides and U.S. air strikes from above, the enemy suffered a catastrophic defeat in the Konduz pocket. Bands of allied tribal militia cut other sections of the ring road and trapped enemy forces in smaller pockets throughout northern Afghanistan. This was 1997 all over again, but this time the enemy had no means of escape.

In the south and east, a more ambivalent local population of Pashtun tribals provided less geographic advantage. There was no secure territory from which to launch ground attacks against Qandahar. Yet again history and HUMINT illuminated the possibilities. Internal Pashtun rivalries and growing disenchantment with the Taliban presented opportunities. CIA assets had already launched sabotage operations against Taliban forces, especially around Qandahar, and intelligence revealed the fear and confusion among Taliban leaders. Moreover, Hamid Karzai represented a rare national hope. Highly respected by various tribal leaders, including the Panjshiri-dominated Northern Alliance, Karzai believed that he could raise an armed militia in his home region and carve out a small area in which to begin offensive ground operations. In one of the most heroic acts of the war, the future president of Afghanistan infiltrated enemy lines in Torin Kowt and rallied his tribesmen into a ragtag fighting force. A small team of CIA and U.S. military forces were deployed at night via CH-47 helicopters under enemy fire; they landed on a lily pad in an enemy pond. They joined Karzai's forces and rallied more militia, calling in U.S. airpower for protection, then launched an offensive to the south. Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Qandahar drove north to meet them. The November 17-18 U.S. and Afghan victory over al-Qaeda and Taliban forces south of Torin Kowt was critical, because it opened the way to Qandahar and provided a victory for Karzai, perhaps the only Afghan political leader who could pull together the north and the south. Otherwise, southern Pashtuns fighting northern Tajiks, in particular, could turn a Taliban defeat into a broad civil war and deny the United States the military and political victory it sought.

In addition to these joint U.S.-Afghan efforts, U.S. Special Operations Forces operated with brazen unilateral impunity throughout southern Afghanistan, destroying enemy infrastructure, capturing prisoners, killing Taliban operatives, and raiding the residence of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. U.S. Marines also played a key role in the Qandahar area. Intelligence guided and supported these unilateral missions and, in the aftermath of raids, provided assessments such as the devastating psychological impact on enemy leadership.

On December 7 U.S. and allied Afghan forces captured Qandahar. By taking advantage of local military-political objectives, the United States harnessed

the tribal forces already in motion and provided massive reinforcement via intelligence, communication, coordination, and firepower. And, when necessary, unilateral action complemented and encouraged natural tribal political tendencies. In other words, the CIA strategy accepted and expanded by CENTCOM, reflected much of the Afghan allies' own geographical aims.

The third level of application, deeper than raw power or geographic strategy, required understanding why the Afghans waged war. Why men fight often determines who they fight and defines how they fight. Thucydides, in *The Peloponnesian War*, explored the motivations of societies and warriors; this ancient historian's lessons are still important today.⁶ The Afghans fought for more than mere survival; thus force alone was insufficient (contrary to Clausewitz and Keegan). The Afghans fought not only for conventional geopolitical gain. They fought as much for prestige and honor, defined in their tribal terms, as for anything else, often more. Understanding these motivations and providing them with the opportunity to earn greater honor was the path to U.S. victory. This required intelligence beyond conventional HUMINT or SIGINT. It required images far deeper and more complex than satellite systems could provide. It required a cultural understanding based on trust and confidence, even bonds of empathy, with Afghan allies. It also required a special brand of intelligence officer who could map the human terrain and lead a multilateral collection of tribal elements to fulfill their own unrealized objectives.

Granted, those Afghan tribal leaders allied with the Taliban and al-Qaeda wanted to live, and they grew increasingly concerned about the application of U.S. power. They became more worried when confounded by a strategy that placed small, mobile U.S. teams behind their lines and saboteurs within their ranks. They needed options. The CIA, working with Afghan partners, offered them a series of choices. First, if they cooperated with the United States, they improved their chances of survival. In concert with CIA intelligence and covert action, U.S. air power reinforced this by quickly attacking some of the enemy Afghans who rejected the offer of partnership, which inclined survivors and others to reconsider U.S. overtures in a different light. Lethal coercion, although it has limitations, is a clear and fundamental baseline in war; in fact, it defines war. Clausewitz got that part right. The second, deeper benefit focused on caring for the families, the clans of these potential allies. In October 2001, especially in the high central mountains, winter was fast approaching. These impoverished Afghans needed tents, clothes, medicine, food, Korans, toys, and much more. The CIA and the U.S. Air Force responded. Within sixty days, from mid-October to mid-December 2001, U.S. aircraft delivered 1.69 million pounds of goods in 108 airdrops to forty-one locations throughout Afghanistan. Each drop was tailored to the specific requests of teams on the ground. Imagine the power conferred upon the Afghan tribal leader who sided with the United States, whose clan's needs fell from the sky within seventy-two hours of

his request. Their desperation was addressed, and their leader won honor and prestige among his people. Tons of other supplies arrived from clandestine overland networks. More were delivered by overt means, to highlight the U.S. response in humanitarian terms. The deliveries even sparked competition among tribal leaders for CIA benefits; others offered their services once they learned of the potential rewards.

These airdrops, of course, also included weapons and munitions. Now the Afghans had the means to kill their real enemies—those Arab, Chechen, Pakistani, and Uighur invaders. With CIA intelligence, U.S. firepower, and their own weapons, these Afghans had an unprecedented opportunity to enhance their warrior status among their tribes. The CIA's covert action reinforced the Afghan warrior's identity. He could fight and win, rightfully claiming victory as his own. Moreover, the Afghan fighters began to view the handful of U.S. warriors as comrades-in-arms. After all, these fellow fighters had demonstrated courage by placing themselves at such risk; these teams were at the mercy of their Afghan hosts. They shared the Afghans' hardships and danger. Finally, they talked about a new Afghanistan. They provided hope.

Another benefit, of course, was material self-interest. The CIA handed out millions of dollars. This bought influence and helped induce the defection of thousands of Taliban-aligned militia. Some Afghan partners provided for their clans and tribes with this money. Some pocketed the funds. All understood the origin of the largess and the reciprocity it required.

U.S. power is usually measured in terms of kinetic strength, but the power of empathy, honor, prestige, hope, and material self-interest can complement raw strength and produce a more effective, more enduring victory. This is the lesson of Thucydides. And, the power of thermobaric munitions and AC-130s can underscore the terms of both altruistic and self-interested deals. Through intelligence, at a deeper level, the CIA teams on the ground generated and directed this intangible power, reinforced by lethal force, in concert with the broader U.S. military-political strategy. The Afghans understood and embraced this complex partnership of power. As a consequence, Taliban-sponsored tribal alliances began to unravel, as the center of gravity, within the minds of those militia leaders, shifted toward the United States and the prospect of collective victory.

Teams

To accomplish this mission, the CIA deployed uniquely capable teams into Afghanistan. These teams blended diverse talents and boasted highly experienced leaders who excelled in missions demanding independence and initiative. Despite the erosion of the CIA's paramilitary capabilities since the end of the cold war, the CIA retained a core group of these warriors. These few dozen paramilitary officers provided the backbone for the CIA teams. Many were cross-trained as operations or intelligence officers. Most,

however, lacked relevant language skills, experience in central Asia, and expertise in counterterrorism. Moreover, CIA operations officers with the requisite qualifications often had limited or rusty tactical skills. A team usually consisted of an operations officer with language skills, especially Farsi/Dari, who may have had military experience. His deputy was usually a paramilitary officer. Other team members brought tactical, technical communications, counterterrorist, and language capabilities. This combination of personnel with the right leadership proved successful.

The team leaders were all senior officers at the colonel or general level. Gary Schroen, a fifty-nine-year-old SIS-3 who spoke fluent Farsi/Dari, led the first team into Afghanistan; it arrived in the Panjshir on September 27. This was analogous to the U.S. military deploying a three-star general to lead an eight-man A-team. Another team leader with advanced graduate study in Islam and central Asia, who spoke fluent Russian and Uzbek, had vast experience in the area. Yet another, who spoke Farsi/Dari, was a cultural anthropologist intimately familiar with the tribes of the region. The average age of a CIA team member in Afghanistan was forty-five, with more than twenty years on the job. Experience mattered, because these men had to plumb the depths of political and cultural dynamics to understand the environment. These CIA officers needed to map the human terrain of their patch in Afghanistan, while understanding and contributing to the larger strategy. They needed not just skills but knowledge rooted in virtue and judgment developed through experience. They especially needed to know themselves, because this was the first and most important reference point in measuring the complex psychological, social, cultural, and political variables that swirled around them. The GPS provides a good analogy: When deployed into the field, the teams used a GPS, and their first point of reference was their position. Only then did they start fixing allied and enemy positions. The same was true of the psychological, cultural, and social environment; these officers needed first to know themselves, then to understand others, build empathy, acquire deeper intelligence, make decisions, and take action. For example, CIA officers challenged Afghan warriors to fight a common foe, to avenge the deaths of September 11 victims and Afghan martyrs Ahmed Masood and Abdul Hag, brutally murdered by al-Qaeda. CIA officers collected deep intelligence and invoked a common honor to build alliances. Significantly, these culturally sensitive and professionally disciplined officers also harbored and nurtured a cold, visceral determination to kill the enemy. This focused passion needed no translation for their Afghan allies.

These experienced teams demonstrated a special kind of courage. With confidence in their leadership, they ignored political risk and embraced the courage of responsibility. While less clear and less recognized, this type of bravery was critical to the victory in Afghanistan. Their courage enabled these leaders to make decisions and move forward with speed and confidence. Each team, with unprecedented responsibility, complemented each other.

Team members had tactical responsibilities but made decisions with strategic consequences. This was especially true because of the CIA command structure, purposely designed to deal with the unique tribal environment and enhance networked decisions. Afghanistan is not a nation-state in the conventional Western sense but a fractured, shifting jumble of tribal and clan networks. Intelligence collection and war are very local matters. The CIA, therefore, did not assign an overall chief of station for Afghanistan, not in the beginning. Instead it initially deployed seven semiautonomous teams that operated in a network under the command of a single headquarters office within the CTC. Each team understood its strategic objectives within the overall plan, but each had the widest latitude in its tactics and operations while keeping other teams informed. They could thus maintain maximum flexibility in order to understand and adjust as local variables changed. For example, a team could deploy reconnaissance elements of two officers at will; no operational permission or review was required. There was no requirement for close air support. No approval was needed to hire a local. The teams could reconfigure and recombine with U.S. military partners or Afghan allies at a moment's notice. The team leaders and members operated in a manner that took full advantage of their experience, initiative, and local knowledge. Only after all the major Afghan cities had fallen in December 2001 and a nascent national government had begun to form did the CIA assign a chief of station—a senior operations officer who had led the CTC's effort against al-Qaeda for the previous three years. In sum, the teams performed as self-organizing networks, linked by a single chain of command to a single headquarters office.

Intelligence

In contrast to the decentralized, networked command structure, the intelligence reporting system was extraordinarily centralized but also networked. Each team generated intelligence reports that would reach other teams, the military commands, CIA stations around the world, analysts, and policymakers. There was plenty of intelligence. In the first six months CIA teams, using laptops in the dirt, often in combat conditions, produced almost two thousand HUMINT disseminations. This is an extraordinary number of reports, surpassing during the same period geographic divisions with more than a score of permanent stations. Significantly, the CIA fused these reports with all other sources of intelligence, from imagery to other HUMINT to SIGINT to overt Foreign Broadcast Information Service cuts. The CIA operators and analysts worked together in this fusion process; this real-time melding of operations and analysis proved essential, because analysis supported not only CENTCOM and policymakers but also the operator who was collecting intelligence and waging covert war. The CTC office, relying on the entire intelligence community, strived to push fused, value-laden intelligence to CIA teams in Afghanistan.

Integrated all-source intelligence sharpened operations through the constant validating and reprogramming of each source. An unvetted HUMINT source could be under the coercive influence of the Taliban, but the comparison of his reporting with other sources could prompt an investigation and the rejection of his information. SIGINT could provide the details of a true conversation of a militia leader pledging support to a Taliban commander, but a HUMINT source could claim that the same militia leader was lying to the Taliban and truly intended to defect. Imagery could provide indications of enemy camps; HUMINT sources could therefore be deployed in the area and SIGINT sensors redirected. An unvetted HUMINT source could prove his worth and thus receive more sensitive tasking if his information was corroborated. For example, CIA officers tasked volunteer sources to report on areas already understood, as a test of their intentions. In one case, an outstanding long-time Afghan source provided exact targeting information and, seized with the mission, rejected the CIA's repeated orders to evacuate the enemy area before U.S. air strikes commenced. Joint direct-attack munitions igniting secondary explosions of Taliban-al-Qaeda military targets further validated his information and his courage. Thanks to superior imagery and a perfect expression of U.S. air power, the asset survived. He earned special CIA recognition and reward.

The fused intelligence produced specific dynamic targeting for the U.S. military. This was conveyed in phone-video-teleconference-video feeds to CENTCOM. The CTC generated an electronic map with multiple overlays of data that tracked CIA teams, U.S. military deployments, allied Afghan forces, enemy locations, and no-strike zones. This was done nearly in real time. The CIA pushed the data as fast as possible. U.S. pilots in particular responded with precision and great flexibility. On more than one occasion U.S. aircraft veered away from enemy camps at the last moment because the CIA could not contact an asset exposed to the air strikes. The CTC maintained a duplicate electronic map via a link in CENTCOM, so military commanders knew what the CIA knew. Moreover, the CIA welcomed detailed military personnel into the CIA operations structure, on the teams, and in CIA headquarters. A select few CENTCOM and Special Operations officers even had direct access to source-sensitive databases and operational cable traffic. The protection of sources and methods, of course, is fundamental to the intelligence business, but effective operations need compartments with the right people on the inside, including analysts and warriors. These military partners were fully integrated into the CTC and provided invaluable guidance for all aspects of targeting and operations. Special Forces General Mike Jones, assigned to the CTC, played a key leadership role. CIA liaison officers were also posted at CENTCOM, air force commands, and throughout U.S. military commands in central Asia.

The CIA's partnership with the U.S. military was the foundation for the kinetic war, and the integral link of intelligence to military operations reached new levels. In one

case a CIA HUMINT source reported the possibility that an enemy convoy would be departing a small village at dawn. The navy deployed a P-3 surveillance aircraft that picked up the three suspect vehicles. The navy handed off the coverage to an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that tracked the convoy. In response to this imagery, a small team composed of U.S. military personnel, CIA operatives, and Afghans blocked the enemy's escape into Pakistan. This one encounter forced the enemy's convoy deeper into Afghanistan, allowing sufficient time for navy SEALs to reach the convoy by helicopter. While the UAV provided live video coverage, the SEALs executed a classic L-shaped attack. All seventeen Chechens died in the brief firefight. There were no U.S. casualties. The success of this mission reflects the success of all-source, fused, flexible, and networked intelligence geared to the tactical customer, in this case a navy SEAL team.

The field partnerships, however, faced bureaucratic challenges. U.S. military forces carried the baggage of standard operating procedures, whereas CIA teams often developed initiatives on an ad hoc basis. CENTCOM sometimes thought CTC leadership ill informed about their teams' exact tactical intent or, worse, reluctant to share detailed plans, while the CTC wondered why CENTCOM appeared so bureaucratic and rigid. Worse still, parts of the Department of Defense (DoD) sought to gain control of critical resources and exert political bureaucratic power in the midst of the conflict. Some in the DoD and CIA questioned the entire plan, predicting disaster such as the Soviets encountered in Afghanistan in the 1980s. But forceful intelligence generated speed and momentum and, with strong field leadership from the CIA and CENTCOM, eventually succeeded.

Intelligence collection and analysis also played the critical role in policymakers' strategic decisions. A remarkably flat command link enabled intelligence and strategic decisions to flow two ways in only minutes, thus enhancing the impact of the intelligence.⁷ For example, the national command authority would often listen to an intelligence brief from a CIA headquarters officer in overall command of the teams, and then debate key points. The officer would in turn inform team leaders of the policy context through informal dialogue or more formal intelligence requirements, usually within the hour. The political importance of Kabul as a capital and unifying symbol of a new Afghan state was one policy issue. The viability of a Pashtun leader and a Tajik-dominated military in a new Afghanistan was another. The expectations, capabilities, and roles of neighboring allied countries were yet another consideration, the dangers posed by Iran, another. By understanding the strategic context, team leaders could make better operational judgments and collect more relevant intelligence. These teams, sensitive and responsive to the policymakers' needs, reported teams not only of intelligence but of quality intelligence. The dramatic compression of the intelligence cycle at the tactical and strategic levels throughout the Afghan war benefited everyone, collectors, analysts, and customers alike.

War

As expected, the war evolved in three phases. The first ended in early December 2001 when the Taliban collapsed as an organized fighting force and al-Qaeda forces dispersed into their sanctuaries. Because most of the targets were large, relatively static enemy concentrations and infrastructure, the intelligence collection for military action was relatively clear. The second phase, from early December 2001 until April 2002, focused on al-Qaeda sanctuaries. This included the battles of Tora Bora that winter and Shaikot the following spring. Because the targets were fewer in number, more mobile, and operating in specially selected areas, the United States needed more specific tactical intelligence. The difficulty grew because al-Qaeda had chosen its sanctuaries well: high mountain terrain close to the Pakistani border. Moreover, Afghan allies much preferred to fight for their village or valley; they were less inclined to engage a trained enemy hidden in a fortified redoubt. An ethnic Tajik or Uzbek Afghan is much less useful in Pashtun territory, as is a Pashtun not from that particular clan. Al-Qaeda leveraged their relationship with their Pashtun allies in the southern and eastern part of Afghanistan in seeking refuge. This intelligence nut was harder to crack. The CIA located the sanctuaries and managed to infiltrate Afghan assets, who marked out enemy locations. This, combined with other intelligence means, led to overwhelming but imperfect victories. In Tora Bora the U.S. sacrificed power for speed. CENTCOM and the CIA understood the limitations of Afghan allies but also appreciated the need to attack with alacrity. Moving U.S. forces into the area would simply take too long. Intelligence fixed the enemy, including al-Qaeda leadership. Afghan allies, encouraged and supported by the CIA and U.S. Special Forces, were deployed into blocking positions around Tora Bora. U.S. firepower, guided by a five-man joint team calling in strikes, did the real damage. The U.S. captured a key al-Qaeda sanctuary, destroyed weapons and munitions, recovered valuable intelligence, and killed hundreds of the enemy and forced others to flee to Pakistan, where scores more were captured. Osama bin Laden, however, escaped.

When criticized by London for his unorthodox method of warfare, T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) said of his indigenous allies, "Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. . . . Actually also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is."⁸ The same reasoning applied to the U.S. victory at Tora Bora.

The battle at Shaikot three months later, Operation Anaconda, was a more conventional, more "complete" U.S. victory, because more U.S. and coalition forces were directly engaged. The press coverage was also greater. The CIA provided intelligence support in this battle. HUMINT determined the enemy's area of concentration, but

HUMINT could not determine the enemy's tactical positions or defensive plans. Traditional U.S. military reconnaissance and direct engagement often determined al-Qaeda's location. Given the extreme terrain and dispersal of enemy forces in caves and canyons and poor weather, traditional imagery provided limited value. The enemy's communications discipline improved after press reports of U.S. tactical SIGINT efforts at Tora Bora; therefore, SIGINT was less useful in Shaikot. The CIA nevertheless collected unique intelligence to support the warfighters. For example, the CIA deployed unliated Afghan assets with modified GPS devices into the Shaikot area to mark key sites and routes. The agency illuminated enemy positions for strike aircraft; on one occasion this included marking a target for a French Mirage that blunted an enemy attack on isolated U.S. troops. Perhaps as many as eight hundred enemy combatants died in this battle, but others, including some al-Qaeda leaders, escaped. What the United States had gained in power by waiting for weeks to build up its forces, it lost in speed.

The third phase of the war had actually been in progress throughout the campaign but gained exclusive focus after Operation Anaconda: the search for high-value targets such as Osama bin Laden. The CIA had in fact been hunting bin Laden in Afghanistan for years. Although he was spotted briefly, there was no immediate shooter or clear authority to complement the sensor. The CIA and U.S. military did kill al-Qaeda's number-two man, Mohammed Atef, and other terrorist leaders. Man hunting has always posed difficult intelligence challenges, especially in hostile environments. General Pershing chased Pancho Villa in northern Mexico for many hard months, with no success. Nazi war criminals eluded capture for decades. Carlos the Jackal dodged his pursuers for years, until he crossed paths with the CIA's Cofer Black in Sudan.

Future War

The transformation of war from large standing armies to microtargets armed with WMD will challenge the United States, even more so if conventional doctrines prevail. As enemies disperse into smaller units under cover of more complex, possibly vertical urban environments, the importance of HUMINT will grow. The enemy target might be a two-man terrorist cell, with firearms plus a chemical agent, in a third-floor apartment. Technical collection, especially if this cell exercises tradecraft discipline, may offer nothing. Only a local HUMINT source might have access to the target. Of course, as in Afghanistan, the best intelligence emerges from multiple sources from various collection disciplines. Such microtargets will confound larger technical systems unless they are fused into HUMINT structures and products. It is important that technical systems enhance HUMINT. Intelligence on microtargets in counterterrorist war will be increasingly transitory. There will be no time to waste, because a single terrorist, perhaps with his own agenda, can move at will at any moment. In this kind of warfare

the United States will need to integrate the various sensors with the various shooters, all in the right combination, so that action is precise and immediate. The intelligence operatives, or sensors, will also need to understand the strategic consequences of such tactical missions and must factor this into collection and reporting. Sensors must support the shooters, and both must support the policymakers.

Greater emphasis on interdisciplinary intelligence teams will become the norm, especially in counterterrorist war. Such teams may require traditional sensors and shooters reinforced by biotechnicians who can track and defeat bioweapons. They may require operators who can launch and control mini-UAVs armed with special MASTINT sensors. Or they may need financial analysts who can crunch data at the point of field collection and provide immediate feedback to other teams hacking into terrorist bank data on another continent. Technology, however, should not drive these operations or determine broader strategy at the expense of experienced, risk-taking HUMINT collectors on the ground. While we assess the operational impact of technology from our American perspective, we must be cognizant of other views. We seek moral comfort in long-distance, technically buffered killing, but we lose the tactile sense of the human battlefield.⁹ Distance and remote technology may reduce physical risk and protect our consciences, but it impedes the development of empathy in the collectors and warriors who must understand the human variables. The United States cannot ignore the most powerful force on the battlefield: the human condition of friends and foes.

HUMINT and covert action will be unilateral, bilateral, and/or multilateral. U.S. intelligence must forge increasingly interdependent links to a multitude of nonstate partners. In Afghanistan the United States relied on a wide range of allies far from the conventional formula of interstate relations. U.S. operations in Afghanistan were supremely multilateral, supplemented by unilateral sources and unilateral action. Each reinforced the other.

One of the most important lessons of the Afghan war of 2001-2 is how intelligence enabled the calibration of covert action and war, a war that conformed to broader U.S. policy and endowed the victors with legitimacy. The United States achieved military and political success in Afghanistan and in the process boosted its global political standing. The world likes a winner, but only if the battle is just, the fight fair, alliances strengthened, and the victor humble. The calibrated operation served the United States in the military sense in part by recruiting ambivalent foes into allies against intransigent enemies. It also achieved global strategic objectives, in that calibrated U.S. power demonstrated to the world that the United States respects the "preferences of other societies . . . an indispensable element in maintaining the peace," according to Philip Bobbitt. In *The Shield of Achilles* Bobbitt writes, "Legitimacy is what unites the problems of strategy and law at the heart of epochal war."¹⁰ Excepting the already radicalized parts of the Islamic world, the global public viewed the U.S. action in Afghanistan as

legitimate, because of the September 11 attacks but also because covert action and war, guided by deep intelligence, incorporated the Afghan people into the fight. The skillful teams in Afghanistan transcended their tactical engagements to help confer legitimacy on the United States in the eyes of the world. This is no small thing. Robert Kagan notes, "The struggle to define and obtain international legitimacy in this new era may prove to be among the most critical contests of our time. In some ways, it is as significant in determining the future of the U.S. role in the international system as any purely material measure of power and influence."¹¹

The Afghanistan war also revitalized the American way of war. "Boldness and prudence, flexibility and opportunism, initiative and tempo, speed and concentration, force multipliers, and intelligence," are the elements historian David Hackett Fischer sees in George Washington's winter campaign of 1776-77. These elements "defined a new way of war that would continue to appear through the Revolution and in many American wars."¹² The American warriors in Afghanistan demonstrated these same traits, upholding the legacy of their founding fathers' independent, entrepreneurial spirit.

Counterterrorist war will require a stronger CIA capable of deploying experienced teams into terrorist sanctuaries, whether in the hinterlands of Somalia or the complex urban jungles of Karachi, to collect quality intelligence and, as directed by the national command authority, execute covert action. And the intelligence and covert action must always support U.S. policy, whether reflected in a diplomatic demarche or a joint direct-attack munitions strike. At the same time, the United States should not expect CIA paramilitary officers to substitute for U.S. military forces; the CIA mission is different, requiring broader, more strategic orientation. The CIA mission also requires espionage and tradecraft. U.S. commandos need to focus on the tactics of killing terrorists; CIA officers need to focus on the intelligence that supports the operation and provides policy context for the ramifications of such killing.

The U.S. military will need to improve its responsiveness, flexibility, quickness, and stealth. According to the *Weekly Standard*, in part because of the influence of conventional military leaders, "Prior to 9/11, these [Special Forces] units were never used even once to hunt down terrorists who had taken American lives."¹³ In counterterrorist wars like in the one in Afghanistan, conventional forces will support Special Operations Forces, turning decades' worth of doctrine on its head. But the United States should not expect these brave warriors or other elements of the military to collect nonactional intelligence or direct covert action. Regrettably, the ongoing debate, outlined in an excellent article by Jennifer Kibbe in the March-April 2004 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, is more about politics than about mission. Intelligence operatives and fighting soldiers both bring special skills and complement each other; this lesson of Afghanistan should not be lost in the scramble for resources, power, control, and bragging rights. We need the CIA and the military to work together as directed by the policy masters they serve.

Robert Kaplan wrote, "Not only should the CIA be greener (that is, have a larger uniformed [*sic*] military wing), but the Special Forces should be blacker."¹⁴ The 9/11 Commission's recommendation to strip the CIA of its paramilitary covert-action capabilities is a bad idea.

The policy community will need a more dynamic, more robust diplomatic aid corps, geared to engage provincial, even tribal, political leaders and to support the construction of legitimate societies defined by local needs, not American (mis)perceptions. The dismissive criticism of support to "warlords" in Afghanistan ignores the obvious: local leaders hold the power and define political reality. Nevertheless, with time, patience, and hard work, perhaps a national Afghan society based on something stronger and more stable than local tribal legitimacy will emerge. In the meantime, U.S. political representatives, like CIA and military operatives, must engage these nonstate actors, especially those in the hinterlands. In the end, counterterrorist war is more about providing opportunities and hope for the dispossessed in terrorist sanctuaries than about just killing the enemy. As Eliot Cohen argues, "U.S. policy abroad has been effectively militarized, at the expense of a State Department whose collective strength has rarely matched the quality of individual diplomats."¹⁵ In Afghanistan, military strikes needed immediate support by more than transitory covert actions, which in turn needed overt policy manifested at the local level, not just United Nations conferences in capital cities.

Finally, the Afghan war shows us what America can achieve—a victory based upon the enduring lessons of the ancients, deep intelligence, and the right people, the right partnerships: technicians and spies, collectors and advisors and policymakers, sensors and shooters, riflemen and pilots, Americans and Afghans. This victory, like any other, is also about leaders. We must therefore seize its lesson of bold leadership and learn from those brave Americans who were deployed in Afghanistan during the grief-ridden autumn of 2001, who struck the enemy with nuance and fury, with intelligence and war.

Notes

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions or views of the CIA or any other U.S. Government agency. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. Government authentication of information or Agency endorsement of the author's views. Where appropriate, this material has been reviewed by the CIA to prevent the disclosure of classified information.

1. Richard Clarke, *Against All Enemies* (New York: Free Press, 2004). See also National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, staff statements, 2004, available at www.9/11commission.gov/staff_statements.htm. Both provide accounts of U.S. initiatives in Afghanistan before September 11, 2001. Although Clarke's account is egocentric and subjective, he successfully outlines U.S. efforts. The statements by the commission staff capture (and miss) some of the history and note the critical importance of intelligence.

2. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); John Keegan, *Intelligence in War* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
3. Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger Ames (New York: Ballentine Books, 1993), 120.
4. *Ibid.*, 157.
5. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Rashid provides an excellent account of this operation in his discussion of the rise of the Taliban.
6. Robert B. Strassler, ed., *The Landmark Thucydides* (New York: Touchstone, 1998).
7. Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command* (New York: Free Press, 2002). Cohen illustrates the critical importance of civilian leadership during war and the importance of policy's driving military strategy. During the Afghan war, CIA intelligence and CENTCOM briefings to the NSA helped in this regard.
8. T. E. Lawrence, "27 Articles," *Arab Bulletin*, August 20, 1917.
9. Dave Grossman, *On Killing* (New York: Little, Brown, 1995). Grossman provides a penetrating psychological analysis of conflict, exploring how men naturally seek distance and technology to ease the hard task of killing.
10. Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 334.
11. Robert Kagan, "America's Crisis of Legitimacy?" *Foreign Affairs* 82 (March–April 2004): 67.
12. David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 375.
13. Richard H. Schulz Jr., "Nine Reasons Why We Never Sent Our Special Operations Forces after Al Qaeda before 9/11," *Weekly Standard*, January 26, 2004, 19.
14. Robert Kaplan, "Supremacy by Stealth," *Atlantic Monthly* (July–August 2003), 79.
15. Eliot Cohen, "History and the Hyperpower," *Foreign Affairs* 83 (July–August 2004): 61.