



# CTX

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## From the Editor

“Learn from your mistakes.” “Adversity makes us stronger.” “There are no obstacles, only challenges.” We all know the clichés, right? And, probably more often than we want to admit, we feel a twinge of annoyance every time we hear them.

And yet, the whole purpose of this journal is to provide you, the CT professional, with a forum where you can share lessons learned or, perhaps, ponder the aftermath of lessons unlearned or never learned. Throughout the warfare that has been such a large part of human history, whether we like it or not, very often it’s what we messed up that teaches us what we need to know.

This issue of CTX looks at what went wrong, or at least not as right as it should have gone, on some very diverse battlefields. COL Imre Porkoláb launches the discussion with a detailed look at Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan in 2002. As envisioned by the command HQ several hundred miles away, this operation should have been a simple matter of ‘coptering in and taking a valley called Shah-i-Khot from a few scattered remnants of the enemy. As many of you know, that’s not what happened. Porkoláb uses the near-disaster of Anaconda to highlight one unconventional officer’s courageous leadership, and suggests that role models like him are vital for future SOF training.

MAJ Greg Merkl leads us through the math of societal breakdown caused by floods of well-meaning development money, sent into dusty rural hamlets from another culture a universe away. Those of you who have seen the ways in which Afghanistan has changed—and not changed—over the past decade will appreciate the author’s ironic sense of humor.

The Estonian Forest Brothers’ resistance movement defied Soviet occupation during and immediately after WWII, only to succumb to Soviet infiltration as its weak organizational structure, initially a strength, became a liability. In two articles covering two major periods of the Forest Brothers’ activity, CPT Olavi Punga and COL Martin Herem take advantage of newly accessible Soviet archives to analyze the lessons this little known piece of history offers for CT professionals who face a similarly decentralized enemy.

Alongside the development money described by MAJ Merkl, there’s another flood of money going into Afghanistan, this one directly into the hands of the Taliban. What the world gets in exchange, thanks to a network of PKK smugglers, is several tons of cheap, high-grade heroin every year. LTC Kashif Khan and Chief Inspector Olcay Er take us on a tour of this terrorist financing pipeline, from the farms of Afghanistan through the processing labs located near porous borders, and onto the street corners of Europe.

Human rights are central to any discussion of insurgency. From many years' experience combating the Colombian insurgent group known as the FARC, LTC Jorge Galindo Cardenas opens his readers' eyes to the ways in which even those who champion the cause of human rights can become unwitting pawns in the insurgents' efforts to gain political legitimacy.

This issue's CTAP interview has LTC Kashif Khan speaking with LTC (and MD) Ramey Wilson about Wilson's training and experiences in the U.S. Army medical corps. Wilson shares his thoughts on how U.S. medical teams are adapting their strategy to the requirements of remote, austere, and hostile territories. He also discusses ways in which the United States can and should assist other countries to develop their medical capabilities and make the best use of limited resources under combat and post-combat conditions. When you send people to risk their lives in far-away places, he emphasizes, they have to know that the resources are in place to take care of them when they get hurt.

George Lober returns to the Ethics and Insights column with a thoughtful exploration of the responsibilities individuals bear to maintain a personal code of ethics, even when subordinated to an organization that demands conformity and obedience. If you surrender your rights to life and liberty when you "sign on the dotted line" of a military career, do you also give up the right to pass moral judgment on orders and missions that violate your personal code of honor?

We have no movie or book reviews from our readers this time. C'mon, folks, send 'em in! Here is a relatively painless, and actually pretty fun, way to get your name and opinions in print. Have you seen a great World War II movie? Tell the rest of us, so we can watch it, too! Have you wasted your time on a good-sounding book that missed the mark? Help your fellow CT professionals avoid the same fate by describing where it went wrong. Without your contributions we wouldn't have a journal, so keep writing, and when you have something you like, send it to [ctxsubmit@globalecco.org](mailto:ctxsubmit@globalecco.org).

We also want to hear from you about the journal itself. Do you like what you're reading? Do you know how we could do better? Is there an article or column that really got you thinking or talking? We welcome all your feedback, positive and negative. Write a letter to the editor at [ctxeditor@globalecco.org](mailto:ctxeditor@globalecco.org).

Have a great summer.

**ELIZABETH SKINNER**

Managing Editor

## Inside This Issue

- Letter from the Editor ELIZABETH SKINNER
- 5** When the Goldfish Meets the Anaconda: A Modern Fable on Unconventional Leadership  
COL IMRE PORKOLÁB, HUNGARIAN ARMY
- 22** Incentivizing Cooperation in Afghanistan  
MAJ GREG MERKL, U.S. ARMY
- 30** Estonia's Forest Brothers in 1941: Goals, Capabilities, and Outcomes CPT OLAVI PUNGA, ESTONIAN ARMY
- 39** The Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers: 1947–1950  
COL MARTIN HEREM, ESTONIAN ARMY
- 54** Cutting the Link between Illegal Drugs and Terrorists  
LTC KASHIF J. KHAN, PAKISTANI AIR FORCE AND CHIEF INSPECTOR  
OLCAY ER, TURKISH NATIONAL POLICE
- 63** Human Rights as a Weapon of Terrorists  
LTC JORGE GALINDO CARDENAS, COLOMBIAN ARMY
- 71** CTAP INTERVIEW  
LTC Ramey Wilson, U.S. Army, with LTC Kashif J. Khan, Pakistani Air Force
- 80** ETHICS AND INSIGHTS  
The Real “Double-Bind” GEORGE LOBER
- 84** JSOU PUBLICATIONS

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**Lieutenant Colonel Jorge Galindo Cardenas** has more than 20 years of active service as an infantry officer in the Colombian Army. He graduated with a master's degree in Defense Analysis from NPS in June 2013. Prior to that, he attended the Colombian Command and General Staff College, where he was recognized as a distinguished graduate. LTC Galindo has held command positions at every rank from platoon commander to battalion commander. Prior to his most recent promotion, LTC Galindo served as chief of security for the Colombian minister of defense, advising government leaders on national security and strategic issues.

**Colonel Martin Herem** has served as an Army officer in the Estonian Defense Forces since 1992. He has been a platoon leader, company commander, staff officer, instructor in tactics at the Estonian National Defense College (ENDC), and commander of a military region (a territorial infantry brigade). In 2006, COL Herem served as a force protection officer with a U.S. brigade in OIF II. COL Herem graduated in 2012 with a master's degree from the ENDC and from the Baltic Defense College's Higher Command Studies Course. He is currently commander of the ENDC.

**Lieutenant Colonel Kashif Jamal Khan** has served in the Pakistani Air Force as a fighter pilot for 20 years. After commissioning in 1993, he served in a number of different Air Force squadrons. He is a qualified flight instructor, flight safety officer and quality assurance officer and served as an instructor pilot at Pakistan's Combat Commander school (equivalent to the U.S. Navy's Top Gun school). LTC Khan has also served as a flight commander (training), flight commander (operations), and commander of a fighter squadron. He earned degrees in science, aviation, and war studies from Pakistan's top universities before coming to NPS. He received his Master of Science degree in Defense Analysis from NPS in June 2013.

**Major Greg Merkl** is a Special Forces Officer who currently serves as a mathematics instructor at West Point. He completed

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**Colonel Imre Porkoláb** is presently serving as the Hungarian national liaison representative at NATO Allied Command Transformation, in Norfolk, Virginia. Earlier in his career, COL Porkoláb played a pivotal role in developing the Hungarian Army's SOF capability while serving with the MoD, Joint Forces Command, and finally as the commander of Hungary's SF battalion. He has operational experience in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He has earned master's degrees in the fields of leadership, international relations, and defense analysis through studies in Hungary, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He also holds a PhD in Military Sciences.

**Captain Olavi Punga** began his active duty with the Estonian Defense League (Kaitseliit) in 1994, serving until 1998. From 1998 to 2002, CPT Punga served as the director of the Estonian National Defense College (ENDC) War Museum, and from 2002 to 2012 as a lecturer in military history. Since 2012, CPT Punga has been a researcher in the ENDC Applied Research Center. He graduated from Tartu University with a master's degree in 2009, and expects to complete his doctoral dissertation in 2014. CPT Punga has published extensively in the Defense League's magazine *Kaitse Kodu* about the World War II-era Forest Brothers' movement in Estonia, as well as the history of the Defense League.

**Lieutenant Colonel Ramey L. Wilson** is an Army internal medicine physician who has served in operational assignments and deployments with both conventional and Special Operations units. He recently graduated from the Defense Analysis curriculum in Special Operations/Irregular Warfare at NPS. During his studies and research, he focused on post-conflict reconstruction and stability operations, and explored the role of health development as a key component of any security strengthening mission. Dr. Wilson currently serves as a general internal medicine fellow at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and is an assistant professor of medicine at the Uniformed Services University.

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### COVER PHOTO

Põhjaka bog in Estonia by Merily Salura, via Wikimedia Commons.

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## When the Goldfish Meets the Anaconda: A Modern Fable on Unconventional Leadership

I HAVE WONDERED MANY TIMES WHETHER EXTERNAL REALITY EXISTS independently from how the observer sees it. What, in other words, is reality? A few years ago, in the Italian town of Monza, keeping a goldfish in a bowl was banned. The explanation was that it was cruel to keep a fish in a bowl with curved sides, because the fish would have only a distorted view of reality. But how do we know that we have a true, undistorted view of reality? Might not we ourselves be inside some kind of big goldfish bowl, so that our vision is distorted by an enormous lens? Even looking through a curved bowl, the goldfish would still be able to formulate scientific laws based on its own observations, and these might even enable it to make predictions about the future of the objects outside the bowl. Like the goldfish, many of the military leaders who participated in Operation Anaconda had a distorted view of reality.

Gathering information about Operation Anaconda, which took place in March 2002 and was the first major battle of the Afghanistan war after Tora Bora, is not hard by any means. The internet is full of firsthand accounts of what had happened and the lessons ostensibly learned from the operation. Rather than offer any judgmental assessments of anyone in particular, my intent in this article is to map out the dynamics of the many decision-making layers during a complex military operation, using Anaconda as a case study.

Some important lessons have yet to be learned from this epic battle in Afghanistan. In this article, I contend that a different kind of leadership development is needed if we want to prepare our leaders for future conflicts, especially asymmetric ones. Certain situations require different approaches, and an unconventional leadership style is best suited for asymmetric conflicts. I also maintain that the key to success on a battlefield, especially in an asymmetric environment like Afghanistan in 2002, has very little to do with the electronic gadgetry and technology of modern warfare, and much more to do with the mind-set of leaders and the decisions they make, as well as how the subordinates execute these decisions.

### The Participants

In early January 2002, there were about 50 U.S. personnel living in and operating out of a safe house in the city of Gardez, in eastern Afghanistan. It was an interesting gathering: without any official documents or directive to guide them, this group managed to reorganize the U.S. force structure occupying outposts in the frontier areas all across Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> The people involved in these early days were members of Advanced Force Operations (AFO), which was a highly unusual concept organization in itself.<sup>2</sup> AFO is a term used by the U.S. Department of Defense to describe a task force made up of SOF personnel whose job is to precede the main force into the area of operations and carry out whatever preparation work is needed. This may include, among other things, reconnaissance and surveillance, reception, staging, onward

*COL Imre Porkoláb, Hungarian Army*

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movement, integration of forces, terminal guidance, and, possibly, direct action. In Afghanistan, Special Forces and the CIA seemed to be sharing information and cooperating with each other in an unprecedented manner. The AFO and Special Forces tactical operations centers (TOCs) were also co-located in Gardez;<sup>3</sup> they all seemed to agree that sharing a common operating picture would help everyone in the fight. It was understood by this group that for Operation Anaconda, the CIA and AFO were essentially working as one organization.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of the operation, teams were gathering intelligence in order to develop the situation, including all the open-source information that was available to them.<sup>5</sup> Soon they identified a potential target, Jalaluddin Haqqani, whose greatest battlefield victories had occurred near a high valley called Shah-i-Khot.<sup>6</sup> This place was little known to the Americans, but they read some declassified reporting on the battle of Shah-i-Khot, together with reports on lessons learned. Based on open-source intelligence, they learned that Haqqani was hiding in the mountains above the valley with a considerable number of al Qaeda fighters, and was preparing to fight an asymmetric guerrilla war against the U.S. forces.

As their training directed, the Special Forces personnel had established ties with the local tribal leaders, but intelligence was still scarce and the teams decided to spread across the frontier and further develop their network. Local knowledge, as always, seemed to be invaluable, and they were soon convinced that Shah-i-Khot was where the enemy was hiding. At this time, the difficulty was to confirm the enemy's presence without being detected, and thus prepare the ground for a larger operation. The AFO commander, whose team would carry out this task, was strongly against using helicopters because they would make it impossible to do a sub-rosa infiltration; more importantly, he was looking for creative options to obtain the necessary information. For what looked like an impossible reconnaissance mission, he needed more specially trained men on very short notice. Getting permission from the commander was not easy, however, and this reveals some aspects of the C2 relationships during the entire operation.

For what looked like an impossible reconnaissance mission, the AFO commander needed more specially trained men on very short notice.

AFO at that time was reporting to Task Force II. AFO was only a small part of TF II, whose main body at that time was located at Bagram Air Base.<sup>7</sup> The deputy commanding general in charge of TF II at the time, an Air Force brigadier, was an exceptionally experienced special operations pilot, but not an exceptionally experienced special operations ground commander.<sup>8</sup> He must have been a good bureaucrat, though, because he believed that an accomplished leader can effectively lead just about any type of organization.<sup>9</sup> To assist him, he had a staff of more than 100 personnel in Bagram and a massive TOC a thousand miles away in the Persian Gulf.<sup>10</sup> From the very beginning, the AFO commander seemed to be constantly at odds with the TF II deputy commander over the best way to proceed with operations against the Taliban, with the latter favoring a mass attack with Rangers and air assault troops, and the AFO leader favoring precision assaults with Tier I AFO teams.

Conventional wisdom says that any organization that exceeds 100 personnel is by nature a bureaucratic one. The TOC was such an organization, run by standard armed forces protocol, with access to sophisticated technology and massive databases to ensure mission effectiveness for the main body—the

SEALs and the Rangers. As Sean Naylor described it in his book about Operation Anaconda, some internal friction was also present in the command.<sup>11</sup> The TF II commander's<sup>12</sup> concept of operations was to keep the direct action force based at Bagram intact, waiting for intelligence on high-value targets; once a location was pinpointed, the "door-kickers" would launch a raid to kill or capture the target.<sup>13</sup> Some staff personnel, in contrast, thought that dividing the main force and pushing units out to safe houses in the vicinity, where the action was most likely to happen, would bring about greater mission effectiveness. The flight time from Bagram was too long to take advantage of time-sensitive targets, so it seems it would have been wise to do at least some forward deployment.

The most important task the AFO leader had on hand was to get the best people specifically suited for the particular mission he faced. To get command approval, he flew to Bagram for a video-teleconference with the deputy commander, who was located in Masirah, and the commanding general, who was in his office in North Carolina and frankly doubted the presence of a large pocket of al Qaeda fighters in the Shah-i-Khot Valley.<sup>14</sup> From an operational perspective, this information just did not make sense to the general, but it seems that there was a personal component to the disagreement as well.<sup>15</sup> "Their personalities are oil and water—they don't mix," said a JSOC officer who knew both men.<sup>16</sup> The AFO leader, who had a record of standing by and representing his men during missions, obviously already had a reputation for independent thinking, and this time around, he was again in close coordination with the CIA and just about every other force in the area. It seems that the independent role the AFO had been awarded greatly troubled some of the higher leadership, including the TF II commander. Nevertheless, the JSOC commander agreed to provide two thirds of the additional personnel the AFO leader had asked for. The AFO could carry on being innovative, adaptive, and audacious.

The new reconnaissance specialists arrived within 48 hours of the AFO's request, all of them with recent operational experience in Afghanistan. Their main tasks were to find the enemy and to recon routes to the general area of the Shah-i-Khot Valley. They decided to test ground routes of infiltration and do environmental reconnaissance for testing the perimeter of the valley, without actually entering it. The teams approached the mission with an open mind, experimented with different options, and came up with their own ideas. The AFO leader didn't tell them how to do their jobs but instead provided a conducive environment for them to work in. The AFO leader also wanted to gain time to develop the situation.<sup>17</sup> Within a week, he had a fairly good idea of the ground around the valley. The AFO had learned how to navigate the terrain, and the extremely harsh weather was also in their favor.

By mid-February, the 10th Mountain Division assumed the lead for planning an operation into the valley, named Operation Anaconda. To better exercise command and control of the operation, 10th Mountain headquarters moved down from Uzbekistan to Bagram Air Base outside Kabul. This move, accomplished between 13–20 February 2002, disrupted planning. The general in charge of the 10th Mountain Division commanded three battalions of U.S. conventional infantry, and also assumed operational command of all American forces in Afghanistan, with just one exception: TF II. This meant that the AFO had no official C2 link to the 10th Mountain Division command.

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Moreover, these new command relationships drastically changed the way the locally established military forces were expected to operate. After operating for the previous five months as a geographically dispersed, SOF-centric force with decentralized planning for most ground operations at the JSOTF level, they were now told to work as a geographically concentrated, large conventional ground force, on operations that required detailed functional component planning. These major operational changes had to be accomplished within a relatively brief period, which meant the forces did not have much time to adjust from their accustomed conduct to the way that Operation Anaconda would be executed.

In spite of this, the AFO commander immediately sent a liaison up to the 10th Mountain TOC. This move made a lot of sense, since by that time it was apparent that the AFO personnel had been developing the situation for the 10th Mountain Division's assault. The AFO leader made sure that all mission-critical information was shared with the division command.

### The Plan

Operation Anaconda officially started with a meeting at a Special Forces safe house in Kabul, where all participating unit leaders came together to pool their knowledge and ideas, and ensure a shared vision of the operation.<sup>18</sup> At this meeting, the 101st Airborne Infantry representative (part of the 10th Mountain planning group) argued that the key to the success of the operation was an air assault by helicopters. This was no surprise, given that in the mid-1960s, the 101st pioneered the air assault concept, at the time a revolutionary military tactic. The air-mobile infantry training and the logic of the infantry major was flawless—this was his professional reality. The Special Forces leaders in the room, however, were strongly against the concept, especially the AFO leader, who knew firsthand about the terrain and had studied the enemy in depth. He assumed that the enemy also expected an air assault and was likely prepared to counter it. The AFO leader wanted more time to prove his point, but the military decision-making process took over and the planning continued based on partial information.

The AFO leader wanted more time, but the military decision-making process took over and the planning continued based on partial information.

From a military perspective, it must have been very weird to see the Special Forces operators dressed in their scarves and chitlari hats, with long, unkempt beards and hair. Their appearance made a lot of sense in the frontier areas, but was very unorthodox in Bagram. In spite of the early difficulties, the AFO personnel developed a solid relationship with the 10th Mountain Division staff, based on mutual respect. They both understood that they needed to work closely together if they were going to fight this battle side by side in the Shah-i-Khot Valley. Word of this relationship got back to the TF II commanding general, however, and it made him furious.<sup>19</sup> The AFO leader was told by a staff officer at TF II that he might be relieved of command of AFO, and this information understandably unsettled him.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, because of his commitment to the mission and his men, he decided not to change policy and carried on cooperating with the 10th Mountain Division command. As a result, AFO personnel were sent in to be the eyes and ears of the assault force during the operation.<sup>21</sup>

On 27 February 2002, three teams of AFO began infiltrating the area, with three objectives: to occupy strategic positions on the tops of the mountains,

to confirm the presence of the enemy, and to check that the helicopter landing zones (LZs) were clear for the 10th Mountain Division to land and destroy the enemy (mainly with smart bombs launched from aircraft overhead). The operational commander was planning to carry out a hammer-and-anvil maneuver, with the Special Forces in Gardez (together with local Afghan forces) as the hammer and the 10th Mountain as the anvil, flying in their CH-47s to land in the eastern part of the valley and destroy the fleeing enemy. The 10th Mountain command's plan was based on three key assumptions. The first assumption was that the enemy forces in the Shah-i-Khot Valley consisted of only several hundred personnel. The second was that enemy forces might be warned of the coming attack by the local population, or even by agents within the friendly Afghan forces, so full details of the operation were not shared with the participating Afghan units. Finally, the 10th Mountain plan was designed around the assumption that the enemy would flee the area through the mountain passes ahead of the friendly Afghan troops, where U.S. and coalition forces would be waiting to catch them. Based on previous experience, the 10th Mountain commander and his staff were more worried that the enemy forces would escape, as they had repeatedly done, than they were about encountering stiff enemy resistance.<sup>22</sup> Both presumptions, about enemy strength and likely course of action, later proved to be incorrect, while the withholding of information from the Afghan forces caused disruptions during the operation.

The 10th Mountain commander and his staff were more worried that the enemy forces would escape than they were about encountering stiff enemy resistance.

To achieve tactical surprise, the 10th Mountain commander insisted that the pre-infiltration airstrikes begin as late as possible. There was also concern that heavy strikes on caves would destroy documents that could otherwise be exploited to facilitate the capture of other terrorists. For both of these reasons, the 10th Mountain planners decided on a compromise plan that called for fewer than 20 targets to be hit, beginning about 30 minutes before the helicopters landed.

The plan did not make a lot of sense to the Special Forces personnel. It was too complex, and it relied too much on the use of helicopters, which were highly vulnerable in this type of terrain, something that had become clear during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 20 years previous. It was apparent at the launch of the mission that all participants—AFO, Special Forces, and 10th Mountain Division—had quite a lot of concerns regarding the plan. Then, as Operation Anaconda unfolded, they all seemed to focus narrowly on their own roles, even as the plan itself unraveled.

It was apparent at the launch of the mission that all participants had quite a lot of concerns regarding the plan.

## Operation Anaconda

The majority of the AFO teams successfully infiltrated on the night of 28 February 2002, but one team in particular made little progress. This team finally encountered an enemy position on the very location where it was supposed to set up an observation post (OP), so its members decided to take out the enemy before they moved onto location. Only later was it learned that none of the satellites or spy planes that scoped the area had detected any enemy activity or weapons in the mountains around Shah-i-Khot.<sup>23</sup> This technological “all clear” further convinced the high-level leadership that it was unnecessary to risk AFO personnel in long-range infiltrations through the hazardous terrain, by reaffirming their initial assumption that there was very little enemy presence in the valley and the surrounding mountains. The infiltration teams sent situation

The situation became a classic “technology or boots-on-the-ground” debate. As it turned out, the enemy had done their homework.

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reports that directly contradicted this information, so the situation became a classic “technology or boots-on-the-ground” debate. As it turned out, the enemy had done their homework, and their use of low-level camouflage techniques had paid off by deceiving the high-tech equipment.

By this time, the tension between AFO and TF II had intensified. The AFO team’s decision to take out the enemy on the OP site was not supported by TF II command, which insisted that the team was not an assault team but reconnaissance only.<sup>24</sup> The two commands’ concept of C2 and leadership was also different. The AFO leader firmly believed that commanding a mission like this required a delicate balance between asking and telling, so he was relying mainly on his team (the boots on the ground) to recommend a course of action, and frequently asking the question, “What is your recommendation?”<sup>25</sup> It is clear that for AFO, the main purpose of C2 was to share a reality, while for TF II, it was to pass down orders. The AFO teams also sent pictures through the AFO leader up to TF II, proving that the enemy had anti-aircraft capability and was dug into the mountain ready to fight, instead of fleeing towards the anvil that was waiting in the valley.<sup>26</sup>

The convoy of Special Forces personnel and their Afghan partners also fell behind schedule. For the Afghans, this convoy was yet another strange organization superimposed by Western military tactics. They were used to scattering around on the mountainside, not attacking in a strict formation. Convoy movement was also a tactic very rarely practiced by the Afghans, and there were vehicle rollovers along the bad roads that further demoralized the Afghan personnel. To make matters worse, the convoy fell victim to a friendly fire incident involving an AC-130, in which four U.S. and Afghan vehicles were destroyed.<sup>27</sup> Many of the Afghans fled afterward, and the hammer was falling apart before it was even in place.

D-Day for Anaconda was originally set for 28 February. Due to bad weather, the 10th Mountain commander postponed the start to 2 March. Based on what they saw from the ground, the AFO teams at this point were indicating that the area was not suitable for helicopters to land. This information encountered a lot of resistance in the 10th Mountain Division command, whose staff officers had been putting the plan together for days and were very reluctant to alter it. Again, the military planning process proved inflexible, and once the ball started rolling, it was almost impossible to make adaptive changes, no matter what the operator on the ground was telling headquarters.



Before dawn on 2 March, F-15Es, B-1s, and B-52s began dropping JDAMs (Joint Direct Attack Munitions—smart bombs), conventional and thermobaric bombs on the small number of approved targets. Following the bombing raid, U.S. helicopters entered the valley. When the first wave of helicopters started touching down on the valley floor, they came under heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Several soldiers were wounded instantly, and the anvil itself was getting hammered. At this point, the 10th Mountain Division commander decided to call off the second wave of helicopters and immediately started to focus on evacuating the wounded and moving troops out of the killing zone.

This dire situation was nonetheless an opportunity for the AFO. The enemy was engaged and therefore susceptible to targeting, a development the AFO operators used to their advantage by directing the fire of the supporting aircraft towards the enemy positions and causing serious damage among the insurgent fighters. The three AFO teams were engaged in a continuous cycle of describing targets, vectoring attack aircraft, and destroying the enemy. The exposed 10th Mountain troops were the unintentional bait that made it possible to detect and destroy the enemy outposts and formations.<sup>28</sup>

On the second day of the operation, the three American forces involved in Anaconda were dealing with three very different realities regarding the situation in the Shah-i-Khot Valley. The Special Forces and the Afghans were still stuck outside of the valley, frustrated with not being able to get in. The 10th Mountain Division forces were inside the valley being overwhelmed by enemy fire, while the 101st commander was telling the 10th Mountain Division commander to pull out immediately. The three AFO teams had the best situational awareness thanks to their bird's-eye view of the valley, and were pounding the enemy with the help of the Air Force.

The AFO leader, having eavesdropped on the conversation between the 101st commander and the operational commander, called the 10th Mountain Division commander to give his situational assessment. To the AFO commander, it was clear that the leaders' decisions high up the food chain were based on a false reality.<sup>29</sup> The commanders were not fully aware of the situation on the ground, and their reality was based on the filtered information that came

On the second day of the operation, the three American forces were dealing with three very different realities regarding the situation.

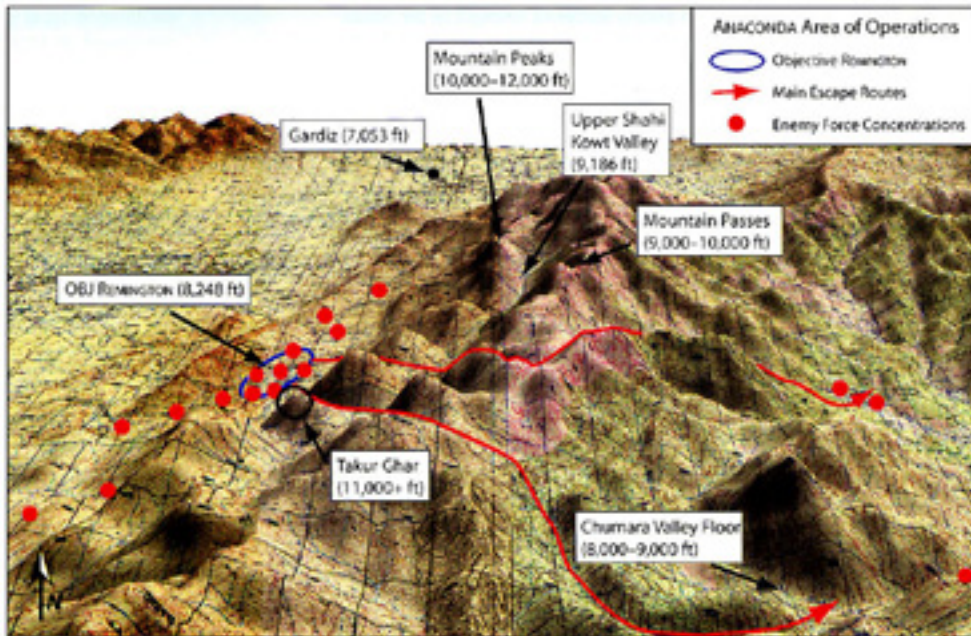


through PowerPoint staff briefs and Predator feeds. Remarkably, the general, after a brief discussion with his key staff, changed his mind based on this new information!<sup>30</sup> He seems to have pushed aside his ego and, in a moment of total chaos, made the decision not to pull out but to carry on with the mission as it was planned. This decision forced the pinned-down 10th Mountain soldiers to innovate and adapt to the situation as well. At the same time, the AFO leader decided to move forward with the Special Forces and the Afghans, who had been gathered by then, to make another attempt at entering the Shahi-Khot Valley. The eventual reinsertion of the 400 Afghan fighters enabled the Americans to seal the valley.

The AFO leader objected that inserting anyone without sufficient preparation would result in failure. He was not heeded.

To make the situation even more complex, on the evening of 3 March, the AFO commander received notice from the commander of TF 11 that two SEAL teams were to be inserted into the Shahi-Khot Valley on very short notice.<sup>31</sup> The AFO leader objected to the order, replying that inserting anyone without sufficient preparation and rehearsal would result in failure. He was not heeded.

The two SEAL teams, Mako 30 and Mako 21, planned to establish an OP at either end of the valley. One team would move to the peak of Takur Ghar, which commanded the southern approach to the Shahi-Khot Valley. Due to time constraints, a helicopter insertion would be needed for the teams to reach the peak before dawn. The SEAL team commander requested authorization to shift the insertion by 24 hours, to the next evening, but was directed that insertion was critical to SOF providing support to the operation.<sup>32</sup>



The Operation Anaconda battle zone.

Before the insertion, an AC-130 scanned the mountain for the helicopter LZ through its infrared sensors and radar. These sensors enable the gunship crew to make a visual or electronic identification in almost any conditions, but the individuals operating the equipment on this particular night did not know the operational context for their search, or what specifically they were looking for, so they pronounced the mountain secure.<sup>33</sup> Even though the overhead imagery showed no signs of life on the peak of Takur Ghar, the commander of SEAL team Mako 30 gave

the team final guidance, per SOP, that if any signs were seen, the mission would be aborted. Mako 30 was picked up by an MH-47 Chinook helicopter, at 23:23 on 3 March. Originally, an insertion point 1,300 meters (1,400 yards) east of the peak was identified. However, the Chinook experienced engine difficulties, and another MH-47 was dispatched to replace it. This delay meant that the SEALs could not be inserted into the LZ east of the peak until 02:30 on 4 March, which did not allow them enough time to reach the peak before

daylight. Because of these unforeseen developments, the SEALs of Mako 30 were forced to land on the peak itself.

At approximately 03:00, the Chinook attempted to land atop the mountain. As they approached, the pilots and SEALs observed tracks in the snow and other signs of recent human activity. As they discussed a possible mission abort, two RPGs slammed into the helicopter, shutting down one of its engines, the electric system, and the hydraulic systems, and causing one team member to fall out of the open ramp. The disabled helicopter was forced to crash-land in the valley below, approximately four miles away. AFO teams from their OP could see the incident, and sent out a stream of reporting as events unfolded. A Predator drone was also flying overhead, sending indistinct images back to the commanders in Bagram and Masirah.<sup>34</sup>

As they discussed a possible mission abort, two RPGs slammed into the helicopter.

The situation was very similar to what happened when the 10th Mountain Division's first wave of assault began. Every piece of the puzzle presented its own version of reality to those monitoring the situation. In the TOCs at Bagram and Masirah, the commanders were watching the Predator feed, which was a blurry image streamed by an aircraft flying at an altitude of nearly 6,000 meters (17,000 feet) with a narrow field of view.<sup>35</sup> The AFO leader was listening to the traffic on his radio net, while the SEAL and 10th Mountain personnel in the valley were seeing each other on the ground. Together they had the full picture, but this picture was not shared among them, so each group focused on the piece it saw. They all had different vested interests in the situation as well. The SEALs were of course dedicated to rescuing their teammate who had fallen from the chopper.

The full picture was not shared among them, so each group focused on the piece it saw.

The Ranger Quick Reaction Force (QRF) located at Bagram Air Base was called in to help search for the fallen SEAL, who was now alone on the mountaintop. Meanwhile, Mako 30 regrouped and was ferried by nearby units to a CH-47 to go back to Takur Ghar and find their fallen comrade. The AC-130 that had earlier scanned the LZ was then directed to attack the large groupings of enemy combatants currently exposed on top of the mountain, one to three minutes before the Mako 30 was scheduled to arrive.

To make a difficult situation worse, at this point someone at the Masirah headquarters 1,100 miles away decided to switch to a new radio frequency, and began directing all the forces and aircraft involved in the rescue of the fallen SEAL atop Takur Ghar.<sup>36</sup> Although the change may have been meant to enhance direct control of the rescue operation, it had the critical effect of severely limiting communications between the different teams participating in the battle. The AC-130 commander continued to use the sat-com channel to communicate, not knowing that he had been switched over from command headquarters to a TF II staff officer, and this again created a lot of confusion.<sup>37</sup>

At this point, someone at the Masirah headquarters 1,100 miles away decided to switch to a new radio frequency.

As the CH-47 with the SEALs onboard neared its destination, the AC-130 radioed on the new satellite frequency for confirmation to fire on the enemy surrounding the fallen SEAL. The crew were unable to get a clear answer from the officer they reached, and also were unable to connect with the AFO teams. As a result, the AC-130 crew never received permission to fire on the mountaintop. The CH-47 nevertheless successfully landed the team on the ground amidst heavy machine gun and rocket fire. The Mako 30 team charged the enemy position, but had no radio contact with the AC-130 to call for support.

Finally they were able to establish communications via a line-of-sight radio that the AFO had positioned on Takur Ghar, taking advantage of the AFO's knowledge of enemy movements in real time. Air Force rules, however, prohibited AC-130 aircraft from remaining in hostile airspace in daylight (after the crash of an AC-130 in Khafji in the Gulf War), so the AC-130 support protecting Mako 30 was forced to leave before the Ranger team onboard Razor 01 reached the LZ.

At 03:45, TF II alerted the Ranger QRF, but the two QRF Chinooks were not equipped with functioning satellite radios to maintain communication with the HQ in Bagram or, even more critically, with the AFO team leader. The pilot of Razor 01 was not told about the enemy's anti-aircraft location on top of the mountain, nor did the Rangers have any idea what their specific mission was.<sup>38</sup> The QRF was to establish communication for further instructions when Razor 02 reached Gardez, 10 minutes from the mountain. As events unfolded, the Ranger QRF flew into the same enemy trap that the SEALs had flown into, because no one had been able to communicate the reality of the situation. At approximately 06:10, the Chinook approached the landing zone. The aircraft immediately began taking fire, and the right door mini-gunner was killed. An RPG then hit the helicopter, destroying the right engine and forcing it to crash-land.

After landing on the unsecured mountaintop, the rescue mission itself turned into a near disaster. As the Rangers and special tactics team members left the aircraft, three were immediately killed. The survivors took cover as a fierce firefight began. The Rangers fought a desperate battle for hours, until one of the AFO teams was able to help them by relaying enemy positions over the radio, while simultaneously providing targeting guidance to the attack aircraft flying above.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, Razor 02, which had been diverted to Gardez, returned at 06:25 with the rest of the Ranger QRF and the SEAL team leader. With the help of the new arrivals and close air support, the force was eventually able to consolidate its position on the peak. It continued with the rescue mission, and at around 20:00, the QRF and Mako 30 were finally exfiltrated from Takur Ghar peak.<sup>40</sup> Because they had remained undetected in an observation post throughout the firefight, the AFO were able to provide critical support by coordinating multiple coalition air strikes to prevent the enemy fighters from overrunning the downed aircraft, to devastating effect.

In the meantime, the attempt to reinsert the Afghan forces into the valley finally had its effect by pushing the enemy fighters out of their positions, while the AFO teams continued targeting the enemy formations. This was a turning point in the battle.

Ultimately, the battle for the Shah-i-Khot Valley lasted for almost two weeks, but in the end, the steady flow of U.S. and coalition reinforcements into the fight finally broke enemy resistance. On 16 March, the 10th Mountain commander declared the end of Operation Anaconda. By that time, coalition forces were firmly in control of the entire Shah-i-Khot Valley and the surrounding area. Reporting on the casualty rate is inconsistent to say the least, but it is estimated that the U.S. forces suffered 80 casualties in the operation, with 8 killed and 72 wounded. Several Afghan soldiers died in the fighting as well. Estimates of al Qaeda and Taliban casualties range from 100 to 500,

Because they had remained undetected throughout the firefight, the AFO were able to coordinate multiple coalition air strikes, to devastating effect.

with U.S. commanders favoring the higher estimates and Afghan commanders citing the lower ones. An unknown number of enemy fighters were able to escape the Shah-i-Khot Valley into Pakistan.

## Unconventional Leadership

This case study exemplifies the very distinctive and complex leadership requirements and characters that arise in irregular warfare. The AFO leader, the TF II TOC, and the 10th Mountain subordinate units and their commander were working on the same mission, but as this article shows, they did not work from a shared reality. This is partly because of the clashes between the different cultures of the Services (Army, Air Force, and Special Forces), but mainly because there was a gap in leadership education. Some Services might do better than others in this field, but there is room for improvement everywhere. Closing this gap should include education for leaders at all levels in how to deal with the highly complex and uncertain situations of irregular warfare. This is a different kind of leadership: unconventional leadership.

As Ronald Heifetz observed, “[O]ur language fails us in many aspects of our lives, entrapping us in a set of cultural assumptions.”<sup>41</sup> Leadership in an asymmetric conflict has to be very different from what we typically have been trained to do as military personnel. Conventional wisdom says that military units are most likely to succeed in the field when they follow strict C2 procedures. Operation Anaconda showed in several instances, however, that following conventional wisdom created confusion on an unconventional battlefield, and arguably cost the lives of brave warriors. Western industrialized militaries are organized and trained to operate through a top-down, rigid hierarchy, and they tend to stick to this familiar system despite changing circumstances. In an asymmetric conflict, this is the same as settling into our personal comfort zone, not wanting to venture out into new territory. Before digging deeper into the realm of unconventional leadership in an asymmetric environment, let us consider the comfort zone model (see Figure 1, next page).

Your comfort zone is the area of your life where you feel relaxed and at ease, because your current skill set allows you to easily navigate within that area. For instance, you may be very comfortable with your daily schedule, but you want to increase your energy and become more fit. Taking up some form of regular exercise initially moves you out of your current comfort zone and causes a little distress, but it helps you reach your goal of being fitter, and gradually becomes part of your familiar routine.

Now, imagine a problem materializing in your life for which you do not have a solution or skill set. This problem could potentially pull you out of your mental comfort zone if you make the decision to face it. It could even create some anxiety in you—in fact, your anxiety and stress levels will rise proportionally the further you go from your area of familiarity. In this case, you are in what is called the learning zone, and if you tackle your problem, something interesting happens: your comfort zone expands, because by learning a new way of solving the problem or acquiring a new skill, you have expanded your universe.

The best way to grow your comfort zone is to stay within the learning zone or at the edge between the learning and panic zones. The panic zone is where

Leadership in an asymmetric conflict has to be very different from what we typically have been trained to do.

Operation Anaconda showed that following conventional wisdom created confusion on an unconventional battlefield.



Interestingly, scientists have discovered that being outside the comfort zone raises one's level of happiness.

your current skill set is nowhere near the level that is needed, or the difficulty you are facing is utterly different from those you have encountered before. You can go into the panic zone, and it can potentially create rapid growth and vastly accelerate your learning, but it's also likely that you will see this as a negative experience. It all depends on how well you can handle these situations. In general, going into the learning zone is the right approach, and only the very adventurous should deliberately cross into the zone of panic.

There is a zone beyond the panic zone, often called the zone of failure. If you reach too far outside of your skills and knowledge, you set yourself and your organization up for failure. Although we can certainly learn from mistakes, operating in the failure zone, especially for the military, will not bring about accelerated learning and is likely to cost the lives of our men and women.

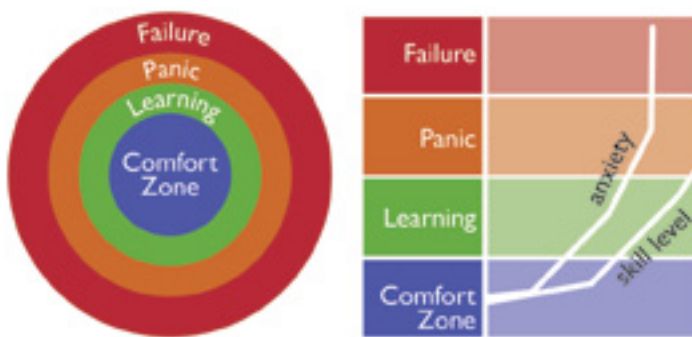


Figure 1: The Comfort Zone Model

Leaving your comfort zone feels, naturally, uncomfortable. But this is a good thing. Sometimes you have to *force* yourself to go through the discomfort in order to get to the level you want to be on. Interestingly, scientists have discovered that being outside the comfort zone raises one's level of happiness, as long as one doesn't get into the red panic zone. Adaptation and expansion can be a very rewarding and enjoyable experience, one that our military leaders not only have to practice regularly, but have to learn to incorporate into their everyday lives.

Our military training is based on following orders, but as recent research suggests, there is a clear distinction between leadership and authority. As the Anaconda study showed, especially in the case of the AFO leader, on the one hand, people without formal authority can practice leadership on any given issue at any given time. On the other hand, we have all seen cases in our lives when people had formal authority, and thus a following per se, but they did not lead. The most interesting leadership operates without anyone feeling as though they are following.<sup>42</sup> This form of leadership is often observed in the zones of challenge and panic. I call this phenomenon *unconventional leadership*.

What is interesting is that genuine unconventional leaders can mobilize even those who are opposed to action, or who are just fence-sitting. This is an essential skill in an asymmetric conflict, where mobilizing the fence-sitting portion of the population is the ultimate goal if we want to achieve strategic victory. In the Anaconda case, the AFO leader was not only able to mobilize the local tribal leaders, but he managed to navigate his way through bureaucratic channels as well, and changed the mind of the 10th Mountain Division

The most interesting leadership operates without anyone feeling as though they are following.

commander about aborting the mission at a very decisive moment of the battle. He cultivated close ties with the 10th Mountain Division command although officially discouraged from doing so, a bit of insubordination that paid off at a vital moment. Through constantly sharing the reality of the battle from his perspective, he managed to mobilize the leadership by raising their awareness of the operation's complexities, which demanded trade-offs throughout the battle.

One of the major questions that arises when we try to conceptualize unconventional leadership is, Where does it take place and how can we anchor more “following” in the process?

Leadership, as in the zone of comfort model, emerges in the context of problems and complex challenges. In fact, leadership isn't much of a consideration when everyone is playing from the same sheet of music and all we need to do is keep the beat while coordinating routine activities. Good leaders step up when a tough or complex problem arises, and are willing to tackle it by moving themselves and their followers directly into the zone of learning. Some especially skilled leaders also dare to step into the zone of panic when they realize that operating under the current structures and processes is no longer sufficient. Unconventional leadership in most cases results in organizational or procedural changes, and most importantly, influences the thinking of people within the organization. (See Figure 2.)

Leadership emerges in the context of problems and complex challenges.



Figure 2: The Unconventional Leadership Model

Complex problems are also multilayered, and can be divided into three distinct categories: *technical*, *adaptive*, and *critical*.<sup>43</sup>

Technical problems fall within the range of our current problem-solving expertise, but stand out as unusual nevertheless. In our case study, dealing with helicopters in an austere environment can be a technical challenge. To solve it, what we need to do is to apply the right kind of expertise to the problem in order to get a solution.

Adaptive problems require new perspectives, expertise, and solutions. This type of problem is the real innovator's challenge, because first we need to diagnose the problem, develop an understanding of it, and then create a new set of tools to solve it. An adaptive problem often creates a lot of friction within organizations. In the Anaconda case study, setting up and operating an AFO organization was an adaptive challenge in itself.

An adaptive problem often creates a lot of friction within organizations.

Critical problems require new ways of working as well, but these problems are by definition less controlled or predictable. In such cases, the intensity of the situation demands immediate action. The first suggestion often is to slow down (“take a deep breath”), share perspectives, and then focus the team’s actions toward the solution. In critical problems, the stakes are also very high, and this puts a lot of stress on leaders.

Many of the complex problems military leaders face in an asymmetric environment are in either the adaptive or critical categories. These complex problems require people to operate in the zone of learning, and even the zone of panic, in terms of our comfort zone model. Adaptive and critical problems can also be conceptualized as a gap between our aspirations and the reality, which demands a response outside of our current thinking or skill sets. The main difference between a technical and an adaptive/critical problem is whether that gap can be closed through applying existing know-how. The main difference between an adaptive and a critical problem, by contrast, is the size of the time window available to sort out the situation.

We can close the gap between our aspirations and the reality only if we learn new ways of thinking and doing, and are able to constantly adapt.

Adaptive and critical problems also demand learning, as we have seen throughout the case study: the AFO leader was constantly developing his understanding of the situation, and led by listening to his men on the ground. It is also important to understand that the learning process reaches far beyond just collecting information. We need to apply those lessons that we gathered in the past to the present situation, if we claim to have actually learned anything. This constitutes a critical difference within organizations between lessons identified and lessons learned. Referring to our comfort zone model, we can close the gap between our aspirations and the reality only if we learn new ways of thinking and doing, and are able to constantly adapt. This in turn requires a new approach in leadership education.

If we are looking for authority figures, it means that we are treating critical problems as if they were technical ones.

Another interesting factor that can be observed from Operation Anaconda is the people-centric approach of the AFO leader. He was fully aware that in a highly complex situation, when facing a critical dilemma, the people “with a problem” *are* the problem, but they can be part of a solution as well. Adaptive and critical problems often require a shift in responsibility from the shoulders of the authority figures and the authority structure to the stakeholders themselves.<sup>44</sup> In contrast with technical obstacles, which experts can solve for us, overcoming critical situations requires a different level of responsibility and leadership. This is where unconventional leadership can thrive. The case study shows that responsibility must not only be shared but owned among all the stakeholders. If we are looking for authority figures in this kind of situation, it means that we are treating critical problems as if they were technical ones, and approaching them with a conventional leadership style. In most cases this mindset can be highly damaging. We will be better off if we develop the situation by relying on the key stakeholders.

It is also essential that we do frequent reality checks while we are developing the situation. As can be seen from the comfort zone model, there is a fine, usually indistinct, line that separates the zone of panic from the zone of failure. Crossing this line means that we are setting ourselves and our organizations up for possible disaster when lives are at stake. If we do not do constant reality checks, we not only risk losing an understanding of the reality on the ground, but may also set our aspirations so high that we eventually

can't help but fail. This kind of reality check was much needed during Operation Anaconda, when the Ranger team was inserted by helicopter despite the previous failed attempts to send helicopters into the fight.

Finally, we have to consider the time factor, as it is likely to be one of the most critical parts of the military decision-making process. As was mentioned before, adaptive problems require significantly more time for people to learn and develop innovative solutions than do technical problems. Critical problems are even worse from the perspective of time, because they do not have any ready solutions and also offer little time to find one. Organizations in particular generally need time to learn the necessary lessons, and to make cultural changes in order to adapt.

Adaptation in an asymmetric environment is the only way forward for both individuals and organizations, and those who fail to adapt quickly become extinct. This whole process naturally generates resistance from the different organizational cultures involved, and even avoidance on the part of those who do not have an immediate stake in the problem. Diverting one's attention is one type of problem avoidance, and with today's access to overwhelming amounts of information, it is too easy to forget about something even when we consider it to be important. This is why case studies like Operation Anaconda are useful, because they can remind us to not repeat the mistakes we have made in the past.

## Final Thoughts

A famous example of a model based on a distorted perception of reality, like that goldfish looking out from its glass bowl, is the Ptolemaic system of astronomy. For centuries after Claudius Ptolemy (c. 90–c. 168 CE) postulated his astronomical model, people believed that the Earth was at the center of the universe and that the planets moved around it in complicated orbits. The Ptolemaic system was adopted by the Catholic Church and held as doctrine for more than 1,400 years. It was not until 1543 that an alternative, sun-centric model was put forward by Nicolaus Copernicus.

Today we believe we know better. Many people would dismiss the question if asked which, the Copernican or the Ptolemaic model, was correct. But one could also say that both of them were right, in a way, just as our goldfish is right in its acceptance of what those outside the bowl know to be a distorted reality. The only difference between the two models is that Copernicus had access to more advanced technology with which to observe and interpret the same reality.

Hierarchical decision-making implies that the leader at every level of the pyramid is the person in charge of deciding and directing everything below him. By default, in this model, the highest ranking individual is assumed always to have the deepest understanding of the problem and the best solutions. This structure is very deeply entrenched in the military, but it is unsuitable for highly complex asymmetric situations, especially when we are facing adaptive and critical problems that are changing minute by minute.

In an asymmetric environment, the guy on the ground must be entitled to make recommendations, based on a recent reality check and a shared

Diverting one's attention is one type of problem avoidance.

In a hierarchy, the highest ranking individual is assumed always to have the deepest understanding of the problem and the best solutions.

The way military leaders think of asymmetric conflict requires a different mindset—the organizational equivalent of biological thriving.

understanding of the situation, regardless of how he will look in the eyes of his commander. When leaders up the chain regard themselves as all-knowing and infallible, the cultural pressure to give “the answer” increases the likelihood of making mistakes. One way to avoid this is to not give that answer, but instead question the guy on the ground and, with an open and adaptive mind, listen closely to his recommendations. This approach would by no means abuse the current decision-making system but rather enhance it by encouraging personnel to adapt to new security dilemmas and new ways of warfare. The concept of adaptation arises from scientific efforts to understand biological evolution; the changes needed in the way military leaders think of asymmetric conflict require a completely different mind-set—the organizational equivalent of biological thriving.<sup>45</sup>

In these situations, unconventional leadership must be the norm, just as the conventional leadership model has been the norm for several hundred years in bureaucratic military organizations, up through the Cold War. This new breed of people, who have the skill to lead in unconventional ways and the knowledge to differentiate technical problems from adaptive/critical ones, must be protected so they can fruitfully share their knowledge with others and gain even more experience practicing unconventional leadership in asymmetric environments. This evolutionary model can be a cornerstone of new SOF education as well, which will enable Special Forces personnel all over the world to maintain the cutting edge in asymmetric conflict. ❖

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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#### NOTES

- 1 Pete Blaber, *The Mission, The Men and Me: Lessons From a Former Delta Force Commander* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2008), 223.
- 2 According to Gen. Michael Repass, who conducted AFO in the Iraq War and was very familiar with its use in Afghanistan, “AFO consists of U.S. Secretary of Defense-approved military operations such as clandestine operations, source operations, and deployment of enabling forces and capabilities to conduct target-specific preparations prior to the conduct of an actual operation.” It is logically part of Operational Preparation of the Battlespace (OPB), which follows the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlespace, a concept well-known in U.S. and NATO doctrine. OPB is defined by the U.S. Special Operations Command as “Non-intelligence activities conducted prior to D-Day, H-Hour, in likely or potential areas of employment, to train and prepare for follow-on military operations.” OPB is seldom used outside of Special Operations Forces channels. Michael S. Repass, “Combating Terrorism with Preparation of the Battlespace,” report for the U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Penn., 7 April 2003: <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/respass.pdf>
- 3 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 223.
- 4 A little background may help readers understand how this particular aspect of this story developed. AFO by definition

- was made up of “unconventional” actors. When the 10th Mountain Division came into the picture, two things apparently came into play: first was a “turf war” between these conventional and unconventional forces, and the second was a personality conflict between the TF 11 DCO and the AFO commander. In the case of Operation Anaconda, AFO units were there on the ground from the very beginning and had good situational awareness. 10th Mountain came in and assumed operational command over the area of operations, which meant that the role of the AFO changed from being the shapers of the situation, using a truly unconventional approach, to a supporting role within a conventional operation.
- 5 This was mainly from books written earlier about the Soviet war in Afghanistan, which contained combat lessons as well some useful profiles on mujahideen commanders—material that had real intelligence value.
- 6 Jay Solomon, “Failed Courtship of Warlord Trips Up U.S. in Afghanistan,” *Wall Street Journal*, 8 November 2007: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB119448472303085968.html>. Haqqani cooperated with the CIA during the Soviet war but later became an insurgent leader.

- 7 Task Force 11 was the first designation given to the U.S. SOF composite grouping, which has pursued terrorist high-value targets in Afghanistan and Iraq since October 2001. The higher command (JSOC—see note 16) frequently changed the name of the task force to avoid information leakage, and it has been designated Task Force 6-26, Task Force 121, and Task Force 145 as well. The main body of TF 11 consisted of Navy SEALs, Army Rangers, and SOF aviation assets, together with their supporting and leadership elements.
- 8 Sean Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 2005), 32.
- 9 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 231.
- 10 General Tommy Franks, *American Soldier* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 493.
- 11 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 78.
- 12 Note that this is the same DCO as mentioned above, but I use the titles interchangeably from now on, as he had been given command once the CO left.
- 13 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 80.
- 14 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 232. This information is also derived from Naylor (*Not a Good Day to Die*), who seems to have had “off the record” access to high-level TF 11 leaders while writing his book.
- 15 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 81.
- 16 The JSOC is a component command of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and is charged to study special operations requirements and techniques to ensure interoperability and equipment standardization, plan and conduct special operations exercises and training, and develop JSO tactics. After the 11 September 2001 attack on the United States, JSOC expanded enormously. The JSOC runs various specialized task forces, which are identified only by their numbers (e.g., TF 11, TF 6-26, TF 121). These task forces perform highly classified activities.
- 17 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 236.
- 18 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 39.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 142.
- 21 As operational commander, it was well within the 10th Mountain commander’s right to do whatever he wanted. Also, he had TACON (tactical control) over the SOF teams during the operation, but not over the AFO. One of the main C2 problems, which emerged later, was that these units had authority to request support from the same assets that also supported 10th Mountain operations, such as the C130s. These competing command structures must have served as another source of confusion during the execution phase of the operation. The main debate between the AFO leader and the TF 11 commander was over the role and mission of the AFO in Anaconda. TF 11 command emphasized throughout that AFO was to act strictly as a reconnaissance mission to enhance the common operating picture, not a direct action force.
- 22 Throughout the Afghanistan campaign, U.S. forces had been receiving numerous reports concerning “thousands” of enemy troops in a variety of locations around the country, but when friendly forces investigated, the reports turned out to be highly exaggerated. Misinformation of this nature had made U.S. commanders and staffs at every level highly skeptical of all reports of very large enemy forces.
- 23 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 169.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 176.
- 25 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 258.
- 26 It is not clear what happened to this information. It is possible, on the one hand, that a strong reliance on technical superiority convinced those in charge that what the sensors did not see did not exist. On the other hand, the information may have been taken simply as another instance of inaccurate human intelligence, as described in note 22.
- 27 MAJ Edgar Fleri, COL Ernest Howard, Jeffrey Hukill, and Thomas R. Searle, “Operation Anaconda Case Study,” College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, 13 November 2003, 27: [http://www.au.af.mil/au/aul/school/awc/electives/6543\\_operationanaconda.pdf](http://www.au.af.mil/au/aul/school/awc/electives/6543_operationanaconda.pdf)
- 28 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 266.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 274.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 270.
- 31 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 286.
- 32 According to the AFO leader, there was no mission-critical requirement to deploy a team on the top of the mountain that night, but the decision was made up the chain to send them in. Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 279.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 280.
- 34 Nate Self, *Two Wars: One Hero’s Fight on Two Fronts—Abroad and Within* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 216.
- 35 Robert Valdes, “How the Predator UAV Works”: <http://science.howstuffworks.com/predator.htm>
- 36 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 285.
- 37 Naylor, *Not a Good Day to Die*, 322.
- 38 Blaber, *The Mission, The Men*, 328.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 292.
- 40 The SEAL who had fallen from the helicopter died while awaiting rescue. Accounts differ on exactly how and when he died.
- 41 Ronald A. Heifetz, “Anchoring Leadership in the Work of Adaptive Progress,” in *The Leader of the Future 2: Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the New Era*, Frances Hesselbein and Marshall Goldsmith, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 73.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 43 The three types of complex challenges are described in detail in John Alexander, “The Challenge of Complexity,” in *The Leader of the Future 2: Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the New Era*, Frances Hesselbein and Marshall Goldsmith, eds. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 85.
- 44 Heifetz, “Anchoring Leadership,” 76.
- 45 See Ernst Mayr, *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology: Observations of an Evolutionist* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1988). Biological evolution conforms to laws of survival. Thriving is much more than simple survival; it eventually leads to a vastly expanded range for the species to live in. Organizations, however, generate purposes beyond survival, and thrive by expanding their activities.

## Incentivizing Cooperation in Afghanistan

MAJ Greg Merkl, U.S. Army

THE UNITED STATES' PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS AGAINST THE TALIBAN insurgency in Afghanistan seem inexorably linked to its ability to inspire cooperation among disparate actors in a land of dynamic alliances. To centralize power in a way that will keep the Taliban from establishing sanctuary—much less overt control—in significant regions of the troubled state, the United States and its allies must find ways to foster a capable Kabul government. The last decade of conflict has only increased the complexity of trying rapidly to build a poor, weakly affiliated agrarian society into the likeness of a modern democracy. Moreover, lessons from the Afghanistan war demonstrate how the United States has made a difficult task monumentally more complicated through poor strategic decision-making.

Too much aid can drown a fledgling legal and political system in corruption.

The United States' profligate use of money to influence loyalties in Afghanistan has confused and hindered efforts at establishing legitimate governance, at the levels of both the tribal *shura* and the National Assembly. Financial aid certainly serves a vital purpose in rebuilding a war-ravaged land. Too little aid can leave a broken state in the violence of desperation. Conversely, too much aid can drown a fledgling legal and political system in corruption. A "sweet spot" exists where the structure of the financial incentives encourages cooperation according to the rule of law. The United States has substantially overshot this sweet spot.

As long as the Department of Defense is going to espouse the concept of "money as a weapons system," it would do well to reestablish the left and right limits of its financial weapons.<sup>1</sup> A realist's perspective on the nature of



cooperation highlights the fact that the United States has spent hundreds of billions of dollars inspiring counterproductive behavior within Afghan society. The influx of cash into the Afghan system of social and commercial relationships has not only overwhelmed its modes of accountability, but actually encourages unethical and anti-social behavior.

## Solving the Prisoner's Dilemma

The paradigm of the “Prisoner's Dilemma” illustrates how natural impulses tend to favor competition over cooperation. In its simplest outline, the dilemma postulates a scenario whereby two individuals can choose to cooperate for the best mutual outcome, or compete and risk the worst mutual outcome. The incentive structure paradoxically leads them to compete, because each believes he can gain a unilateral advantage through competition.<sup>2</sup> This scenario plays out frequently in most societies.<sup>3</sup>

To illustrate this concept, consider the hypothetical scenario of Daoud and Omar, two farmers in modern-day Afghanistan. Each has a large herd of sheep, and they share grazing lands. If they share the land reasonably and responsibly, both can adequately maintain their flocks. Daoud could, conversely, try to force Omar out of the pasture so Daoud's sheep get all the grass. If Omar submits without a fight, Daoud's herd will increase by five at the expense of 10 of Omar's flock, for a net loss to the community of five sheep. The reverse is also true. If, however, they both attempt to seize the entire pasture, they will get into a costly conflict. Some of their sheep will die from starvation, and they will have to sell others to finance their feud. In this eventuality, each will lose five sheep, for a net loss of 10. The matrix in Figure 1 shows the “normal form” of the game: the first number listed in each cell is the change in the number of sheep owned by Daoud and the second number is the change in the number owned by Omar.

One can quickly see that Daoud should always compete. If Omar is foolish enough to cooperate, then Daoud will see a gain of five

The tendency for both will be to compete, despite the fact that this will lead to the worst possible mutual outcome.

Change in sheep		Omar		<span style="color: blue;">■</span> Cooperate <span style="color: red;">■</span> Compete
		Cooperate	Compete	
Daoud	Cooperate	0, 0	-10, 5	
	Compete	5, -10	-5, -5	

Figure 1: The Prisoner's Dilemma Matrix: The Sheep Feud





sheep by competing. If Omar chooses to compete while Daoud remains passive, then Daoud will lose 10 of his flock to starvation in a naively benevolent gesture of cooperation. By competing, he still loses sheep, but he loses five instead of 10. The exact same logic applies to Omar. As a result, the tendency for both will be to compete, despite the fact that this will lead to the worst possible mutual outcome. This incentive structure bodes poorly for the community. The cooperate–cooperate strategy clearly offers the most total utility for the society in which Omar and Daoud live, but the incentive of personal gain will reliably drive a self-interested player to compete. So, how can society balance the incentive scale to ensure that it does not bear the opportunity cost of 10 sheep in this ill-fated conflict?

### The Beauty of Punishment

The simplistic model described previously clearly does not tell the entire story. Although history recounts tales of horrific conflict, communities have managed to control violent contests between individuals or groups in order to build a better future for all members. Nevertheless, numerous studies across multiple disciplines have drawn the same conclusion: People are not naturally motivated to cooperate. They cooperate largely because society enforces cooperation.

Heuristically, one may assume that a person cooperates as a spontaneous outpouring from a kind heart. Most of us need only to look within our own family to see that bonds of trust and shared interests can mitigate the competitive urge ascribed to the self-interested player in the Prisoner’s Dilemma. Then again, everyone has heard a story or two about the time when Omar broke into Daoud’s piggy bank to splurge on whistle pops and comic books at the corner store. It does not take many incidents of cheating within a family, a neighborhood, or a community to erode the bonds of trust. In fact, as the bonds of community expand past the family and the neighborhood, the temptation to cheat increases in a vicious cycle.<sup>4</sup> This leads to the “tragedy of the commons,” in which self-interested players pursue outcomes that enrich themselves in the short term but hurt the community at large for the long term.<sup>5</sup>

Why, then, do members of a community generally cooperate? Simply put, people cooperate because social institutions force them to cooperate. Even though Daoud sees an incentive to cheat Omar, his local *shura* has a clear interest in ensuring that he cooperates. The normal form of the game shows that, taken together, a society maintains its status quo through cooperation. The compete–cooperate and compete–compete strategies promise a loss of five and 10 sheep, respectively, to the community. To forestall this, successful societies force cooperation when it serves the interests of the community, by punishing those who attempt to compete.<sup>6</sup>

Fortunately, Daoud and Omar have a powerful local *shura*. If either decides to cheat the other by usurping the grazing fields, the *shura* will punish the infraction at a cost of 20 sheep. Figure 2 shows the new normal form of the game with a penalty of 20 sheep for counterproductive decisions to compete.<sup>7</sup> In this scenario, both Daoud and Omar should clearly cooperate.

Societies must keep the chances of getting away with a crime low enough to favor the community.

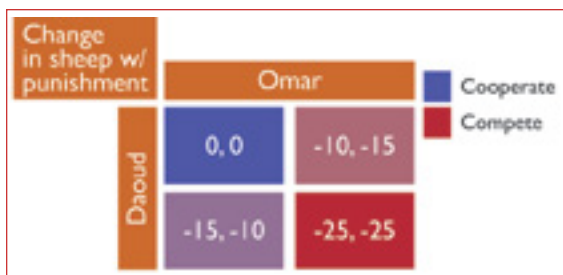


Figure 2: The Prisoner’s Dilemma with the Addition of Punishment

By imposing a penalty of 20 sheep for failing to cooperate, the local *shura* will inspire productive cooperation. But, if eliciting cooperation is so simple, why do real people in relationships like Daoud's and Omar's so often choose to battle?

### Defying Society for the Risk of Gain

Daoud might cheat for the same reason a burglar might rob a bank: He thinks that he will get away with the crime. To prevent him from taking this risk, the local *shura* must maintain a good track record of punishing infractions.

Again, the normal form of the game gives insight into why the *shura* must consistently punish cheaters. If Daoud believes that he can compete without incurring the penalty of 20 sheep with a probability of  $\alpha$ , his prospects change entirely. Daoud assumes that Omar will follow the law. Therefore, if Daoud cooperates, he expects no change in sheep. If he cheats, he expects to gain five sheep with a probability of  $\alpha$  and to lose 15 sheep with a probability of  $1 - \alpha$ . The utility of cheating is then  $5\alpha - 15(1 - \alpha)$ . To incentivize cooperation, Daoud's *shura* must make certain that he expects a better outcome from cooperation. Mathematically,  $0 > 5\alpha - 15(1 - \alpha)$ . Therefore, if Daoud believes that  $\alpha$ , the probability that he will get away with cheating, is less than 75%, he will cooperate. Note that a stiffer penalty with the same value of  $\alpha$  will further reduce Daoud's incentive to cheat. For this reason, many *shuras* would take all of Daoud's sheep, his favorite goat, and possibly a hand for stealing from the community!

Captain America is an expert in hybrid conflict, so he seamlessly transitions from breaking to building.

Societies must keep the value of  $\alpha$  (the chances of getting away with the crime) low enough to favor the community. In doing so, they encourage a rational Daoud to follow the rules. But sometimes societies break down. And with them goes the incentive to cooperate.

### Captain America: The Breaker and Builder of Societies

To emphasize the relevance of these basic incentive structures to current U.S. policy, consider the United States' mission in Afghanistan. Growing up in rural Afghanistan, neither Daoud nor Omar had much vested interest in religious extremists. Following 9/11, however, their district's acquiescence to the local Taliban militia brought hypothetical Captain America—an extremely motivated U.S. Army company commander—to their village. Captain America is an expert in hybrid conflict, so he seamlessly transitions from breaking to building as the situation requires.

Initially, Captain America focuses on breaking. He controls a vast array of 50-caliber machine guns mounted on armored vehicles, automatic grenade launchers, and laser-guided missiles. Moreover, he has 120 motivated soldiers dedicated to eradicating the Taliban from every corner of the little village. In short order, Captain America has used his lethal weapons systems to eradicate—however temporarily—the Taliban. He has shown admirable discretion with his fire control measures, but the fighting has still taken a toll on the village. Much of the mud-engineered



infrastructure has crumbled from the over-pressure of 500-pound bombs, and the members of the village *shura* have gone into hiding.

Under these conditions, Daoud may now be tempted to cheat the system for two reasons. First, the absence of his *shura* might lead him to believe that he can get away with seizing the pasture from Omar without punishment. That is, he faces the incentive structure of the Prisoner's Dilemma. Second, he may cheat out of desperation. Assume that the war has truly ravaged the community and that Daoud's family is living in poverty. He and his family will starve if he cannot gain more sheep. A despondent Daoud has no choice but to compete. He knows that he will get no additional sheep from cooperating, so he does not even consider choosing this option; it leads to guaranteed starvation. Instead, he sends a prayer toward heaven and competes. He does not expect a good outcome, but it is truly his only chance at survival.

Fortunately, Captain America has a generous war chest for rebuilding the community, and he easily voids both of these conditions. He quickly reestablishes the *shura* and reconstructs the demolished government buildings. He helps to finance a police force that can establish the rule of law. He also supports aid projects directly aimed at protecting Daoud and his family from starvation. In no time, Captain America has reestablished the pre-war status quo, and he should stop here.

Eager to exceed the standard and inspired by the concept of money as a weapons system, however, Captain America takes it a step further. He initially broke the system through combat. In doing so, he broke the society's ability to enforce cooperation. In rebuilding, he fulfilled his debt. Now, however, by surpassing the standards of restoration, he will actually break the community through his naïve benevolence.

### Breaking with Benevolence

A catastrophic loss clearly undermines the power of a community to enforce cooperation, but a sudden major gain similarly ruins the incentive structure. Afghanistan provides a detailed case study to illustrate the ways in which this occurs. The primary problem with quick riches lies in their affect on the community's ability to enforce punishment in dynamic economic systems.

Captain America meets Daoud in a *shura* meeting and decides that he would like to purchase his heart and mind. Daoud appears amicable, intelligent, and relatively influential in the community, so it seems perfectly logical for Captain America to expend his CERP (Commander's Emergency Response Program) funds on Daoud's behalf. Soon, an Afghan contractor appears and digs a well close to Daoud's farm at a price of about \$1,000,



an amount Daoud would never have managed on his own. Daoud is now perceived to have the backing of Captain America—a force far more powerful than his local *shura*. The next day, Daoud ruminates while minding his flock, and considers forcing Omar to accept less of the grazing grounds. Daoud is a big deal in the village now, as he sees it, and Omar should feel grateful to get any land at all for his sheep to graze. Ultimately, however, his gentler sensibilities prevail, and Daoud settles for the status quo.

Daoud is now perceived to have the backing of Captain America—a force far more powerful than his local *shura*.

Over time, Daoud's relationship with Captain America blossoms. Daoud always speaks in support of Captain America at the *shura*, and he provides Captain America with frequent—and occasionally accurate—reports on the town's business. Daoud soon takes note of the American captain's affinity for digging wells. Never a scrupulous businessman, Daoud decides to take a chance and calls a cousin in Kandahar who owns a drilling rig. Soon, the two have a booming business digging a well a week for the development-minded commander. Daoud starts to wonder how the community ever procured water prior to the infusion of benevolent aid money. While Captain America has purchased Daoud's heart and mind, Daoud has followed suit, just like countless other Afghan contractors, and purchased a mansion on Kabul's Street Six with his newly generated wealth.<sup>8</sup> One day, Daoud decides to force Omar completely out, and he seizes their shared pasture. At this point, neither the *shura* nor Omar can do much to discourage this behavior.

When Daoud's income suddenly makes herding sheep a pastime instead of a livelihood, he can purchase the consent of the *shura*.

Two factors influence the ability of a community to use punishment to force cooperation in this environment. First, Captain America's implied support of Daoud reduces the likelihood that the *shura* will censure Daoud for his misdeeds. Second, when Daoud's income suddenly makes herding sheep a pastime instead of a livelihood, he can purchase the consent of the *shura* with side payments. In the first case, a direct increase in  $\alpha$ , the probability that Daoud will be able to cheat without penalty, results from his relationship with Captain America. In the second case, Daoud can make a side payment to the *shura*, and they will turn the other way while he steals Omar's land. This hypothetical scenario paints the endemic corruption plaguing the artificially bloated Afghan economy in painfully vivid detail.<sup>9,10</sup>

In the normal form of the game, one may argue that Daoud has no incentive to offer a side payment to the *shura*. After all, if the *shura* confiscates 20 sheep as a consequence for cheating, Daoud would have to pay at least this sum for a modest gain of five sheep over Omar. Here, one must take careful note of the nature of the side payment. Daoud has gained control over the *shura*. If Daoud values this power at 15 sheep, then he breaks even. In politics, this type of influence carries a value far greater than 15 sheep and a dozen camels. In fact, at this point in the game, Daoud really does not even care about the sheep. Usurping the power of the *shura* is the prize that he seeks.

A wise *shura* takes its bribes under careful consideration.

Prior to the change in his status from a common sheep farmer to a powerful businessman, Daoud did not have the wherewithal to buy influence because he needed the sheep that he gained through cooperation to support his family. He simply did not have the capital to invest in the political machine. Moreover, a wise *shura* takes its bribes under careful consideration. If things should go badly for a conspiring member of the *shura*, Daoud's deep pockets and cozy relationship with Captain America would help smooth things over. Prior to his accumulation of wealth, Daoud could not have mitigated these risks.

Daoud's display of power incurs some risk as well. He must ensure that Omar has enough sheep to survive so that he does not become desperate, which might lead to a direct confrontation between the two. With Daoud as the power broker, the game structure mirrors that of warlord politics. In it, Daoud represents a strong player and Omar represents a weak player.<sup>11</sup> A strong Daoud has a dominant strategy of competing, yielding a submissive Omar. Daoud simply must not allow Omar to sink into the realm of despair, because if Omar does, then Daoud will face a belligerent and desperate opponent. Omar has little chance of defeating Daoud, but if confrontation is his only chance of survival, he will unquestionably take the risk. A dominant strategy of conflict emerges in this circumstance. Fortunately, Daoud can evade this dynamic.

Daoud now controls the resources throughout his village, and if Omar needs some sheep, Daoud can easily afford to act as the benevolent dictator in return for continued submissive support. Should the community meet with utter calamity, so that everyone needs more sheep than Daoud can provide, he has nimbly and wisely hedged his bets with his Kabul residence. In all likelihood, Daoud moved his wife and kids to Kabul long ago. The guarantee of a permanent change of scenery and a comfortable early retirement ensure that Daoud will continue to usurp power within his community without fear.

Although Captain America certainly bought the heart and mind of Daoud, and was able to report impressive non-lethal aid numbers to his higher headquarters, he simultaneously had an immeasurably negative impact on the culture of mutually beneficial cooperation within his area of responsibility. Daoud, Omar, and their lineage of ancestors survived without Captain America's wells. Because he failed to understand the true needs of the village or the effects of superfluous cash on an economy concerned with grazing sheep, Captain America nullified the community's ability to use punishment as a means for evading the pitfall of the Prisoner's Dilemma.

Captain America nullified the community's ability to use punishment as a means for evading the pitfall of the Prisoner's Dilemma.

### Captain America's Lesson

Aid money plays a crucial role in a war zone. Yet, the United States seems to advocate spreading money around as a way for its commanders to buy support. While Captain America purchased the support of Daoud, he destroyed the *shura*—and the community that depended on it—in the process. Instead of using money as a weapons system to buy friends, Captain America should have used just enough aid to restore power to the community government and to avert catastrophic loss. Investments beyond this sweet spot may curry favor with a minority of the community, but they do not build an enduring, self-reliant society.

Investments beyond the sweet spot do not build an enduring, self-reliant society.

Admittedly, some circumstances do call for buying friends. When the United States engages in this type of behavior, it must do so with clear-eyed realism regarding the negative effects that using money as a weapons system has on indigenous communities. Current Army doctrine gives little consideration to this phenomenon, which helps explain the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. We can imagine that every new mansion springing up in Kabul's suburbs memorializes a dying community *shura* in the heart of the Afghan conflict. ❖

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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**NOTES**

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- 2 Martin J. Osborne, *An Introduction to Game Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14–18.
- 3 Howard Raiffa, *The Art and Science of Negotiation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 346–349. Raiffa describes a similar scenario when discussing Thomas Schelling's "N-Person Prisoner's Dilemma Game."
- 4 Jack Hirshleifer and Juan Carolos Martinez Coll, "What Strategies Can Support the Evolutionary Emergence of Cooperation?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* vol. 32, no. 2 (June 1988): 367–398. Hirshleifer and Coll show that evolutionary behavior does not generally lead to cooperative behavior in the Prisoner's Dilemma. Instead, a threat of punishment can favor the emergence of dominant strategies.
- 5 Steven Kuhn, "Prisoner's Dilemma," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta, ed. (Spring 2009): <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/prisoner-dilemma/>. Kuhn looks at many games that emulate the normal form of the Prisoner's Dilemma, including the tragedy of the commons.
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## Estonia's Forest Brothers in 1941: Goals, Capabilities, and Outcomes

*CPT Olavi Punga, Estonian Army*

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE SOVIET UNION'S OCCUPATION AND ANNEXATION of Estonia in June 1940, Estonians commenced various types of resistance, both passive and open, against this foreign power. In the context of the conventional warfare that prevailed in the 20th century, the resistance that arose in Estonia, culminating in the summer of 1941 as the German invasion of the Soviet Union commenced, was viewed by Soviet historians as an inseparable part of World War II (or, as it was officially known in the Soviet Union, the Great Patriotic War). Estonians, in contrast, referred to the anti-Soviet resistance in 1941 as the Summer War and called the participants the Forest Brothers.

Estonian refugees who were exiled from their homeland took the memory of the Summer War with them.

The Soviet Union never officially recognized the Summer War as such for two reasons. First, in the Soviet theory of warfare, the theoretical premises for the type of irregular warfare carried out by the Forest Brothers had been dismissed.<sup>1</sup> Second, the Soviet political system cultivated the idea that Estonia had voluntarily joined the Soviet Union in 1940. The Estonian refugees who were exiled from their homeland during and after World War II took the memory of the Summer War with them, but later research on this topic has been fairly limited. That is why the Summer War has so far been a subject of research primarily for Estonian historians, who have published their works in Estonian. The term *Forest Brothers*, commonly used in Estonian literature, has been overshadowed in Soviet or Soviet-biased literature by the use of more general terms such as *guerrilla* or *partisan*.

The year of the first Soviet occupation of Estonia caused a small but gradually increasing number of Estonians throughout the country to withdraw from society and go into hiding. They were soon referred to as the Forest Brothers. For several days beginning on 14 June 1941, the Peoples' Commissariat for Internal Affairs (or *Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del*, abbreviated NKVD) deported thousands of people thought to be "anti-Soviet elements" from Estonia.<sup>2</sup> More Estonians reacted by becoming fugitives, hiding in the forests and marshes to escape any subsequent deportations.<sup>3</sup>

### The Influence of the Forest Brothers on the Conduct of War

The Forest Brothers' irregular tactics initially caused confusion and panic in the Red Army.

The activities of the Forest Brothers against the Soviet government and its representatives varied greatly, from pranks to well-planned military actions directed against local collaborators and Red Army units. The intensity of the Forest Brothers' activities varied over time, depending largely on the local situation and reflecting the influence of the larger German–Soviet conflict.

The idea of combat activities without a clearly defined front was unknown to the Red Army at the time. Both its leadership and rank and file were

unprepared for such warfare, and the Forest Brothers' irregular tactics initially caused confusion and panic in the Red Army. It is possible that activities conducted by the local Forest Brothers were the main reason that the headquarters of the Soviet Eighth Army, which had retreated to Estonia following the initial German attack of Operation Barbarossa, was forced to leave the Suure-Kambja area in Tartumaa on 6 July 1941. The headquarters was relocated to the north, four kilometers from Põltsamaa, which had been assaulted by the local Forest Brothers two days earlier. On the same day, Lieutenant General F. Ivanov ordered the Soviet 11th Rifle Division to "most ruthlessly clear the Army's rear area of bandit and diversion groups."<sup>4</sup> Despite the large number of Soviet units that were engaged in these missions against the Forest Brothers, however, Red Army soldiers who fled to the rear later explained that they abandoned their positions because they feared being surrounded, even though the German forces were still far away.



Counties of Estonia

It is important to understand the position of the Estonians as Germany began its invasion of the USSR. After a year of "Sovietization" and terror, Estonian civil society was virtually destroyed. The German invasion gave people hope for relief from Soviet terror and for the restoration of Estonian statehood. But this did not mean the Forest Brothers gave unconditional support to the German forces. Rather, the Forest Brothers viewed the Wehrmacht as a temporary ally in their mutual fight against the Soviet Union.

The Forest Brothers viewed the Wehrmacht as a temporary ally in their mutual fight against the Soviet Union.

The Soviet forces that either were stationed in or had retreated to Estonia, as well as the local "red" activists, went through a very intense period of combat from 4–12 July 1941, due to the various resistance operations conducted by the Forest Brothers. During this period, as panicked Communist activists and refugees fled before the oncoming German forces, Pärnu, Valga, Võru, Sakala, and Tartumaa counties came under the Forest Brothers' partial or complete control, even before the advancing German forces reached these areas.<sup>5</sup> North of the Pärnu–Emajõe line, numerous small and large battles took place between the Forest Brothers and various Soviet military units. In the middle of July 1941, an operational pause descended on the war in Estonia, a pause that changed the character of the Summer War. An increase in the number of Soviet units fighting against them, as well as more efficient counterinsurgency operations, temporarily stalled the Forest Brothers' hitherto extremely active armed resistance. The Forest Brothers in the northern parts of Sakala and Tartumaa counties, located in the Soviet close rear, suffered heavy losses, caused mostly by NKVD operational units and so-called destruction battalions, and Red Army battalions that had been withdrawn from Latvia and southern Estonia.

In the middle of July 1941, an operational pause descended on the war in Estonia, a pause that changed the character of the Summer War.

Once the Soviet units had recovered from their retreat and the initial confusion caused by the Forest Brothers' attacks, the new commander of the Eighth Army and the newly appointed rear guard commander were able to reestablish command and control over their units. At the same time, the Red Baltic Fleet established contact with the Eighth Army. Subsequently, most Soviet forces in Estonia managed to establish communications and improve cooperation



The Soviets gained the cooperation of local civilians through various methods, including torture.

and attempted to seize the initiative in their counterinsurgency operations. The rear guard forces were directed to support the missions assigned to the Army units. In addition, agent networks were established with the purpose of gathering information about the locations of the Forest Brothers' units, and plans to search and locate insurgents in specific areas were put into action. The number of patrols and guard posts was increased to protect vital communication assets, while border guard detachments, railroad security units, operational units, and the destruction battalions, all under the command of the NKVD, assumed concrete areas of responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

The countermeasures undertaken by the Soviet forces increased the number of armed contacts with the resistance fighters, but these actions had no significant influence on the numbers or fighting will of the Forest Brothers. The Forest Brothers in Harjumaa and Järvamaa counties, caught by a larger operation of the Soviet rear guard forces that was intended to destroy a reconnaissance



These photos show a group of Forest Brothers from Rägavere parish in Virumaa county, northeastern Estonia, taken in July 1941 at the height of the resistance movement.



Ownership of a personal radio or a weapon meant immediate arrest and subsequent punishment, varying from interrogations to execution on the spot.

group sent in from Finland, were affected more than the others. In general, the Soviet rear guard units were successful in a limited number of operations in which one or more of the following was true:

- the exact location of the Forest Brothers was known from intelligence or agent network information;
- military tracking dogs were used in searches;
- the Forest Brothers did not cover their tracks sufficiently; and
- the Soviets gained the cooperation of local civilians through various methods, including torture.

## The Goals of the Forest Brothers

The people who took refuge in the forests were by no means adventurers or “Wild West” outlaws. Nor were they like the ideological heroes of Soviet propaganda films. They were common folk, and probably only a very small fraction of them had a full understanding of the war raging in their country. A person did not become a Forest Brother based on orders or political guidance; it was simply his (or sometimes her) own choice. Estonians’ options were limited to enduring the oppression of the new system, moving or being moved to Russia under Soviet authority, or hiding in Estonia as a Forest Brother.

There were different reasons for supporting or living as a Forest Brother, but the most important reason was a desire to avoid the heavy hand of the occupying power and thus survive. By isolating themselves from general society, it was possible for the Forest Brothers to avoid the direct oppression

The people who took refuge in the forests were by no means adventurers or “Wild West” outlaws. They were common folk.



This particular group was relatively well armed and equipped, as shown by the bicycles and the radio.



To survive, the Forest Brothers needed to be able to travel openly and blend in with ordinary people. This explains their neat and orderly appearance despite living life on the run.

of the Soviets, but they had no guarantees for their continued survival. They considered the possession of firearms to be their only solid assurance. A lack of weapons was the impetus for the initial actions carried out by the Forest Brothers. They used all possible means to arm themselves, such as purchasing guns from hunters, exchanging weapons for vodka with the *militia* (Soviet police force), stealing a rifle or pistol from a sleeping soldier, as well as attacking individual soldiers. Once armed, the Forest Brothers were ready to defend themselves and their loved ones, as well as their property. The majority of activities conducted by the Forest Brothers served the sole purpose of saving lives and private property. Many people who joined the Forest Brothers,

however, were motivated by their desire to resist the enemy—not just the Red Army but all representatives of the occupation regime. In general, the Forest Brothers fought with these two primary purposes: to defend themselves and to resist the Soviet occupiers. For these small, scattered guerilla units, trying for a larger goal such as destroying the occupying forces would have been suicidal.

## Military Capabilities

It is very difficult to give even a general overview of the Forest Brothers' military capabilities. The main factor that determined which skills would be developed was the presence of personnel with relevant military experience and the capability to lead. Among the Forest Brothers, however, nobody had any special training in the conduct of war in the enemy's rear, or in the environment of guerrilla warfare. Former members of the military, border guards, and *Kaitseliit* (the militia-based Estonian Defense League, founded in 1918 to protect Estonian independence) were the best prepared.

The Forest Brothers lacked a higher command element and a larger structure (on the county or national level). This lack had both positive and negative effects for them. For example, when any member of the Forest Brothers was captured, the enemy couldn't extract the necessary information, even by torture, that would lead to the capture or destruction of others. On the negative side, however, the Forest Brothers were unable to bring together a sufficient level of manpower and firepower to take over any significant population centers, to disrupt the activities of the destruction battalions, or undertake other such large-scale operations. This weakness was exacerbated by the Forest Brothers' poor armaments and minimal means of transportation, as well as a lack of access to timely information.

Nevertheless, the Forest Brothers' lack of organization, varying unit sizes, and uneven levels of armament meant that the Red Army rarely knew the capability of the unit it was facing. Consequently, the Soviets rarely were able to assemble the appropriate forces to counter the Forest Brothers' units.

The source materials describing the Forest Brothers' activities include several ambiguous terms describing the size of their formations: *group*, *band*, and *camp*. While these are all common appellations, they are vague in terms of indicating actual personnel strength, firepower, command and control structure, and combat capabilities. Based on incomplete data, the total number of Forest Brothers has been estimated at around 12,000. Compared with national armies at that time, this would have been roughly equivalent to the size of an infantry division, but the Forest Brothers were scattered in small groups across the countryside. Considering the partial or sometimes complete lack of command and control, armaments, training, and supporting structures, the overall combat capabilities of the Forest Brothers could not have been very high. But this is only in the context of conventional warfare. The simple lack of reliable, good-quality weapons and adequate ammunition were the most common reasons for the Forest Brothers' failures in battles. The main strengths of the Forest Brothers were their loose organization, their ability to blend into the environment, and the rest of Estonian society's overall positive attitude towards them.

The Forest Brothers' lack of organization, varying unit sizes, and uneven levels of armament meant that the Red Army rarely knew the capability of the unit it was facing.

The main strengths of the Forest Brothers were their loose organization, their ability to blend into the environment, and Estonian society's overall positive attitude towards them.

As a rule, guerrilla tactics do not differ greatly from those of conventional small military units. The Forest Brothers implemented some tactics that were more or less adapted from the Estonian Defense Forces' doctrine. The decentralized nature of the Forest Brothers' units and the loose connections between key personnel meant that when a unit of Forest Brothers faced an armed confrontation, it would be able to disperse without significant casualties, or to escape encirclement by breaking into smaller groups. The unit later reassembled elsewhere or simply moved to another area. The Forest Brothers themselves referred to this technique as *evaporation tactics*: "to disappear from a battle they had started at the right moment in order to disrupt the enemy by opening fire from another direction."<sup>7</sup> This tactic underlay the sustainability of the camp or group-centered structure of the Forest Brothers.

*Evaporation tactics*: "to disappear from a battle they had started at the right moment in order to disrupt the enemy by opening fire from another direction."

## Outcomes of the Forest Brothers' Activities

One of the most significant outcomes of the Forest Brothers' resistance was the disruption of Red Army movements and government communications: road blocks, ambushes, and blown-up bridges made railways and highways impassable, while phone lines were cut to slow or prevent the transmission of orders and information. These attacks not only affected the Red Army's command and control capabilities, but also limited the activities of the local Soviet-controlled governing bodies.

Initially, the goal of the Forest Brothers in cutting phone lines was to disrupt the activities of local officials. Later, when the repair crews were assigned armed escorts, the disruptions were mostly used to acquire weapons from these escorts. Before 1941, the communication lines of the Soviet Baltic Special Military District units in Estonia were based on the local phone lines, and even when the war commenced in June 1941, radio communication was almost never used. For this reason, operations by the Forest Brothers to destroy phone lines sometimes caused a complete communications blackout in several areas, and forced the Soviet units to deploy significant forces to secure their communication lines. The attacks disrupted not only communications between the Northwestern Front and the Eighth Army headquarters, but also command and control over the Eighth Army and Red Baltic Fleet fighting units.

Operations by the Forest Brothers to destroy phone lines sometimes caused a complete communications blackout in several areas.

In another bid to acquire weapons, the Forest Brothers also attacked various Red Army air surveillance posts, successfully in most cases. These attacks resulted in serious disruptions and gaps in the early warning system of the Tallinn air defense network.

On the level of their individual lives, the Forest Brothers were largely successful. Out of more than 12,000 Forest Brothers, only 561 have been confirmed as killed. This means that at least 11,439 Forest Brothers survived and escaped the regime's oppressions in 1941.<sup>8</sup> What is even more important is that while in hiding they felt safe from the reach of the Soviet terror. On a group level, the Forest Brothers minimized the reach and results of several Soviet-organized repression campaigns. For example, they were able to significantly impede the mobilization of conscripts and reservists, forced evacuations, the use of common people in building defensive positions, and requisitions of farm animals and agricultural products.

The Forest Brothers guarded their own and their neighbors' households and attempted to prevent the retreating Red Army units from wreaking havoc.

There have been several statements concerning the use of scorched earth tactics by the Red Army in Estonia in 1941. Compared to the destruction that occurred in Russia during the Soviets' retreat from the advancing German army, such claims don't apply in Estonia's case. When Stalin gave the order over the radio to utilize scorched earth tactics across the Soviet Union, the main idea was to destroy anything and everything that could aid the enemy. In Estonia, much was destroyed, but not everything. This outcome raises some questions. First, why were Stalin's orders not fully obeyed in Estonia? Second, what or who may have interfered with the execution orders? Third, who or what could have prevented the Red Army throughout Estonia from obeying Stalin's orders? There were too few Estonian Communists, and they lacked any authority or power over the Red Army to prevent it from acting on those orders. The advancing German units moved quite fast, but even they could not reach everywhere fast enough to prevent destruction. The evidence points to the Forest Brothers, who guarded their own and their neighbors' households and attempted to prevent the retreating Red Army units from wreaking havoc.

### Epilogue: German Occupation

The more active units of the Estonian resistance tried to continue their fight for the complete liberation of their homeland, even after the Wehrmacht had reached the territory already liberated from Soviet control by the Forest Brothers. Along the Pärnu–Emajõe front, former Forest Brothers participated in direct combat against the Red Army until the German reserves arrived. After that, most of the self-formed Forest Brothers' units were simply disbanded by the Germans, as only Germans were allowed to fight under arms on the front. Only in a few cases were former Forest Brothers permitted to participate in combat as a unit, usually to counter intensified resistance put up by the Red Army or to reinforce insufficient German forces in a particular sector.

Most Forest Brothers gradually followed the front, leaving the forests and going home.

A handful of less active Forest Brothers continued to live in the forest for days after the front had passed through, before they were informed of the change of power from Soviet to German hands. Most Forest Brothers gradually followed the front, leaving the forests and going home. After the reoccupation of Estonia by the Red Army in 1944, many of those Forest Brothers who had engaged in resistance against the Soviet power in 1941 were persecuted, and many, with their families, were exiled to Siberia.

### Closing Remarks

It was common in the Soviet Union to characterize the Estonian Forest Brothers in the context of World War II as supporters of Germany. The main logic behind this (and in some instances, the historical interpretation of Russian historians today) was simple: Because the Forest Brothers were the opponents of the Soviet regime, they were supporters of Germany. This logic was also supported by descriptions of the Forest Brothers' activities recorded during the war.<sup>9</sup> However, as Estonian historians repeatedly highlight, there are important flaws in this train of thought. Estonians did not support Germans or the official fascist ideology of Germany. Instead, they saw the Germans as liberators from the Soviet occupation and its oppressions, and thus as their allies against the Soviet Union.

Consequently, the topic of the Forest Brothers has been a favorite subject in Soviet propaganda from World War II to recent times. Connecting the Estonian Forest Brothers to one of the warring parties in World War II enabled Soviet propagandists to apply derogatory labels, such as *traitors of the fatherland*, *bandits*, or *criminals*, in order to smear the Forest Brothers' name. In modern days, the term *terrorists* has also been added. This is just one example of how the history of the Soviet occupation has been distorted for the sake of propaganda. The authors and supporters of such statements demonstrate a poor knowledge of history and of military operations.

The 1997 study highlighted the need for small war theory to be reinstated in the Russian military's formal "science of war."

Following the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the first War of Chechnya, in 1997 the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Interior Forces Headquarters conducted a joint large-scale study on small wars. In one of its findings, the study highlighted the need for small war theory to be reinstated in the Russian military's formal "science of war." This step gives us hope that perhaps, one day, the Forest Brothers will be viewed as equal to guerrillas and partisans, and the Summer War will be on equal footing with other small wars. Such a change is not needed to enhance the dignity of those who participated or were killed; it would, however, allow historians to draw more fair and objective conclusions based on the theory of unconventional warfare. ❖

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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#### NOTES

- 1 The status of small war theory was not reinstated in Russian military doctrine until 1997.
- 2 For the most comprehensive and succinct overview, see Andres Kasekamp, *A History of the Baltic States* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 130–131.
- 3 The Forest Brothers' activity from 1940 to 1941 can be divided into three periods.

**21 June 1940–14 June 1941.** This was the "hiding" period, during which those who had gone into the forests lay low. Not many people actually went into hiding at this time. For a law-abiding citizen, the thought of leaving one's home and living like a hunted beast was an almost insurmountable psychological obstacle. In the beginning of June 1941, there were a few outlaw individuals or small groups in the Estonian forests, but they had no central organization or information network at the time. This year-long period is characterized by an almost complete lack of activity.

**14–22 June 1941.** This was the "waiting" or "confusion" period, and coincides with the beginning of the war on the Eastern front. Everything changed overnight after 14 June, when more than 10,000 Estonians—including entire families—were deported from their homes by the Soviets. The sudden deportations terrorized Estonian society and were immediately followed by a mass flight of citizens from their homes. This eight-day period saw:

- the emergence of larger resistance groups and the first forest camps;

- the organization of armed resistance; and
- the beginnings of active resistance by a few groups immediately after the deportations began.

**22 June–30 August 1941.** Third was the "active attacks" period. This period saw the end of active guerrilla combat on the mainland, although fighting continued on the Estonian islands.

- 4 ERA R-358-1-17, 177; Eesti rahvas Nõukogude Liidu Suures Isamaasõjas 1941–1945. Dokumente ja materjale. Tallinn 1975, dok. nr 42: "Kaitse organiseerimisest Pärnu-Viljandi-Tartu joonel. 8. armee lahingukäsk. 6. juuli 1941."
- 5 Different levels of the Soviet power structure were struck by several panic waves in early July 1941. Caused primarily by command and leadership issues, the ensuing chaos made the situation in Estonia even more complicated. The first wave involved mostly local-level Communist activists, between 3–6 July. The masses of retreating units and refugees from Latvia caused tremendous disruption, which was further aggravated by the evacuation of the local Communist functionaries and their families. At the same time, the Forest Brothers became active as well, driven by the general lack of command and leadership, and the distribution of arms to the local Executive Committees. They carried out several serious attacks against Soviet lines of communication and some towns where Communists were living.

The confusion caused by the first wave was dying down when a clearly distinguishable second wave of panic arose. The Forest Brothers' activities in the southern part of Pärnumaa County enabled German forces to quickly seize control of Pärnu on 8 July. This caused a serious upheaval among almost all Soviet

command and armed forces in Estonia. The Baltic Fleet's War Council and its headquarters escaped to their ships, and the most critical fighting units were evacuated to Kronstadt. Consequently, the capabilities of the fleet in the area of operations was significantly reduced. The government of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic tried to escape to Russia via Narva. The ESSR War Commissar and his subordinates also fled Estonia. The panic wound down by 14 July.

- 6 The NKVD assigned the following areas of responsibility to units charged with the destruction of the Forest Brothers:
  - the 6th Border Guard detachment: the territory from Estonia's northern coastline up to 22 km inland;
  - the 109th Regiment of the 2nd Division of the Railway Guard troops: 7 km-wide zones along the main railroads in cooperation with the respective destruction battalions in the area; and
  - the commander of the NKVD Operational Group of destruction battalions: the remaining Estonian territory, with military objectives of strategic importance being the first priority.
- 7 Eesti rahva kannatuste aasta, lk. 336. Korrasta Viide.

- 8 To be clear, while they may have escaped persecution or death in 1941, this does not mean that all of them were able to escape when the Soviets came back in 1944. See COL Martin Herem's article, "The Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers: 1947–1950," in this issue of CTX.
- 9 The main sources for research on the Forest Brothers' movement are the descriptions of activities and interrogation protocols from the two occupations: Soviet and German. The main differences, but also the main similarities, are in the presentation of the Forest Brothers' activities based on a certain ideology and from a specific viewpoint. During the German occupation, the Forest Brothers were seen in a positive manner, influenced by the prevailing anti-Soviet ideology. The sources recorded during the Soviet occupations showed the Forest Brothers, or people connected to them, as a priori guilty and thus subject to condemnation, regardless of their real activities.



## The Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers: 1947–1950

THE FOREST BROTHERS' RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN POST-WORLD WAR II Estonia is a topic that has received quite a lot of attention in recent literature, from many different perspectives.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, no study has been published so far that examines the Forest Brothers' activities as a military operation. Such research is, at first sight, made difficult by the shortage of source materials, as well as the general opinion that the Estonian Forest Brothers were not an organized movement. Furthermore, the failure of their campaign—the defeat of the Forest Brothers and Estonia's domination by the Soviet Union—may indicate to some that there is little to be learned. Nevertheless, with regard to Estonia's national defense as well as the current campaigns against international terrorism, it is important to understand the reasons behind the ultimate failure of the Forest Brothers.

*Colonel Martin Herem, Estonian Defense Forces*

This article looks at the Forest Brothers during their most active period of resistance, from 1947 to 1950. In those years, a resistance fighter named Richard Saaliste, along with his brother and three other men, played a key part in the strategic preparations for a hoped-for outbreak of war between the USSR and the Western countries. Their strategy will henceforward be referred to, for brevity's sake, as the JORSS strategy. JORSS—an acronym of the surnames Jerlet, Oras, Raadik, Saaliste, Saaliste—was used by the resistance fighters as a radiogram signature in their attempts to establish communication with the Western countries.<sup>3</sup>

JORSS was only a small part of the anti-Soviet resistance following World War II, and it shared most of the larger movement's characteristics.

The aim of this article is to evaluate the JORSS strategy and the reasons behind the initial successes and ultimate failure of the Forest Brothers who tried to implement it, by considering the resistance movement in the context of Estonian society at the time. This context is taken to include the society, population, economy, and culture of the Estonian SSR, as well as the anti-resistance activities of the Soviet authorities. Changes in the environment that had an effect on the strategy of the resistance movement are another facet of the evaluation. This method of evaluation, applied here to the Forest Brothers, is adapted from the study "How Men Rebel: An Organizational Model for Insurgency," by William Bender and Craig L. Johnson (hereafter, Bender-Johnson), which describes a method for evaluating resistance movements based on the authors' examination of several theories on organization and resistance.<sup>4</sup> This article, in turn, is a brief outline of the author's master's thesis, which applied the Bender-Johnson method to a far more detailed case study of the Forest Brothers.<sup>5</sup>

### General Characteristics of the Estonian Rebellion: 1944–1953

As mentioned previously, JORSS was only a small part of the anti-Soviet resistance that spread across Eastern Europe following World War II, and it



shared most of the larger movement's characteristics. The Soviet occupation of the Republic of Estonia in 1940, a result of the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, inspired two stages of the Forest Brothers' movement: from 1940 to 1941, and from 1944 to 1953. Both of these stages were characterized by an armed resistance movement in support of an anticipated invasion by the United States and European countries. What made the second stage different, however, was the fact that there was no active warfare as such going on from 1945; instead, the resistance was fuelled by the hope for a new onset of war. Estonians in the post-war years had many reasons to hide and fight against the Soviet regime. In 1940–1941 they had endured the Soviet reign of terror that followed occupation. That experience impelled thousands of Estonians to volunteer to serve in the German armed forces' Home Guard during the German occupation. And that in turn was reason enough for them to go into the forest and incite rebellion when the Soviet forces came back in 1944.

The Forest Brothers' movement must be regarded as an ideological conflict between Soviet rule and the citizens of the occupied territory.

Regardless of the number of people who took part in the resistance movement in different periods, and the activity of the Forest Brothers as evaluated by various methods, the entire Forest Brothers' movement must be regarded as an ideological conflict between Soviet rule and the citizens of the occupied territory. In documents on the Forest Brothers from the USSR Committee for State Security (the secret police), the movement is commonly described as nationalist banditry, a bourgeois nationalist underground resistance movement, and a profoundly nationalist underground resistance movement directed at vigorous anti-Soviet operations.<sup>6</sup> The "political banditry"<sup>7</sup> of the western regions of the USSR was thus distinguished in official documents from the "criminal banditry" of people's struggle for material survival in the rest of the Soviet republics, even by the Soviet authorities themselves.<sup>8</sup> Even though the resistance movements in post-war Ukraine, Lithuania, and Latvia were substantially more widespread, active, and organized, the Estonian Forest Brothers must not be underestimated due to their lack of organization. Although they were eradicated, and no broader resistance movement existed in Estonia as far as we know, the Forest Brothers deserve a place in the theory of resistance. In Mao Zedong's three-stage theory of guerrilla warfare, the post-war Forest Brothers' movement falls under the first stage: the creation of an organization that encompasses a conflict of ideologies, armed fighters, and a purpose for the resistance.<sup>9</sup>

Although they were eradicated, the Forest Brothers deserve a place in the theory of resistance.

The post–World War II Forest Brothers' movement has been divided into periods by several authors. Most agree on the years 1944–1945, which were characterized by the ongoing war in Europe and quite a large number of men—estimated at 15,000–20,000—hiding in the forest. This number represents more than 1% of the population at the time.<sup>10</sup> During the second period, 1945–1949, the anti-Soviet activities of the Forest Brothers were more dynamic and better organized. The last period of active armed resistance is considered to be the interval from the March deportation of 1949 until 1953, during which the major groups of Forest Brothers were eliminated.<sup>11</sup>

The casualties on both sides, Forest Brothers and Soviets (including civilians), show the intensity of the conflict. A total of 1,870 armed contacts were recorded during these years. Seventy-four percent of them were directed by the resistance fighters against civilian supporters of the occupation, collective farms, and other public entities.<sup>12</sup> A closer study of the victims usually reveals

a common reason: revenge against informants and other collaborators who harmed Estonian civilians or the Forest Brothers themselves.<sup>13</sup> According to these records, the Forest Brothers killed 1,009 people associated with the Soviet regime: 49% civilians, 29% Soviet activists and voluntary members of destruction battalions, 12% members of the security forces, 5% civilians cooperating with the Soviet security forces, and 5% military personnel. The Forest Brothers' losses during these nine years totaled 16,620 people: 1,495 killed and 9,870 arrested, while another 5,255 surrendered.<sup>14</sup> Many of those who were arrested or who surrendered were punished by death or sent to Siberia. The intensity of the resistance was relatively high for such a short period of time. More than a thousand people killed in 1,870 attacks over nine years is not a big number in itself, but it is striking when compared to some other modern insurgent movements.<sup>15</sup>

### JORSS Strategy and Structure

The most important person behind JORSS was Richard Saaliste, one of the best-known leaders of the Forest Brothers. Saaliste was a farmer and reserve officer in 1940 when the Soviet Union first occupied Estonia. By 1941, he had fled into the forest and begun his struggle against the Soviet occupation. Like thousands of other Estonians during the German occupation, Saaliste joined the Home Guard, where he served as a battalion commander. He was wounded twice and in 1944 escaped to Sweden.

In late 1946, Saaliste returned to Estonia, a move that was extremely unusual. The exact reasons behind his return are still unclear. On the one hand, he was performing a task, assigned by Estonian leaders in Sweden, to arrange for the evacuation of certain individuals to Sweden. On the other hand, he began to make contact with the Forest Brothers right after his arrival back in Estonia. Researchers have discussed a possible connection with the intelligence services of some Western countries, but such contacts have never been proved. Other key personnel of JORSS could be called "career Forest Brothers," using the terminology of the Soviet security services. These men were declared outlaws in 1944 or 1945, were not organized on more than a group level up to that point, and, somewhat surprisingly, had no civilian blood on their hands. All of them, however, had battle experience from service in the German army.

It is significant that the JORSS boycotted the strongest Estonian resistance organization at this time: the Armed Resistance Union (RVL). The RVL had a hierarchical structure and recruited members, including civilians in legal positions, with the objective of restoring an independent Estonian republic. Like JORSS, they understood that the restoration of an independent state would be possible only with the direct support of Western countries. But JORSS regarded a formal anti-Soviet organization as necessary only when the international situation, i.e., a commitment to armed intervention from the West, warranted it.<sup>16</sup> Until then, the preparatory organizational work had to be carried out. Hence, JORSS leaders disagreed with the RVL's principles of operation, although their anti-Soviet objectives were the same.<sup>17</sup> They believed that the

Many of the Forest Brothers who were arrested or who surrendered were punished by death or sent to Siberia.

The Forest Brothers believed that the Armed Resistance Union, with its conventional organizational structure, was doomed to failure.



RVL, with its conventional organizational structure, was doomed to failure from the moment of its creation, and would be discovered by the MGB (as the Soviet secret police were known at the time) very soon. JORSS leaders, in contrast, opposed any formal registration of the members of the organization, whether through lists, forms, or symbols. They were against including legal citizens in the organization, who might want to restrict the activity of the Forest Brothers with organizational principles, and regarded such activity by the leadership of the RVL as mistaken.

### The Strategy

The objective of the JORSS strategy was to win support among the Forest Brothers and the general population for the overthrow of Soviet rule in the Estonian SSR, in the event of a war between the Western countries and the Soviet Union. In other words, the JORSS strategy was based on anticipation of a political or military intervention by the Western countries. This was a common strategic feature of the resistance groups in all three Baltic states. None of the resistance movements aimed at overthrowing Soviet rule on its own, but presumed that an intervention by countries hostile to Moscow would end the occupation of the Baltic states.<sup>18</sup> This hope was fed daily through anti-Soviet propaganda in the news media, including Western radio services from Italy, Switzerland, Turkey, and Sweden, Radio Rias from the U.S. zone in Germany, Voice of America Moscow, Estonian programs in German, and anti-Soviet programs on the BBC. In addition, Saaliste had with him some newspapers issued by Estonian expatriates in Germany and Sweden promoting this idea.

The JORSS strategy was based on anticipation of a political or military intervention by the Western countries.

What made the JORSS strategy different were a few details, especially with regard to the organizational structure. The best way to explain the strategy is with a widely used method that focuses on the objective, desired outcomes, methods of achieving those outcomes, and resources (see Table 1).<sup>19</sup>

Table 1. The JORSS Strategy: Ends, Ways, and Means

Ends	Ways	Means	Risk
The Forest Brothers are prepared for combat upon the outbreak of war between the Western countries and the USSR.	The survival of the Forest Brothers and their weaponry by stealth.	Existing Forest Brothers.	<i>Acceptance:</i> The Soviet authorities do not accede and respond with violence.
	Contact between groups for the purpose of mobilizing the Forest Brothers.	Terrain outside of settlements.	<i>Acceptance/feasibility:</i> The support of the inhabitants is crucial (they accept as long as they can see the merit or do not suffer).
	Provisioning with the help of supporters and through confiscation.	Mediation between different groups.	<i>Acceptance/feasibility:</i> Controlling different groups is complicated.
	A loosely structured organization for the sake of security.	Supporters in the form of local inhabitants.	<i>Compliance:</i> Avoidance of war by the Western countries changes the strategy as a whole.
	Long-term instructions to coordinate the activity of different groups.	State institutions.	
		Discipline and morale of the Forest Brothers.	

Table I. The JORSS Strategy: Ends, Ways, and Means (cont.)

Ends	Ways	Means	Risk
The Estonian population can be mobilized for an armed uprising against Soviet rule at the outbreak of war, while mobilization by the USSR is obstructed.	<p>Information operations to explain the objectives of the Forest Brothers' activities, the criminal nature of Soviet rule, and the international political situation.</p> <p>Taking into account the interests of the population.</p> <p>Clarifying the objectives by means of actions (armed attacks on Soviet representatives and sites).</p> <p>Identifying members of the general population suited for mobilization (physical capability, attitude).</p> <p>Arming the population for mobilization with outside help.</p>	<p>Leaflets, brochures.</p> <p>Facilities for compiling media.</p> <p>Disseminators of oral information.</p> <p>Data for information operations (crimes by the Soviet authorities, people's attitudes, anti-Soviet activities of foreign countries).</p> <p>Information to identify targets (physical parameters, justification for the selection of target).</p> <p>Resources for carrying out armed activities</p> <p>Contacts with Western countries.</p>	<p><i>Feasibility:</i> The dissemination of written information requires printing facilities.</p> <p><i>Feasibility:</i> The availability of resources for attacking the Soviets and arming the population.</p> <p><i>Feasibility:</i> Lack of contact with the Western countries.</p>
The Western countries and Forest Brothers possess strategic information needed to prepare for and conduct the war.	<p>Gathering information (the political and economic situation in the Estonian SSR, people's attitudes, location/nature of the Soviet security agencies and armed units).</p> <p>Relaying the information to foreign countries.</p>	<p>Local inhabitants.</p> <p>Collaborators with the Soviet authorities (by making them double agents)</p> <p>Forest Brothers capable of gathering intelligence (skills, discipline, connections, ability to move around).</p> <p>Communication channels (radio stations, postal service, courier, state media).</p>	<p><i>Feasibility:</i> Persuading collaborators to cooperate (with compromising circumstances, material resources, a strong ideological stance).</p> <p><i>Feasibility:</i> Establishing a system of communication (channels, methods, willingness of both parties).</p>

A characteristic feature of the Forest Brothers was the structure of JORSS. First of all, it should be clarified that it was not an organization in the common sense. The Forest Brothers themselves denied the existence of any such organization. During an interrogation in 1952, V. Oras claimed that the group only went so far as to make preparations for establishing a Forest Brothers' organization when the situation was right, i.e., once a war was underway. This may be a little disingenuous: even a relatively unstructured group can indeed be called an organization, if an organization is understood to consist of a knowingly coordinated social union that is an identifiable entity and works steadily towards a common goal.

V. Oras claimed that the group only went so far as to make preparations for establishing a Forest Brothers' organization once a war was underway.

Judging by the statements of the Forest Brothers themselves, the organization even had a structure that covered all of Estonia. According to that structure,

Estonia was divided into three parts. Two of the parts were reportedly managed by a major and a captain, and the third part by Richard Saaliste. The structure itself was planned and generally created as follows.

Structure of the “organization” (see Figure 1):

- Government-in-exile (primarily in Sweden at this time): managed the three staffs (henceforward, 1/3 staffs), each of which oversaw one third of Estonian territory, through directions for long-term action. Further instructions were relayed through proxies, by mail, via broadcast radio in coded messages,<sup>20</sup> or by direct radio communications.
- 1/3 staff: managed the staff branches. To a lesser extent, each staff, consisting of three to five individuals, also coordinated its activity with the other two 1/3 staffs.<sup>21</sup> Contact with the staff branches was maintained above all to initiate coordinated fighting and to give specific orders during combat. The instruction these staffs provided in anticipation of coming war was aimed at the survival of the personnel in a hostile environment and to further their political education.
- Staff branch: maintained constant contact with the 1/3 staff, groups of Forest Brothers, and individuals hiding in their region. The staff branches also were usually three to five people, depending on who was available and the territory and population to be coordinated. Again, most of the instructions they disseminated were to support the survival of personnel in a wartime environment and to provide political education with leaflets and brochures. If necessary, cooperation would be coordinated before the war. In addition, this group received information from other Forest Brothers and supporters by means of personal interviews. The instructions from the staff branch were designed to support survival and reduce conflicting activities among the different groups of Forest Brothers. Intelligence-related tasks were normally not given to groups or individuals but were performed by members of the staff branch.
- Groups of Forest Brothers/individual members: made their own plans for hiding and operating. They carried out no specific orders or tasks coming from the staff branches. Contact with supporters and informants reinforced the activity or security of the group and was not usually intended to fulfill the needs or tasks of the staff branch.

Forest Brothers made their own plans for hiding and operating. They carried out no specific orders or tasks coming from the staffs.

### Sympathizers

Supporters of the resistance included farms or individuals who helped sustain the Forest Brothers with material goods or resources, accommodation, medical aid, or transportation, depending on their situation. Their support was organized in an ad hoc fashion, based on their specific capabilities and ideological attitude. A supporter could not go directly to the Forest Brothers but had instead to arrange a meeting with an individual. Meetings could also be set up through intermediaries or a “mailbox” (drop box) arrangement. Information was communicated through personal meetings. In the event of a particular danger, preset signals were used to spread the word. The Forest Brothers made use of informants who were in the service of Soviet authorities, mostly to gather security-related information and relay it at agreed meetings. Communication of crucial information might also take place through a mailbox or via an intermediary. It is important to note that many of the

farms run by sympathizers relied on Forest Brothers to work in exchange for food. These farmers then shared in the loot when the Forest Brothers attacked Soviet-run collective farms and cooperatives. This largesse served as a sort of deposit that encouraged further support in later months. The entire structure was designed essentially to serve the strategic goal of maintaining armed strength. In other words, the structure itself did not support operations, but rather the communication of information.

Many of the farms run by sympathizers relied on Forest Brothers to work in exchange for food.

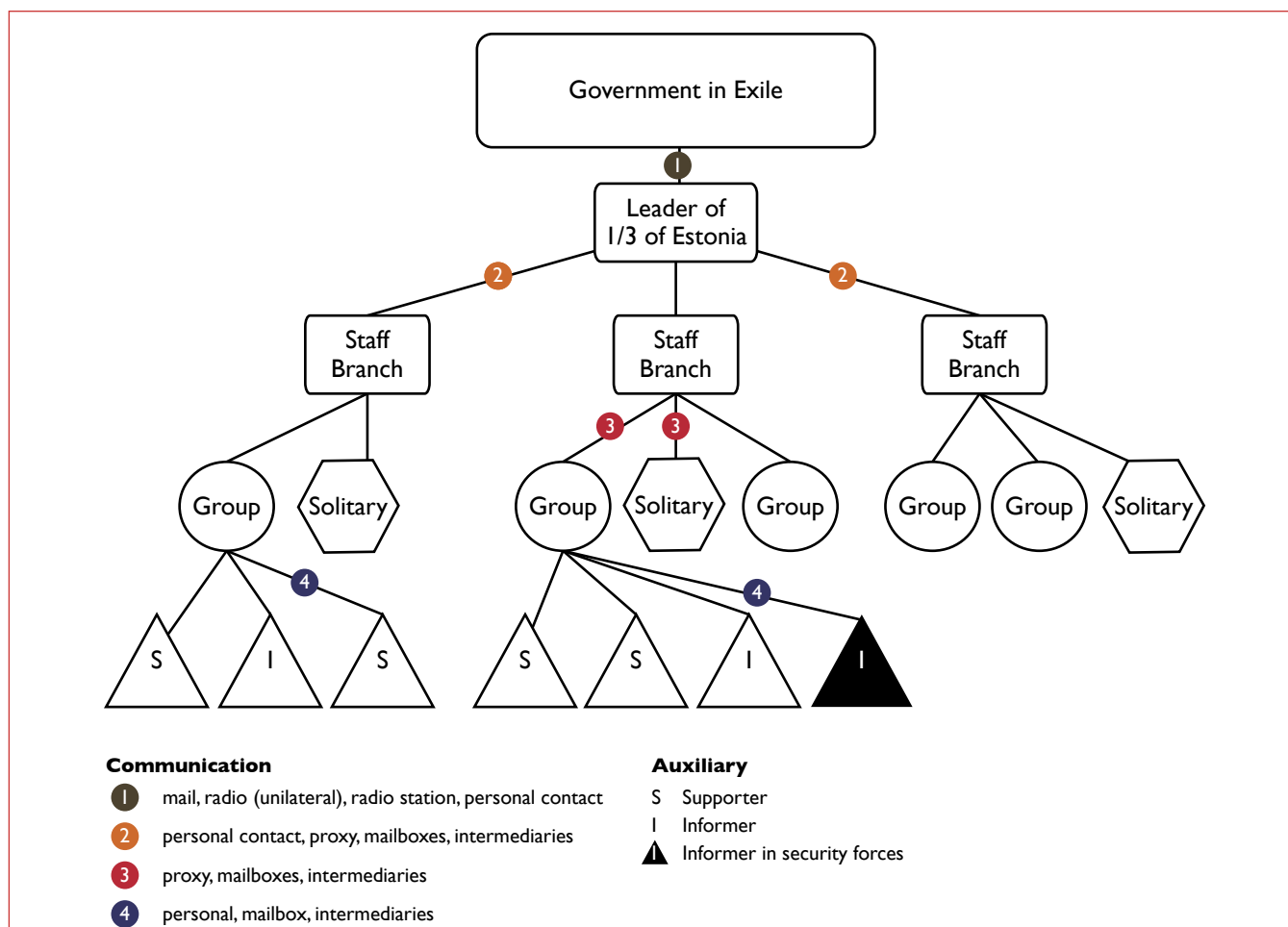


Figure 1: The Structure of JORSS

There was no specialization throughout the different management levels of JORSS. For instance, intelligence work was performed according to the abilities of specific individuals. The means and opportunities of each group were determined for that particular group alone. At the same time, each group was prepared to support other groups if security was at stake, because any breach of security threatened the entire resistance movement. The size of the group depended on the experience of the individual Forest Brothers and the task environment (support and risk). There were no joint funds above the group level—each band had to support itself. All documented structures and lists were forbidden. Information on the location and number of Forest Brothers maintained by the 1/3 staff, however, would enable leaders to quickly restructure a fighting force in the event of war.

There were no joint funds above the group level—each band had to support itself.

The decentralized organization characteristic of the resistance in the Baltic States was also noted by contemporary Russian military analysts. According



to them, the lack of common leadership was compensated for by strong discipline on the local level, sustained by the social status of being a Forest Brother and the enforced discipline of hiding and undertaking covert actions over the course of several years while surrounded by the enemy.<sup>22</sup> In today's terms, such an organizational structure and system of subordination can be compared to al Qaeda, which also lacks a conventional hierarchical chain of command.<sup>23</sup>

Information from the archives of the MGB indicates that the various Forest Brothers' groups were aware of each other's existence and had the opportunity to contact one another in accordance with the objectives and methods of

the JORSS strategy. It is nevertheless difficult to determine the size, location, and members of the groups precisely, because these kept changing. The thesis from which this article was drawn contains a basic list of the Forest Brothers who were in contact with the branch staff either in person or through proxies.<sup>24</sup> The list includes a total of more than 130 people in hiding between 1947 and 1949 who were known to branch staff and could have been mobilized for concentrated action at short notice.<sup>25</sup> There were men and women of various backgrounds among them, although the women would likely have played only a supporting role in combat.

To sum up the question of communicating with Forest Brothers' groups and uniting individual resistance fighters, it can be said that more than 100 people were at least in contact with JORSS in 1949. The territory in which they were most active was situated about 50 km from the Estonian capital of Tallinn, and covered an area approximately 60 km square of rural and forested land. There are many examples of Forest Brothers' activities far away from this "main territory," but it should be noted that the whole of Estonia is only about 350 km square.

## The Results of the Study

The thesis analyzed the Forest Brothers and the JORSS strategy on the basis of the five theoretical requirements for a resistance movement (the Bender-Johnson method described in the introduction). This section discusses the results of that study, and what it revealed about the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy.

### Requirement No. 1: The structure and strategy of a resistance movement must match the environment.

The JORSS strategy was based on an understanding of the prevailing circumstances and the power of the Soviet authorities; hence, it focused on overthrowing Soviet rule only in the event of an outbreak of international war. The tactics were instead based on limiting attacks (usually only on collaborators), so as to maintain a minimal presence in the "market" of Estonian society, and the replenishment of supplies (through attacks on state enterprises and institutions).

The lack of common leadership was compensated for by strong discipline on the local level.

The JORSS strategy was based on an awareness of enemy tactics and therefore avoided frequent small-scale actions.

The concern was that a more aggressive strategy would only invite a show of force by the Soviets, as occurred in Lithuania in 1947, when brutal attacks by resistance fighters were met with an additional 70,000 troops brought in from Russia. This strategy of minimal violence was adopted by most Forest Brothers.

The JORSS strategy, as well as the Forest Brothers' operations, was based on an awareness of enemy tactics and therefore avoided frequent small-scale actions; the movement thus prevented the Soviets from differentiating between the various regions and groups. This hindered the ability of the enemy to accurately analyze the Forest Brothers, and thus their ability to concentrate countermeasures in specific regions.

The JORSS leaders and, to an extent, the Forest Brothers realized the difficult economic situation of their principal support base—the Estonian population. At the end of the 1940s, the Soviet Union, anticipating another war, increased taxes and appropriated such a large percentage of agricultural output that many Estonians suffered from hunger. At the same time, Moscow severely devalued the currency through “reforms.” This difficult economic situation was also taken into consideration, for the most part, by the Forest Brothers when planning their activities. At the same time, JORSS staff exercised no higher-level control in that area nor did they give any instructions of a more specific nature. The weakness of the strategy sometimes manifested when Forest Brothers engaged in the public robbery of private property. The resulting Soviet propaganda and economic controls had a negative impact on the market of sympathizers for the Forest Brothers and lost them support. This in turn enabled the Soviet authorities to develop their intelligence network more effectively.

The strategy as well as the activity of the Forest Brothers showed that working for the people who were sympathetic to them was an important way for the resistance fighters to create a material support base for themselves. The replenishment of supplies through labor was one of the strongest aspects of the strategy and the Forest Brothers' operations. It not only enhanced their base of support but also helped them avoid conflicts with the Soviet authorities, and prevented further deterioration of conditions for the local population (as simple confiscation would have caused).

It must be noted here that the majority of the Forest Brothers studied in the course of this research were arrested and/or killed as a result of intelligence work by Soviet security agents. The available sources suggest, however, that all of those who collaborated with the security agencies were recruited from among legal citizens or those whom the authorities had legalized, with the help of compromising circumstances (e.g., they had served in the German army or the Home Guard, or had recently left the resistance), and that none of them was a current member of the Forest Brothers.

### **Requirement No. 2: The organization must possess a market and demonstrate its presence in the market.**

The dissemination of information, as a means to maintain presence in the market of public opinion, should be regarded as a strength of the strategy. This requirement, however, was only partially fulfilled by the Forest Brothers,

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The Soviet authorities were busy taking over the opinion market by managing the safety and welfare of the population.

primarily with leaflets and other forms of propaganda. The fact that the groups did not spread information about their operational successes, such as attacking Communist activists and collective farms, was a weak spot of the strategy, and lost them the opportunity to gain wider support. It also allowed the Soviet authorities to spread uncontested misinformation about supposed atrocities committed by the Forest Brothers. The restrictions the Soviet authorities put on the dissemination of information (e.g., access to printing facilities), along with the constant barrage of Soviet propaganda, in fairness, made it difficult for the Forest Brothers to meet their information objectives. Meanwhile, the Soviet authorities were busy taking over the opinion market by other means as well, such as managing the safety and welfare of the population. Hence, even if the Forest Brothers had been better at disseminating anti-Soviet information among Estonia's inhabitants, they would not have prevented the Soviet authorities from monopolizing the market.

The maintenance of market share in the form of relaying international information and raising political awareness was also a strength of the strategy. These tactics were put into practice, but again there was a shortcoming in the organizational structure. The number of individuals doing the work was too small, and they all had concurrent duties, which made it impossible for them to work to the best of their abilities in any one area of responsibility.

### Requirement No. 3: The structure of a resistance movement should be closed.

In principle, the organizational structure of the Forest Brothers matched the environmental circumstances and the goals of the strategy. It was a closed organization that made the inclusion of new members quite difficult, and the connections among the groups were not susceptible to the counter-activities of the security agencies. This is supported by several examples where the attempted elimination of a group as a whole was unsuccessful, or an attack on one group did not lead the security agents to other groups. In other words, there was no "domino effect" among the rest of the units when Forest Brothers were captured. Nevertheless, there were some significant exceptions. For instance, the elimination of Richard Saaliste and his group became possible through the connections of one person whom the authorities had arrested. At the same time, however, other groups were not threatened by the arrest of their members. Because, as a matter of policy, there were no clear terms of subordination or member lists to be discovered, security service investigation records reveal that the security agencies never grasped the structure of the organization, and this hindered them in planning operations. This closed organizational structure thus can be considered a strength of the resistance's strategy and activities.

Security service investigation records reveal that the security agencies never grasped the structure of the Forest Brothers' organization.

When a closed organization is operating in a hostile environment, limiting the information that is available to any individual is of critical importance. Adherence to this rule would have rendered agency work ineffective, but the activity of the Forest Brothers reveals numerous examples where this rule was broadly disregarded. One good example is the case of a legal civilian, a former Estonian officer, who was believed to be a Forest Brother but was actually a Soviet agent. Other Forest Brothers passed information to him that he did not need to know. This breach of discipline enabled the security agencies to largely eliminate three groups of Forest Brothers, including the leader of a 1/3 staff. It should be stressed here that this episode constituted a remarkable violation

of the strategy. At the same time, the organization proved unable to respond to such violations and introduce changes to its activities that would prevent another incident.

Forest Brothers were directed to not trust anyone who had changed their ideological view and gave support to the Communists; all contact was to stop immediately. This guidance, however, mistook the real threat. As described earlier, recruited agents cooperated with the regime not because of ideological principles but most often because their background with the German armed forces or the Home Guard, or with the Forest Brothers themselves, left them and their families vulnerable to threats of deportation. This blind spot meant that the strategy focused on ideological differences to evaluate threats, while the Forest Brothers' actual betrayers were not in fact different from themselves.

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to say how much this instruction was followed during resistance activities and whether doing so resulted in any actual harm to the Forest Brothers. Such an instruction most likely demonstrates the general views of the Forest Brothers—that is, threats were judged on the basis of ideological stances. Adherence to this directive, combined with violations of the rules of confidentiality, however, had potentially catastrophic consequences for the organization. Taking into account the general environment of Estonia at the time, this instruction can be regarded as a deficiency of the strategy.

Despite the instruction given in the strategy that units should operate in an unfamiliar area, this was rarely followed by the Forest Brothers. Most of them were based in their native region, which ensured a better base of material support, access to information, and familiarity with the area of operations. They also enjoyed freedom of movement and a very good overview of the security agencies operating in the area. Although the reasoning behind the strategy's directive is not unsound, the fact that the Forest Brothers largely chose to do the opposite should be seen as a strength.

The requirement to limit the information given to supporters is in large part the same as the rule concerning interactions with legal citizens. Excessive knowledge in the possession of supporters who were arrested served as the basis for successful MGB intelligence work. The Forest Brothers' activities in that area must be regarded as a violation of the strategy.

There are several examples proving that the speed of communications between organizational levels was at least satisfactory. It would likely have served its purpose in the event of war. In addition, the communication network fulfilled security requirements, and, as a result, there is no evidence that it had a negative effect on the activity of the organization. Hence, communication can be regarded as a strength of the strategy and activities.

#### Requirement No. 4: The success of the organization lies in increasing its numbers and fighting.

From the creation of the JORSS organization in 1947 to its eradication in 1949, it maintained contacts with the Estonian resistance according to strategy, so that concentrated armed action could have been organized in case of the outbreak of war. Hence, this aspect must be deemed a strength of the organization.

The factor that put an end to the growth of the resistance movement was the success of the security forces in infiltrating the organization and recruiting

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The tendency for the weaknesses of the strategy to be compounded in practice should be regarded as the reason for the movement's failure.

collaborators, which led to subsequent successful attacks against the Forest Brothers. Hence, while the need to raise additional support that came with an increase in group numbers and agent infiltration were not the only reasons behind the dissolution of the organization, they both played a part in it. The failure of the Forest Brothers in the fight against the Soviet security agencies started with the strategy, which touched on the area of recruitment only briefly. Based on the activity of the Forest Brothers, it can be said that they were successful with regard to the growth of the organization and operational planning, while their weakness lay primarily in poor countermeasures against the work of the security agencies. This weakness manifested mainly in violations of the rules of confidentiality. Accordingly, the tendency for the weaknesses of the strategy to be compounded in practice should be regarded as the reason for the movement's failure.

#### Requirement No. 5: Success depends on short-term as well as long-term organizational decisions.

The maintenance of resistance forces as a long-term decision is a strength of the strategy; however, this was not supported by the short-term activities of the Forest Brothers. Group leaders should have made immediate decisions, for example, to enforce confidentiality or limit attacks against the Soviets, in order to improve the groups' ability to remain in hiding. Opportunities to make such decisions or changes came: 1) after the arrest of Oras in March 1949—the loss of a significant political and operational leader; 2) after the March 1949 deportation of approximately 30,000 people suspected to have connections with the Forest Brothers—a change in the general environment, which heightened fear and insecurity; and 3) after the elimination of the Forest Brothers in the second half of 1949—the success of enemy tactics and agent networks.<sup>26</sup> Despite knowing that the secret police were successfully recruiting among their support base, the Forest Brothers failed to adjust their communications strategies or reevaluate their relations with supporters.

The Forest Brothers' awareness of the security agencies' ongoing activities points to the fact that they had sources in the agencies and elsewhere.

Contacts with individuals working in different Soviet power structures ensured that the resistance movement had access to the data it required for general intelligence-related activities as well as the information needed for personal security. There are several examples in the archives of the resistance's contacts with such people and the information the Forest Brothers received from them. Furthermore, the Forest Brothers' awareness of the security agencies' ongoing activities points to the fact that they had sources in the agencies and elsewhere in the Soviet power structures. Despite the eventual dissolution of the organization, their intelligence activity within the Soviet power structures can be regarded as a strength of the activity.

#### Summary

The primary objective of the JORSS strategy—survival of the Forest Brothers as an armed force for the purpose of war between the Western countries and the Soviet Union—based on an understanding of the resistance's capabilities, can be considered a strength of the strategy. The strategy thus identified three desired outcomes. Achieving them would have made it possible to support the overthrow of Soviet rule in the Estonian SSR in the event of a larger war.<sup>27</sup>

The first outcome required to accomplish the strategic objective of organizational survival was to avoid direct contact with the security agencies and other armed structures. This excluded any attack on the Soviet armed forces or

their bases. Armed actions were mostly aimed at replenishing the supply base. Attacks against collaborators or leaders at the local government level were not regulated, but they were avoided by and large as well.

Both spying on the security agencies to increase personal safety and adherence to rules of confidentiality certainly played an important part in the strategy, but these were not regulated in the strategy in detail. In order to mobilize the armed forces of the Forest Brothers in the event of war, the JORSS leadership, specifically the staff branches, had to make contact with different groups and individuals, and establish constant communication. For them to undertake concentrated armed warfare, military support from the Western countries was deemed crucial.

To undertake concentrated armed warfare, military support from the Western countries was deemed crucial.

The second outcome set for the JORSS organization was to convince the population to join in the effort to overthrow Soviet rule, as well as hinder the Soviets' mobilization within the Estonian SSR in the event of a war. To attain that outcome, the strategy emphasized spreading political propaganda among the inhabitants, including the dissemination of international anti-Soviet news. Gathering information on the attitudes of the population likely served the same purpose.

The third outcome was to gather information on the situation in the Estonian SSR with regard to population, economy, armed units, and public order and relay it to the Estonian expatriates to help the Western countries prepare for war.

From 1947 on, the Forest Brothers largely performed the tasks set in the JORSS strategy. The research for this study has uncovered some facts that suggest that the scope of the organization, both geographically and with regard to the number of individuals and groups, was probably much greater than the 130 people identified in the thesis. Groups had stable contacts that would have made it possible to bring them together at short notice to support the military action of the Western countries. The author estimates that the high point of operational alertness was from summer 1948 to autumn 1949. Despite the enemy's superiority with regard to weapons and personnel, the Forest Brothers operated effectively during that period, both in staying hidden and in their attacks on state enterprises, institutions, and Soviet activists.

The Forest Brothers' success was aided by years of experience, familiarity with the local environment and remarkably good connections in the security agencies, which made it possible to avoid anti-resistance operations. The connections are illustrated by their awareness of enemy activities as well as relative freedom to move over distances of dozens of kilometers—during daytime, on roads, and by public transportation. The large relative importance of working for local residents as a way to replenish their supplies and win support is also remarkable.

In that period of just over a year, the Forest Brothers were also active in disseminating political information. They compiled informative written materials in a deliberate and coordinated



The lack of personal security turned people's attention away from the ideology of national independence and toward personal survival.

manner, from foreign media channels and personal observations made in Estonia. The author estimates that the level of activity in the field of strategic intelligence, where the data requested by Saaliste was being gathered, was just as high. Given the objective of the strategy—to win over the population—these areas in particular should be highlighted in a positive sense, because the preparations were meant for war, not for the immediate overthrow of Soviet rule. Such activity was much better suited to the strategic goals and opportunities provided by the environment than direct armed conflicts with the Soviet authorities.

Strategic weaknesses, however, developed into catastrophic flaws in practice. As the security agencies realized the ineffectiveness of their counter-resistance strategy, despite having much greater numbers of personnel, the MGB began to focus increasingly on intelligence work. The experience its agents had gained in earlier years and from other regions of the Soviet Union certainly helped. In the author's opinion, the environment of the Estonian SSR was extremely fruitful for counter-resistance activities in 1949. The continually changing social order, the deteriorating economic situation, and the lack of personal security turned people's attention away from the ideology of national independence and toward personal survival. Individuals who had served in the German army or Home Guard, or who had once been Forest Brothers, were excellent targets for agency recruitment due to their compromising past and the ensuing fear of persecution. Such individuals, of course, most likely still harbored anti-Soviet views and were not a particular threat to the Forest Brothers. Nevertheless, the road to success for the secret police was paved by the aforementioned lack of specificity in the JORSS strategy, the organization's unresponsive leadership, and repeated violations of confidentiality in practice.

The systematic, patient, and ruthless activity of the Soviet security agencies—still despised in Estonia to this day—eradicated practically the entire resistance organization between autumn 1949 and spring 1950. Although some experienced leaders of the Forest Brothers survived, the steady losses meant yet more shattered hopes for the so-called rank-and-file members and supporters, and they began to focus more of their attention on personal welfare than on resistance.

The reasons behind the defeat of the Forest Brothers' movement, as this article shows, are different from the assumptions commonly held by historians today. The movement's failure was not directly caused by the loss of people's support, the March deportation of 1949 and the resulting increase in the number of those in hiding, nor the superiority of the security agencies with regard to personnel and weaponry. The main reason was that the group violated the rules of confidentiality to a remarkable extent, which gave the security forces excellent opportunities to plan exact strikes. Or to put it even more simply: the reason behind the eradication of the Forest Brothers lies in the betrayals committed by those who found themselves betrayed. ❖

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Colonel Martin Herem**, Estonian Defense Forces, currently serves as commander of the Estonian National Defence College.

## NOTES

- 1 This article is based on the author's master's thesis, "Analysis of the Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers: The Forest Brothers Organized by R. Saaliste between 1947 and 1950" (Estonian National Defence College, Tallinn, 2012).
- 2 During the Soviet occupation of Estonia from 1945 until the end of the 1980s, this topic was taboo for researchers and historians. Only in the last 20 years or so has new research come to light regarding this period of Estonia's history.
- 3 It should be noted here that this abbreviation was used among the Forest Brothers only for radio communications. They did not themselves use that acronym to identify their operations.
- 4 William Bender and Craig L. Johnson, "How Men Rebel: An Organisational Model for Insurgency" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, 1995): <http://calhoun.nps.edu/public/handle/10945/31274>
- 5 See Herem, "Analysis of the Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers."
- 6 Decree of the Estonian SSR Minister of State Security, "Võitluse tugevdamiseks relvastatud natsionalistlike bandedega ENSV territooriumil ("For a more vigorous fight against armed nationalist gangs on the territory of the Estonian SSR"). ERAF.131SM.1.122: 44–53. These documents are from the Estonian State Archives. Among them are official Soviet orders, guidance, reports, summaries, etc. concerning the organization, and also the personal trial records of Forest Brothers. Most of these were top-secret documents during the Soviet regime, but today they are available for research.
- 7 Such expressions were used in the Soviet security agencies.
- 8 This could be called the "criminalization of resistance." J. Burds, *Sovetskaja agentura. Otsberki istorii SSSR v poslevoennõje godõ 1944–1948* (Moscow and New York: Sovremennaja istoria, 2006), 30.
- 9 Mao Tse-tung (Mao Zedong), *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung: On Protracted War* (May 1938): [http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_09.htm](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm)
- 10 J.R. Misiunas, R. Taagepera, *Balti riigid: Sõlтеаastad 1940-1990* (Tallinn: Koolibri, 1997), 85–86.
- 11 P. Kuusk, *Nõukogude võimu lahingud Eesti vastupanuliikumisega. anditismivastase Võitluse Osakond aastatel 1944–1947* (Tartu: University of Tartu Press, 2007).
- 12 T. Tannberg, "Relvastatud vastupanuliikumine Eestis aastatel 1944-1953 julgeolekuorganite statistikapeeglis," *Tuna*, no. 1 (1999), 24–30.
- 13 According to my research on this subject, it appears that most of those who were murdered were previously warned to cease their collaboration. This warning might take the form of a beating. If the targeted individuals continued to help the Soviets, they were killed. Collaboration with the regime at some levels, however, was ineluctable—somebody had to organize local life, which meant accepting an appointment from the occupation authorities. This in itself was not a reason to be killed. Murder was likely only if a person took actions that harmed locals or betrayed the Forest Brothers. For example, the director of a local collective farm or chairman of the local government was usually not attacked, despite working for the regime. But if he helped deport people in 1949, or collected information about locals whose family members were in the forest, he risked being killed.
- 14 Tannberg, "Relvastatud vastupanuliikumine Eestis aastatel 1944–1953": 24–30.
- 15 For example, the Basque ETA separatists have carried out approximately 3,000 attacks that killed 829 people over a 40-year period. See Spain's Ministry of the Interior, "Ultimas victimas mortales de ETA: Cuadros estadísticos": [http://www.interior.gob.es/prentsa-3/balantzepak-21/ultimas-victimimas-mortales-de-eta-cuadros-estadisticos-630?set\\_locale=es](http://www.interior.gob.es/prentsa-3/balantzepak-21/ultimas-victimimas-mortales-de-eta-cuadros-estadisticos-630?set_locale=es)
- 16 In this regard, it is likely that they had a structure with a clear hierarchy and chain of command in mind, rather than a loosely affiliated organization as defined in this study.
- 17 V. Oras, ERAF.129SM.1.23845: 215–218; ERAF.130SM.1.9329, vol. 6: 60.
- 18 V.N. Bogdanov, S.P. Osabtšev, and V.V. Terehov, "Armija i vnutrennõje voiska v protivopovstanskeskoj i protivopartizanskoj borbe. Mirovoi opõt i sovremennost," *Glavnoe komandovanie vnutrennõh voisk MVD, Rossii, Institut voennoji istorii, Ministerstva oboronõ Rossiskoi Federatsii, Moscow, 1997: 48.*
- 19 A.F. Lykke, Jr., "Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy," in Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb, Jr., eds., *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, U.S. Army War College, 1995: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/00354.pdf>
- 20 In statements, V. Oras mentioned the intention to receive radiograms by means of an ordinary radio. ERAF.130SM.1.9329, vol. 6: 74.
- 21 Richard Saaliste was reportedly in contact with the captain and major in charge of the other two 1/3 staffs. In summer 1949 he allegedly met with Major Lilleleht, who may have been the major in question.
- 22 Bogdanov et al., "Armija i vnutrennõje voiska": 52.
- 23 "Al-Qaeda Organizational Structure," *Global Security*: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/al-qaida-structure.htm>
- 24 See Herem, "Analysis of the Strategy and Activity of the Forest Brothers," Appendix 3, "Forest Brothers in the JORSS organization."
- 25 Note that these 130 people were only those I found to be in communication with a staff branch and available to be mobilized at the outbreak of war. At this time, however, as noted earlier, there were thousands of rebels hiding in the forests. A larger study would reveal a much more extended network than what my research uncovered.
- 26 From July 1949 to April 1950, approximately 75% of those 130 key people in the organization were eliminated. Every month somebody was taken, and every time it happened there was a secret service recruit behind it.
- 27 The fact that this war never came, and that the Forest Brothers were thus doomed to failure no matter how well they adhered to the JORSS strategy, has to be seen in the context of the time. It was impossible for the anti-Soviet resistance to overthrow their oppressors without outside help, but it was equally impossible for them to give up and simply surrender. Both in the Soviet Union and across Europe, talk was of a coming invasion by the Western allies. The hopes of those living under Soviet occupation were particularly high after the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in April 1949. Thus the Forest Brothers' only course of action, even if they began to feel betrayed, was to survive as long as possible in the belief that war was imminent.

## Cutting the Link between Illegal Drugs and Terrorists

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The nexus between some terrorist organizations and the illegal drug trade has broadened since the end of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> According to a recent study, “The illegal drug trade is estimated to turn over more than \$330 billion annually,”<sup>2</sup> and terrorist organizations have actively participated in this trade.<sup>3</sup> In order to combat terrorist activities effectively, counterterrorism forces and agencies should address the question of funding, of which drug trafficking is a main source. Drug traffickers around the world require assistance from groups that have military skills, weapons, access to clandestine networks, and safe havens. While “opiates and cocaine remain the most problematic drugs across the globe,”<sup>4</sup> this article looks at only opiates, as they are the most profitable and lethal illicit drugs.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) 2012 World Drug Report states that Afghanistan generates 63% of the world’s poppy crop.<sup>5</sup> Of the 75–80 metric tons of heroin trafficked to Europe in 2009, 60 metric tons were transferred along a route through the Balkans with the direct involvement of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party, a militant Kurdish separatist group active primarily in Turkey and Iraq), which has emerged as a major drug trafficker.<sup>6</sup> This article spotlights the opium–heroin trafficking link between the primary terrorist organization operating in Afghanistan, the Taliban, and the group reaping the highest benefit from the heroin trade in Europe, the PKK.<sup>7</sup>

None of the studies we looked at tried to identify vulnerable links in the drug trafficking chain.

During our research, we found a gap in the data concerning the exact value of money being generated by these terrorist organizations through the drug trade. In addition, none of the studies we looked at tried to identify vulnerable links in the drug trafficking chain, the targeting of which might cut one of the terrorist organizations’ primary revenue streams. With these two analytical gaps guiding us, we first identified five stages in the illicit drug trafficking process: cultivation, processing, shipment, sale, and consumption. The study then calculates the extent of the Taliban’s and the PKK’s involvement in each of these five stages. This research creates a counter-narcoterrorist model that displays weak and vulnerable links in the narcotics supply chain, which we use to propose countermeasures and present ways to reduce the funding these terrorist groups are gaining through illicit drug trafficking.

### The Opium Nexus Between the Taliban and the PKK

According to our calculation, the Taliban earn approximately \$530–570 million annually from the illegal cultivation, processing, and shipment of opium and heroin.

Determining how much the Taliban benefit from the drug trade each year is a matter of great debate, and estimates range from \$30–200 million (all figures are given in U.S. dollars).<sup>8</sup> Since the Taliban do not keep records in either handwritten or digital form, it is unlikely that their drug earnings can be calculated with complete accuracy. Nevertheless, the 2009 UNODC report, “Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium,” estimated that a decade ago the Taliban earned \$75–100 million

per year by taxing opium poppy cultivation; however, since 2005, the Taliban have earned \$90–160 million per year from the taxes they collect on opium production and trade.<sup>9</sup> According to our calculation, the Taliban earn approximately \$530–570 million annually from the cultivation, processing, and shipment of opium and heroin. The breakdown of this money stream is illustrated in Figure 1.

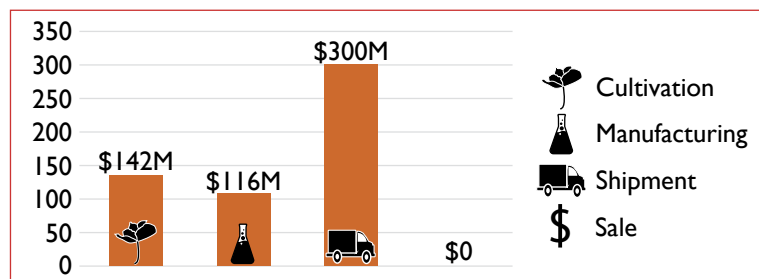


Figure 1: Breakdown of the Taliban's Annual Opium Revenue

After leaving Afghanistan, opium travels to different parts of the world. Although the highest demand is in Asia, the greatest profit is generated in the European market. The main route from Afghanistan to Europe is via Iran and Turkey to the Balkan region. It is along this route that the PKK run the most active smuggling operation and where they gain the highest profit. There are numerous estimates of the PKK's revenue derived from the illegal drug trade, varying from \$50 million to \$2.5 billion.<sup>10</sup> According to our calculation, using figures from the 2010 UNODC report, "The Globalization of Crime: A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment," the PKK generates approximately \$600–700 million annually from the heroin trade. Figure 2 depicts the breakdown of this revenue stream.

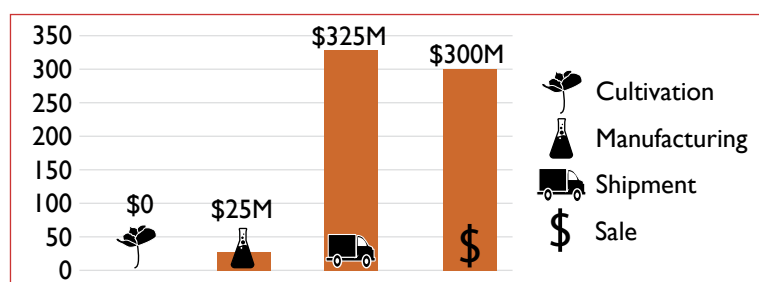


Figure 2: Breakdown of the PKK's Annual Opium Revenue

### Cultivation

Heroin is produced from the sap of the opium poppy, a flowering plant that blossoms in warm, dry climates. The plant requires a growing period of six to seven months and is generally cultivated in the ungoverned zones of countries with a weak central government. The main reason farmers engage in opium cultivation despite its illegality is the incomparable profits involved in this business.<sup>11</sup> The most suitable places for its cultivation are Afghanistan and the so-called Golden Triangle, the mountainous region shared by Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> According to the 2012 UNODC report, Afghanistan remains the main country for opium poppy cultivation, and accounts for two thirds of the global opium crop.<sup>13</sup>

Recent UNODC statistics have shown that between 2008 and 2012, opium cultivation increased in the Taliban-controlled regions of Afghanistan. The Taliban provide protection and support to Afghan farmers to cultivate their poppy crops and then tax the yield. Gretchen Peters stated that the Taliban collect a 10% tax or tithe (called *ushr* in Arabic) from the poppy farmers in their area of control, and this percentage of taxation is applicable at the farm level.<sup>14</sup> In addition to the profit the Taliban make by taxing farmers, they apparently also have started growing poppy on their own, despite professed religious scruples. This poppy cultivation is done covertly by the Taliban, and they avoid portraying themselves as opium farmers. (While the Taliban clearly play an active role in opium production, this study did not find any evidence that the PKK participate in the opium cultivation phase.) The UNODC estimated that the Afghan opium yield in 2011 was 5,800 metric tons, of which 98% came from Taliban-controlled regions. The 2011 average farm-gate price of raw opium was \$250 per kg in Afghanistan.<sup>15</sup> This means that the Taliban netted approximately \$142 million from the 2011 opium crop alone. The

Although the highest demand for opium is in Asia, the greatest profit is generated in the European market.

The Taliban provide protection and support to Afghan farmers to cultivate their poppy crops and then tax the yield.



equation for calculating the Taliban’s revenue from opium cultivation is shown as follows.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 10\% \text{ of opium production in kg} & & 580,000 \\
 \% \text{ of opium cultivated on land under Taliban control} & \times & 0.98 \\
 \text{Farm gate price of opium in \$/kg} & \times & 250 \\
 \text{Cultivation revenue (2011)} & = & \underline{142,100,000}
 \end{array}$$

### Processing

The cumbersome process of turning raw opium tar into pure heroin consists of nine stages: extracting morphine from the raw opium; separating the morphine solution from the water-insoluble opium components; treatment of the water-insoluble opium constituents; precipitation, isolation, and drying of the morphine; conversion of the morphine into heroin base; precipitation and isolation of the brown heroin base; purification of the brown heroin base; precipitation and isolation of the white heroin base; and conversion of the heroin base to heroin hydrochloride, the drug sold on the street.<sup>16</sup>

The Taliban also tax drug processors according to the amount of refined end product they produce. There are different types of opium products, such as raw opium, morphine base, and refined heroin, and the level of taxation varies for the different products. In 2011, total heroin production in Afghanistan was estimated at around 467 metric tons.<sup>17</sup> According to Gretchen Peters, the Taliban control more than 50 laboratories within Afghanistan, and levy a tax of \$250 for every kilogram of refined heroin that comes out (morphine base is taxed at a slightly lesser rate).<sup>18</sup> Thus, in 2011 the Taliban collected approximately \$116 million from the refining process. The equation for calculating the Taliban’s revenue in heroin production is depicted as follows.

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \text{Heroin processed in kg} & & 467,000 \\
 \% \text{ of heroin labs under the Taliban control} & \times & 1.00 \\
 \text{Revenue charged by the Taliban: \$/kg} & \times & 250 \\
 \text{Processing revenue} & = & \underline{116,750,000}
 \end{array}$$

The PKK also directly or indirectly involve themselves in opium processing operations. They either own or tax the drug laboratories situated in regions under their control. The U.S. Treasury Department has evidence that the PKK process morphine base they receive from Afghanistan into heroin at laboratories situated in Turkey, and that they then sell their product to distributors throughout Europe.<sup>19</sup> Table 1 depicts the UNODC data on opium products from Afghanistan.

Table 1: Potential Illicit Production of Opium and Manufacture of Heroin in Tons of Unknown Purity, 2004–2011

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Total potential opium production	4850	4620	6610	8890	8641	7853	4736	6995
Potential opium not processed into heroin	1197	1169	2056	3411	3080	2898	1728	3400
Potential opium processed into heroin	3653	3451	4555	5479	5561	4955	3008	3595
Total potential heroin manufacture	529	472	629	757	752	667	384	467

The UNODC estimated that the Afghan opium yield in 2011 was 5,800 metric tons, of which 98% came from Taliban-controlled regions.

According to our calculation, the PKK generate approximately \$25 million annually from heroin processing.

According to our calculation, the PKK generate approximately \$25 million annually from heroin processing. The equation for calculating this revenue is depicted as follows.

Heroin processed in kg		50,000
% of heroin labs under PKK control	×	1.00
Tax charged by the PKK: \$/kg heroin	×	500
Processing revenue	=	25,000,000

## Shipment

Shipment refers to the movement of heroin from the laboratory where the opium was processed to the point of sale. There are three main routes for moving opium out of Afghanistan to where it will be processed into heroin, and the Taliban either control these routes or provide protection and diversion tactics to ensure safe movement of the opium. This stage is the node within the drug trafficking process whereby the Taliban generate the highest revenue, which, according to our calculations, comes to approximately \$300 million annually. The equation for calculating the Taliban's revenue from heroin shipment is depicted as follows.

Heroin shipped from the Taliban-controlled regions in kg		360,000
Rate of transport protection fees: \$/kg	×	850
Shipment revenue	=	\$306,000,000

The shipping stage is the node within the drug trafficking process whereby the Taliban generate the highest revenue.

According to Sedat Laciner, the PKK have taken advantage of their good luck at being located along the drug smuggling route of the "Golden Crescent," between the opium-producing East and the heroin-consuming West.<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Freedman and Matthew Levitt noted that the PKK get their highest profit by taxing the drug smugglers in regions under their control, and this taxation serves as a crucial income source for the group.<sup>22</sup> According to our calculations, the PKK generate approximately \$325 million annually from the shipping of heroin, in addition to wholesale revenue.<sup>23</sup> The numbers in the calculation of heroin shipment revenue shown below are for Norway, a country we chose at random to represent all European countries. However, we use a similar procedure for calculating the PKK's revenue generated from the rest of the European countries. In our calculation, the wholesale revenue is added to the shipment revenue because the heroin has not yet reached the consumers.



Total heroin (kg) trafficked on the Balkan Route		80,000
Est. PKK's traffic share at the Turkish border	×	0.8
Taxation rate	×	0.1
Percentage value of heroin smuggled by the PKK	×	0.2
\$/1 kg of heroin in the Afghan wholesale market	×	2400
Taxation revenue from shipping	=	3,072,000

PLUS

Kg of heroin entering a European country (figure for Norway)		1000
Prevalence ratios of users in Norway	×	0.0003
Population of Norway aged 15–64 <sup>24</sup>	×	2,195,734
(Total population of Kurdish diaspora in Norway)	×	(3,182,224/12,447)
Est. market share of the PKK	×	0.0073
(If diaspora ratio < 0.005, est. wholesale share for PKK (1-retail share for PKK))	×	0.0025
Wholesale price of heroin for Norway (\$/kg)	×	22,120
Wholesale revenue	=	\$ 6,798,566

Sales

Sales are the middle node between shippers and consumers, and involve both the wholesale and retail drug markets. The Taliban actively involve themselves by either taxing drug traders or directly engaging in the growing and processing of opium; however, they always tend to separate themselves from selling these illicit drugs. According to Peters' survey, local people acknowledge the Taliban's role in the drug trade; however, they categorically deny the Taliban's direct involvement in the sale of heroin.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, this research does not find that the Taliban gained any revenue from the sale of heroin.

The PKK are actively involved in heroin sales across Europe, utilizing the Kurdish diaspora to control the street-level sales of illegal drugs in the European market.<sup>26</sup> They also tax other drug sellers, and generally control nearly all of the European heroin market. Even Kurdish children 10 to 15 years old are involved in selling drugs in many European cities.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, the heavy PKK involvement in the drug trade is evidenced by the number of PKK members who are arrested for criminal activity in various European cities and in Turkey.<sup>28</sup> According to our calculations, the PKK earn approximately \$300 million annually from street sales of heroin.<sup>29</sup> The figures we use to calculate sales revenue in the equation below are again for Norway only, although we use a procedure similar to the previous equation to calculate the PKK's revenue generated from the rest of the European countries.

Amount of heroin (kgs) reaching Europe (figures for Norway)		1000
Prevalence ratios of users for Norway	×	0.0003
Population of Norway aged 15–64	×	2,195,734
(Total population of Kurdish diaspora in Norway)	×	(3,182,224/12,447)
Est. percentage of market control for PKK	×	0.0073
If diaspora ratio ≥ 0.005, then PKK est. retail share, otherwise, "0"	×	0.0021
Retail price of heroin in Europe × 1000 (tons into kgs)	×	45 × 1000
Street level sales revenue	=	\$ 11,617,802

The PKK utilize the Kurdish diaspora to control the street-level sales of illegal drugs and control nearly all the European heroin market.

Even Kurdish children 10 to 15 years old are involved in selling drugs in many European cities.



## Consumption

Consumption is the last step in the illegal drug trafficking process and completes the supply-and-demand chain. A United Nations estimate of annual opiate consumption from 1998 to 2008 reveals a global increase of 34.5%, from 12.9 million people in 1998 to 17.35 million people in 2008.<sup>30</sup> According to the 2012 UNODC report, there are approximately 21 million opiate users worldwide, suggesting an increase of 21% in consumers from 2008 to 2012.<sup>31</sup> The main reason for such an increase in consumption is the decreasing prices of these illicit drugs.<sup>32</sup>

If members of the Taliban consumed heroin, it could be a financial drain on their organization. However, according to the Taliban ideology and their version of Islam, the consumption of any opiate is prohibited, while the production and trade of opium to non-Muslims are allowed.<sup>33</sup>

The PKK encourage people to consume illicit drugs because of the enormous revenue generated; selling heroin to drug addicts helps fulfill the organization's political objectives. According to Hasim Soylemez, two drug dealers confessed that the PKK give drugs to young people in the east and southeast parts of Turkey as a reward for participating in pro-PKK demonstrations. In the Hakkari district, the average age of drug consumers is 14 years old, and an estimated 45% of the children around this age are addicted to illegal substances.<sup>34</sup> Over the long run, it seems likely that the PKK would suffer a significant cost from this behavior, if nearly half of the population of potential new recruits to their organization are heroin addicts.

## Counter-Narcoterrorism Solution Model

The process of narcotics trafficking diverges or converges at each stage of the production-trafficking chain. Figure 3 displays the counter-narcoterrorism model from opium cultivation to street-level sale. What it makes clear is that the opium from widespread poppy fields converges at a few countable and targetable morphine/heroin processing labs. The opium products then follow an increasingly divergent path from the processing to the marketing stage. This path also splits into smaller sub-nodes as it moves from smuggler to distributor to street pusher to user, which make effective interdiction very difficult. It is important to note that the heroin processing stage is the only stage in the chain where the paths of raw material, processor, and smuggler converge into a relatively few targetable facilities. Therefore, this model proposes that the processing stage should be targeted for interdiction.

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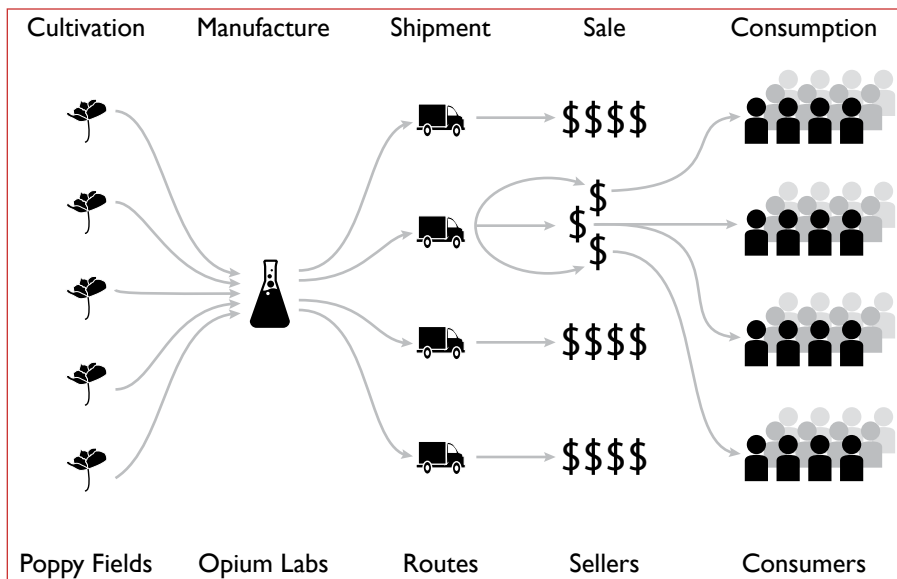


Figure 3: Counter-Narcoterrorism Solution Model

Although the processing stage only accounts for approximately one fifth of the total opium revenue appropriated by the Taliban, disrupting it can cut the Taliban’s resource stream through the rest of the drug trafficking chain. If less heroin were available from Afghanistan, the PKK’s funding stream would be substantially reduced as well. The PKK are comparatively less vulnerable in the processing stage of the drug trafficking chain, however, because they tax or run only a few heroin processing labs. Nevertheless, this model suggests that any increase in the PKK’s involvement in the heroin processing stage would make them relatively more vulnerable to counterterrorism efforts.

### Recommendations

The countermeasures that will affect these two terrorist organizations the most involve reducing their drug money. This article demonstrates that both the Taliban and the PKK gain huge amounts of money from the heroin trade. Therefore, there is a strong need to combat the illegal opium trade as a counterterrorism measure, and it requires a long-term commitment, policy amendments, and effective law enforcement efforts.

### Targeting the Processing Stage

According to this article’s findings, targeting the heroin processing stage is not only cost effective, but also a viable option. Compared to other stages in the drug trade, this stage is the only one where the product streams converge into countable and targetable facilities. Targeting the cultivation, shipment, and sales stages requires comparatively more resources than would the destruction of the laboratories; so far, these strategies have also proven ineffective, given that supplies remain high and prices low at the consumer level. Attacking the processing laboratories also substantially reduces both the Taliban’s and the PKK’s drug revenues, since it directly affects the rest of the drug trafficking chain.

Through intelligence, the exact locations of the heroin laboratories can be traced. The laboratories located within the better-governed zones should be targeted with the combined help of local and international law enforcement agencies. The main aim of this type of ground raid is to physically destroy the labs and make them permanently unusable. The labs located in ungoverned zones should be targeted by international coalition air strikes.

Heroin manufacturing requires specific precursor chemicals, which originate primarily in Europe. Therefore, there is a strong need for an international policy that puts more stringent controls on precursors as dual-use substances. These chemicals should be treated in a similar manner to legal drugs that are also used for illicit purposes. By stopping the precursors from reaching the

Targeting the heroin processing stage is not only cost effective, but also a viable option.

heroin laboratories, the processing stage will become very difficult. In order to develop a strategy for seizing illegal shipments of precursors, it will be necessary to identify the agents, and the possible routes and methods of transportation, and subsequently launch a comprehensive attack against all nodes of clandestine precursor shipment.

### Policy Measures

Despite the concentrated efforts of international agencies and governments, there is no evidence of success against narcoterrorism. An ongoing program run by several international organizations that offers alternative livelihoods to farmers should be continued as an effective and long-term narcoterrorism countermeasure. This policy decreases the amount of opium yield, which reduces the funds going to terrorist organizations. The other strategic effect of this policy is to erode much-needed popular support for the Taliban terrorist organization. The eradication of poppy crops can be a part of the policy, but it must be implemented only in areas that are free of terrorist activities and where sufficiently remunerative alternatives are available to the farmers.

### Conclusion

This article illustrates the extent to which two terrorist organizations, the Taliban and the PKK, raise funds in the five stages of the heroin trade: cultivation, processing, shipment, sale, and consumption. The Taliban and the PKK generate huge amounts of money from the opium trade. The Taliban make most of their money from the cultivation, processing, and shipment stages; the PKK mostly earn their funds from the shipment and sale of heroin. These two terrorist organizations have their peculiar strengths and weaknesses, some of which are identified in this article. The identification of weak and potentially vulnerable links between terrorist organizations and drug trafficking can help law enforcement, drug control, and financial oversight agencies effectively combat this menace.

The counter-narcoterrorism solution model displays both the convergent and divergent stages of the opium trade. The processing stage is the only stage where the products converge into countable and targetable laboratories. This model demonstrates that targeting the opium-to-heroin processing laboratories is not only cost effective, but also reduces both the Taliban's and PKK's illegal funding streams. This model can be applied to other terrorist organizations and other illicit drugs as a means to identify and reduce the funds generated through drug trafficking.

Lastly, this article does not try to solve drug abuse problems but attempts to demonstrate a cost-effective way to reduce the funds received by terrorist organizations through illegal drug trafficking. It provides a direction for intelligence work, and describes a particularly vulnerable stage at which to effectively target narcoterrorism. The question of who, how, and when is open for further study. ❖

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An ongoing program that offers alternative livelihoods to farmers should be continued as an effective and long-term narcoterrorism countermeasure.

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## Human Rights as a Weapon of Terrorists: A Case Study

HUMAN RIGHTS ARE RECOGNIZED WORLDWIDE AS A MEANS TO PROTECT the individual from abuses and to guarantee each and every human being the freedom to pursue his own prerogatives.<sup>1</sup> The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was written in the midst of the French Revolution, and was followed by the Declaration of Human Rights issued by the U.N. in 1948, shortly after the Second World War. Nowadays, in what we can call the “human rights era,” it is almost inconceivable to object to the doctrine of human rights. It can often seem, however, as if every question or attempt at thoughtful debate on that sensitive issue will be considered by someone to be an offense against human rights themselves.

Given the current climate, then, the present article is likely to be considered controversial. The intent of this paper is to demonstrate that the doctrine of human rights can be misused, even abused, by some groups to advance their own agendas. In this context, human rights can become a weapon to advance obscure political movements that legitimize violence, limit the ability of the state to meet its legitimate obligation of protecting its citizens, and undermine the nation’s prestige. I will show how terrorist organizations, like modern Robespierres, wave the flag of human rights while mercilessly decapitating people with the contemporary guillotine of terrorism.

The case I examine in this article is Colombia, my country of origin, a nation that has been dealing with an internal conflict for the past 50 years. I concentrate specifically on the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*, or Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the terrorist insurgent group that has confronted the Colombian government since 1964 in its aim to establish a revolutionary state founded on Marxist-Leninist principles. The article is divided into three main parts: first, a brief orientation to the FARC for the unfamiliar reader; second, a description of the actors and the FARC’s strategy; and third, an explanation of the ways in which the strategy operates to achieve the FARC’s goals. Through this discussion, I demonstrate that the FARC systematically uses the issue of human rights to achieve three goals: advance its political agenda, constrain the state’s legitimate use of force, and undermine the image and prestige of the country.

A priori, this article does not aim to dig into the details of the Colombian conflict. This long-lasting struggle has gone through many stages involving multiple actors, and has caused irreparable damage among Colombia’s population, many of whom have been affected by the abuses of the terrorists, and sometimes of the government itself.

### Putting the FARC into Historical Context

The FARC traces its roots to the bipartisan struggle known as *La Violencia* (the Violence, 1948–1958), a bitter confrontation between the two traditional political parties in Colombia, the Liberal and Conservative parties. The FARC

*LTC Jorge Galindo Cardenas,  
Colombian Army*

Human rights can become a weapon to advance obscure political movements that legitimize violence.

The FARC systematically uses the issue of human rights to advance its political agenda and constrain the state’s legitimate use of force.



The FARC embraced a Marxist-Leninist philosophy of protracted class struggle—a credo that it still defends.

Despite the opportunity to abandon violence, the FARC never fully demobilized.

The FARC formed a partner relationship with some drug cartels, but it eventually became a major competitor.

contends it is the legitimate successor to an organized peasant movement that resisted government-led persecution during *La Violencia*. Although an agreement ended the confrontation between the conflict’s two main factions,<sup>2</sup> the FARC embraced a Marxist-Leninist philosophy of protracted class struggle—a credo that it still defends—and continued to fight against government forces.

During the 1970s, the FARC pursued the “growing and equilibrium phase” of insurgency according to Mao Zedong’s theory of peasant revolution.<sup>3</sup> The movement reached its peak during the 1980s, in parallel with multiple revolutionary movements throughout Latin America. In 1985, the FARC partially accepted a demobilization plan and created a new political party, the *Union Patriótica* (Patriotic Union), which won seats in Congress and occupied various government positions. Despite this opportunity to abandon violence, the FARC never fully demobilized; the group instead used its political wing to further the Marxist principle of combining all forms of struggle.

The end of the Cold War in 1989–1990 had both ideological and economic effects on the organization. What limited funding the FARC received from Communist bloc countries, primarily the Soviet Union and Cuba, dried up. Given the failure of communism as a global political movement and the need to alter their ideology and rhetoric accordingly, the FARC’s leaders adopted a Bolivarian program, presenting themselves as heirs to the ideas of the Latin American liberator Simón Bolívar. Around this time, the FARC also began to rely much more heavily on a funding source that it had begun exploiting in the 1980s: narco-trafficking.<sup>4</sup>

In the late 1980s, the Colombian government, with help from the United States, began a campaign to eradicate the big drug cartels. The FARC, which initially had taxed coca production and provided protection to farmers and smugglers, seized the opportunity to take over a larger share of the country’s cocaine trafficking. The FARC had a tempestuous relationship with the Colombian drug cartels. At the beginning of its entry into the narco-trafficking business, the FARC formed a partner relationship with some cartels, but it eventually became a major competitor. The rivalry resulted in the merciless persecution and assassination of political representatives, and the disappearance of the *Union Patriótica*. The FARC has since become the dominant organization in the Colombian cocaine industry.<sup>5</sup> Thus, what started out as a Marxist-Leninist organization became a narco-trafficking cartel.



Over its history, the terrorist group has joined six failed attempts to achieve a peace agreement with the Colombian government. The FARC took advantage of these brief respites from combat to increase its military power and number of operatives, as well as to gain some international recognition.<sup>6</sup> Beginning in the early 2000s, with the start of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror and the implementation of the Colombian government program called “Democratic Security” (2002–2011), the FARC faced its most difficult period to date, losing its top leadership and significant numbers of personnel to army operations. In late 2012, FARC leaders once again entered peace talks with the Colombian government; these talks are ongoing in 2013.<sup>7</sup> To put it another way, the FARC’s recent significant losses have forced it back to the negotiating table.

The FARC’s recent significant losses have forced it back to the negotiating table.

The success of the Democratic Security program rested on the willingness of the government to confront the FARC, not only by military means, but also by making a decisive effort to bring a positive state presence to the most remote parts of the country. It was based on three principles: the expanded presence of the state, generosity toward demobilized combatants, and a refusal to negotiate under threat of violence. This move by the government was different from previous attempts to confront the insurgency because it encompassed both the military and civilian sectors, while severely restricting the FARC’s political space within Colombia and abroad.

In summary, the FARC is a powerful drug cartel that was militarily decimated as an insurgency. It nevertheless remains extremely resilient, despite being generally unpopular within Colombia (a recent poll gave the group less than 30% approval)<sup>8</sup> and having very remote prospects for achieving its main ambition of overthrowing the government. As a result, the FARC has again refined its strategy: it stubbornly persists in all forms of struggle to advance the group’s interests, mixing such apparently disparate means as violence and terrorism with calls for human rights protections. I explain the motivations and facts underlying this assertion in the next section.

In summary, the FARC is a powerful drug cartel that was militarily decimated as an insurgency.

## Network and Narrative: The Structure to Advance a Political Agenda

The FARC takes advantage of two basic structures that it uses to manipulate human rights as an instrument of its agenda. First is a solid and well-connected personnel infrastructure that I call “the FARC Network,” and second is a consistent and repetitive public discourse that I call “the FARC Narrative.” With these two elements, the FARC has a high chance of success in achieving its intended aims. The FARC has been very resilient throughout its history and still pursues its objective of taking political power, either by violence (which has only the remotest possibility for success), or by following the Leninist principle of combining all forms of struggle—armed, political, and popular. This principle is directly relevant to the current analysis.

The FARC strategy mixes such apparently disparate means as violence and terrorism with calls for human rights protections.

When the doctrine of human rights comes to mind in our contemporary world, it is typically closely associated with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). I define the doctrine of human rights here as the insistence of many individuals, organizations, and institutions on viewing everything they do from the one-sided view of human rights, and using these rights for political purposes rather than authentic humanitarian purposes. A “network”

A number of NGOs have been effective instruments in accomplishing some of the FARC's goals.

encompasses individuals and/or organizations that are mutually linked, and their degree of linkage. The FARC Network I am referring to is composed mainly of NGOs. I am not arguing that all of these NGOs are sponsored by the FARC; rather, what I do claim is that these organizations have been skillfully utilized by the FARC to serve its murky and self-serving interests and that, intentionally or not, a number of NGOs have been effective instruments in accomplishing some of the FARC's goals.

Although the exact number of human rights-oriented NGOs operating in Colombia is hard to pin down, it is possible to describe the distribution across multiple social groups, covering a diverse range of activities. Some examples are the *Comisión Colombiana de Juristas* (Colombian Commission of Jurists) and the *Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear* (José Alvear Lawyers' Collective), both of which act to influence the Colombian judiciary. In the agricultural area, there are multiple associations, the most representative of which is the *Agencia de Prensa Rural* (Rural Press Agency). Indian communities are represented by the CRIC (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*, or Indian Regional Council of the Cauca), among others. Many NGOs with suggestive names occupy prominent positions in the sociopolitical arena: CODHES (*Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento*, Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement), MOVICE (*Movimiento Nacional de Víctimas de Crímenes de Estado*, National Movement of Victims of State Crimes), *Comité de Solidaridad con los Presos Políticos* (Committee in Solidarity with Political Prisoners), and the recently created *Marcha Patriótica* (Patriotic March). Even religion is included in this myriad of groups, through the *Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz* (Inter-Ecclesiastical Commission for Justice and Peace).



This “FARC Network” is not limited to NGOs within Colombia's borders; rather, it expands abroad to multiple organizations in different countries.

This “FARC Network” is not limited to NGOs within Colombia's borders; rather, it expands abroad to multiple organizations in different countries, such as the France-based FIDH (*Federación Internacional de los Derechos Humanos*, the International Federation of Human Rights), the Denmark-based *Asociación Rebelión* (Rebellion Association), and the Britain-based Justice for Colombia, among others. The organizations listed here are merely a small sample of the expanded links of organizations that are used to serve the purposes of the FARC. I will address the activities and effects of these groups later in this article.

The other part of the strategy for advancing the insurgents' interests is the “FARC Narrative,” which characterizes the FARC as a rebel group representing a segment of the population historically forgotten by the government and subject to isolation, poverty, and harassment. This narrative is a two-way exercise intended to legitimize the terrorist group while delegitimizing the state. The NGOs within the “FARC Network” legitimate the terrorist group by lending credibility to the “FARC Narrative”: they often describe its members as “Robin Hoods” stealing from the rich to give to the poor; moreover, the

FARC's terrorist actions are presented as consequences of the legitimate defense of the oppressed against the oppressors, the necessary antecedent to reach "social justice." This rhetoric has remained almost unchanged over time, and was even augmented when the recent peace talks started, in a bid for the publicity that the organization needs to be considered as a legitimate political actor rather than a drug cartel or terrorist group.

Nothing, however, could be further from reality than the "FARC Narrative." The FARC, which is overwhelmingly rejected by the Colombian population, is an organization dedicated to narco-trafficking, with only a thin veneer remaining of its original Marxist-Leninist ideology. It is also a terrorist group guilty of the most despicable crimes: people kidnapped and held captive in the jungle for decades, unarmed civilians attacked and murdered, hundreds of



Colombians mutilated or killed with anti-personal mines, and innocent children murdered.<sup>10</sup> To minimize attention to such atrocities, some NGOs prefer to call the people kidnapped by the FARC "retained" rather than "hostages"; they use the sophism of "sociopolitical conflict" to refer to the terrorist threat posed by the FARC, and they use the term "political prisoners" to refer to FARC operatives convicted of terrorist attacks. It is also remarkable that all of these organizations remain silent towards the FARC's terrorist attacks, giving the impression that they do not support human rights for victims of the FARC's attacks, even if they are unarmed civilians.

In the same way, the narrative seeks to delegitimize the government by presenting it as a quasi-dictatorship, and Colombia as an oppressive state where there is no democracy, and where state security forces commit systematic violations of human rights. This disinformation is used to justify the bloody resistance to a "dirty war as a strategy of the terrorism of the

state."<sup>11</sup> The truth is quite the opposite: Colombia is a stable democracy, and the government is committed to human rights. Vice President of the Republic Angelino Garzón promotes the cause of human rights, civilian and judiciary institutions exercise tight control over the military, and there is an extensive and comprehensive training program on human rights for government officials, especially military personnel. Finally, contrary to the claims of "state terrorism," protection of human rights is actually exaggerated, a situation that unfortunately allows radical groups such as the FARC and sympathizing NGOs to undermine the exercise of state authority. Often the complaints and accusations made by NGOs against the military are accepted as facts by the populace without investigation, and can violate the basic rights that military personnel should have to defense. Moreover, multiple institutions monitor the Colombian armed forces' behavior, including the attorney general's office, the general prosecutor's office, military tribunals, the congress, and international institutions, as well as domestic and foreign NGOs.

Some NGOs prefer to call the people kidnapped by the FARC "retained" rather than "hostages."

Contrary to the claims of "state terrorism," protection of human rights is actually exaggerated.

## Operationalizing the Instrument: Undermining and Constraining the State

The enemies of peace and order in Colombia spare no effort in their attempts to impose limitations on the state. Max Weber defined the state as a “human community that claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a territory.”<sup>12</sup> The FARC, aware of this definition, uses human rights as an instrument to deny this legitimate use of force to the state, converting human rights from something to be respected into a “tool” or “weapon” to advance its terrorist agenda.

The first step in this process is to constrain the legitimate use of force through a cluster of denunciations at the regional and international level. The FARC’s *modus operandi* seems to be “one operation, one denunciation.” After almost every military operation, there is a judicial complaint levied by the FARC against the Colombian military: excessive use of force, indiscriminate shooting,<sup>13</sup> harassment and intimidation,<sup>14</sup> illegal detentions,<sup>15</sup> extrajudicial executions,<sup>16</sup> indiscriminate bombing,<sup>17</sup> and so forth. While it is undeniable that some members of the military have committed abuses and violations, these have been isolated cases and are not systematic conduct by military forces as many NGOs often claim.

The intent of this barrage of accusations is to paralyze military operations, demoralize the troops, and bring about the often unfair imprisonment of military personnel. An emblematic case is that of Colonel (Ret.) Alfonso Plazas Vegas, who in 1985 led an operation to retake control of the Hall of Justice from the rebel force M-19, who were rumored to be working on behalf of the infamous drug lord Pablo Escobar. Plazas was a national hero at that time, but more than 25 years later, he is facing a sentence of 30 years in jail for the “forced disappearances” of civilians who were captured during the operation.<sup>18</sup> Even worse, this crime did not exist in Colombian law in 1985, the year when the events took place.

Another case further illustrates the situation. David Ravelo Crespo, a member of one of these multiple NGOs, was arrested in 2010 and accused of participating in the 1991 homicide of a politician.<sup>19</sup> Multiple NGOs describe Ravelo as a political prisoner and his situation as an example of political persecution.<sup>20</sup> These kinds of denunciations distract the state’s attention from legitimate matters, and undermine its image both within Colombia and abroad.

Additional evidence of this tactic—the misuse of NGOs—was obtained from the computer of “Raul Reyes” (an alias), a top leader of the FARC who was killed in a military operation carried out by the Colombian Army in 2008. The Reyes files mention *Renacer* (Revive), an NGO that was founded in Venezuela by the FARC to “protect the human rights of the significant number of Colombian refugees living in the border areas”.<sup>21</sup> Emails exchanged between terrorist leaders point out how, parallel to the denunciation of the Colombian government, the organization also provided medical assistance, identification documents, and easy access to Venezuela for the members of the FARC.<sup>22</sup>

There can be economic interests linked to the promotion of human rights as well. For instance, in 2012 public opinion in Colombia was astonished by news that one of the alleged plaintiffs in a notorious case of human rights

These kinds of denunciations distract the state’s attention from legitimate matters, and undermine its image both within Colombia and abroad.

In return for her false testimony, Contreras and her family had received a considerable amount of money.

violation known as the Mapiripan massacre was exposed as a fraud. In 2005, an illegal paramilitary force raided the remote village of Mapiripan, allegedly killing at least 49 people. Relatives of the victims received millions of dollars from the government in compensation, and an Army general was imprisoned, accused of “omission” because the massacre occurred without military intervention. One of the beneficiaries, Mariela Contreras, later revealed that she was pressured by the NGO *Colectivo de Abogados José Alvear*, whose lawyers were representing her, to testify at a hearing of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that her husband and two sons were killed the night of the raid. Contreras confessed that one of her sons went missing years before the massacre, the other had been recruited by the FARC, and her husband had been killed by members of the FARC, all before the paramilitary incursion. In return for her false testimony, she and her family had received a considerable amount of money, which she then shared with the *Colectivo*.<sup>23</sup> Currently, the Colombian government is investigating the facts of the massacre again to ascertain whether the numbers of people allegedly killed was further inflated.

There can be obscure interests behind the apparent good will of these human rights defenders. Many of these organizations, skillfully manipulated by the FARC, not only delegitimize, constrain, and undermine the state, they also sometimes receive significant financial dividends from the process. The inevitable outcome of this “symbiotic” relationship between the FARC and some NGOs is the weakening of the state and the advance of the FARC terrorist agenda that lies behind the scenes.

The previous cases are just a small sample of the systematic abuses that NGOs commit under the banner of human rights—abuses that ultimately favor the FARC and undermine the state’s legitimate right and obligation to protect its citizens. The well-configured FARC Network and the persistent FARC Narrative are key components of the group’s strategy to ensure its own survival and perhaps defeat the state in the political arena. This situation, although specific to Colombia, contains elements that are useful for understanding similar situations in other countries that face terrorists. A “network” of sympathizing NGOs that assist the terrorist group and a “narrative” that is echoed by seemingly independent and therefore more credible organizations are likely to exist in other situations and contexts.<sup>24</sup>

As we consider this phenomenon of the misuse and abuse of human rights by terrorist organizations, we must remember that the doctrine of human rights is just that—human, not divine. Thus, those who champion it can be fallible and far from perfect themselves. Baseless accusations of human rights violations made by terrorist organizations and their supporting network against the Colombian government should be viewed skeptically, with the understanding that perhaps such accusations are part of a larger strategy by the FARC to take advantage of the ideas, concepts, and laws behind human rights for its own self-serving purposes. ❖

The inevitable outcome of this “symbiotic” relationship between the FARC and some NGOs is the weakening of the state.

The well-configured FARC Network and the persistent FARC Narrative are key components of the group’s strategy.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## NOTES

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## THE CTAP INTERVIEW

### LTC Ramey Wilson

THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKEN FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE COMBATING Terrorism Archive Project.<sup>1</sup> LTC Kashif Jamal Khan, Pakistani Air Force, spoke on 6 May 2013 with LTC Ramey Wilson, U.S. Army, about LTC Wilson's career as a military medical officer.<sup>2</sup>

*Interviewed by LTC Kashif J. Khan*

LTC KHAN: How did you become involved with military medicine?

LTC WILSON: Before I went to medical school, I was actually a field artillery officer. I spent four years as a field artillery officer and led individuals at the small unit level. I really enjoyed being with soldiers, but also preparing for battle—this is in the mid-'90s so we (the United States) didn't have any big conflicts going on in that time period. I come from a medical family. I went to the Uniformed Services University, which is the Department of Defense medical school in Washington, D.C. It has a mission to train not only physicians but also offers advanced education for nurses and conducts research focused on the practice of medicine in a military environment. So that is how I got into it. The Uniformed Services University is just like any other medical school that is accredited. It also has a special military curriculum to prepare its future physicians to operate in a military environment. So that is how I became a military physician.

Then I went on to do my training in our military treatment facilities at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and my residency in internal medicine. I finished medical school in 2002, and then I was a resident until 2005. So I was at Walter Reed during the beginning of the Afghanistan war and the Iraq war. Having both the military experience as well as the medical military curriculum really gave me—when I was taking care of patients at Walter Reed, many of whom had just been on the battlefield 18 to 20 hours beforehand—a better understanding of the conditions that my patients were facing.

LTC KHAN: Keeping your experience in mind, how do you think military medicine is different from regular medicine?

LTC WILSON: That is a good question, because I think that difference is a part of military medicine that is often underappreciated. If you think about how we practice medicine in general, we practice in a kind of network made up of different actors and roles, all playing a part in providing good medical care to different types of patients based upon illnesses or disease processes or accidents or whatever. It takes nurses, it takes doctors, it takes surgeons, it takes OB/GYNs to deliver babies, to create that full spectrum—a medical network. You have to be able to draw upon all facets of it.

If you think about how we practice medicine in general, we practice in a kind of network made up of different actors and roles.





If a military person is injured, say on the battlefield, they can't just pick up their phone and call the civilian ambulance.

Now in military medicine, we are going to take a large group of people and displace them from their normal situation, and ask them to go and practice medicine in what is often a very austere environment, usually riddled with insecurity. Those are often the areas where medical development is not as pronounced because of the lack of security, or because it is hard to get people to go practice medicine in those areas. When military personnel get injured, you need to have medical people there who can operate in those austere environments, who understand—from the point of injury all the way back to the United States—that some care is appropriate at some levels and not at others in terms of stabilizing and moving patients. A lot of it has to do with that interface between the traditional medical facility, like a big hospital and doctors' offices, and the warfighter who is out there often in very austere, remote, dangerous places. In general, if a military person is injured, say on the battlefield, they can't just pick up their phone and call the civilian ambulance—who would they call? So the U.S. military develops and resources not only the people but also the technology to move forward and extend the reach of its own healthcare system all the way to the battlefield. We do that at different levels: we have medics who are trained to operate with the soldiers on the ground. We have physicians and assistants who staff forward aid stations, and we have echelons of care where patients are brought through increasing levels of capability and technology as they move back towards the medical treatment



facility. So, one of the unique challenges for military medical personnel, I think, is being able to operate in austere environments.

Another unique kind of component is how military medical support has to be integrated into the operational plan. The military physicians and those who are operating at that interface are making the bridge between the place of war and the hospital, and they have to be able to integrate that medical care within the operations that are taking place. A lot of times there is a lack of security in their area as well, so those medical resources, even though they are protected under the Geneva Convention, have to be protected from attackers. There is that aspect of it: being able to work in austere environments, being able to integrate with the military operations, but then also being able to take the technology and the knowledge that we know and apply it in situations that are less than ideal. And you know, it can be challenging.

LTC KHAN: Keeping in view what you have covered, the difference between the military medical system and regular medicine, what do you think is the role of military healthcare? You have touched upon it, so could you elaborate on it?

LTC WILSON: Sure. A good way to think about it is the motto of the Army medical system, which is “To conserve the fighting strength.” There are a couple of different facets of the motto that are important. Obviously, when we have patients who are injured in fighting, our role is to take care of them. But another component of that is preventive medicine. Conserving the fighting strength means not only saving the lives and repairing the injuries of those who are hurt, but also trying to keep people from getting injured or sick.

If you look at the history of modern warfare, especially from the past 100 years, more people have had to be removed from the battlefield due to non-battle injuries than from fighting-related injuries. Diseases, mainly infectious diseases, draw away the fighting strength of the force available for the security mission or operations. So a big aspect of military medicine is the prevention of disease: basic hygiene, basic sanitation, reducing the medical health threats that those soldiers are going to face in different areas. Often those areas have climates that are significantly different from the U.S., and harbor diseases we don't see normally in the U.S. We see this commonly, and it is one of the reasons why the U.S. military has been so aggressive in its infectious disease research, such as with malaria. We don't really have a big problem with malaria in the U.S., but in a lot of the places where we operate, malaria is endemic. If you go back to the career of Walter Reed, who our hospital is named for, understanding the etiology and the causes of yellow fever during the building of the Panama Canal was a big part of military medicine. The fighting strength was those workers and military personnel who were helping build the Panama Canal. Yellow fever had been a big impediment to that development in the past.

From the tactical perspective, the United States has an ethical contract with our soldiers that says: Hey, if we are going to put you in harm's way and something bad happens to you, we have a responsibility to take care of you. If the soldiers don't have confidence in that medical care, I think you are going to see the

The U.S. military develops and resources not only the people but also the technology to extend the reach of its own healthcare system all the way to the battlefield.

Conserving the fighting strength means not only saving the lives of those who are hurt, but also trying to keep people from getting injured or sick.





willingness of people to put themselves at risk decrease. They are going to modify their behavior, be less willing to take risks. A lot of times it is that very risk that is needed in order to secure peace or establish peace in the conflict area. So to me, that is one of the key aspects of military medicine. The other aspect, as I mentioned before, is maintaining the force, and taking a preventative-medicine, public-health approach to a very austere environment, to try to keep people from getting sick so that they can focus on fighting rather than worrying about having to relieve themselves every 20 minutes or something like that.

LTC KHAN: What different types of training have you received to learn this military medicine outside of regular medicine?

LTC WILSON: As I mentioned earlier, the medical school that I went to has a specific curriculum that is designed for military medicine. But you know, not all military physicians go to the medical school that I went to. Many go to regular medical schools and then are brought into the Army. The military helps pay for their medical education with the expectation that they will then serve a certain number of years in the Army as a physician. In the Army specifically—the Navy and the Air Force have similar programs—during your medical school training, either in the summers or after your training, you go through professional education courses, like the leadership courses that teach the skills of tactical medical care. Most of that in the U.S. Army is centered at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, which is where the Army Military Medical Department Center and School is located. That is where we train all our medics and so all military physicians will go there.

The Army also offers some specialized training, such as a course on medical management of chemical and biological warfare. We have specific courses for people who don't do a lot of trauma in the hospital but who are going to be deployed to support a forward unit in combat, to improve their trauma and resuscitation skills. A lot of that is built upon the civilian Advanced Trauma Life Support Course.

In the last 10 years, as we have been fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, there has been a deliberate effort to codify what really makes a difference on the battlefield. That knowledge has been codified into what we call TCCC, or Tactical Combat Casualty Care. The TCCC concept has permeated tactical medical care. For example, the first aid kit that every soldier carries is designed specifically on TCCC principles. The whole idea is that there are certain things that need to be done right. Soldiers need to be prepared to provide that treatment at the point of injury, such as for loss of an airway, or to stop bleeding. This training can really change survivability at the point of injury and allow soldiers to get back to more intensive care. So there are a lot of courses that teach and prepare our soldiers and medical personnel as part of their military education.

A lot of the training has to do with tactical medical care, and I think one of the things that we need to do better is integrating ourselves into military operations: physicians seeing themselves as part of the unit and looking at how they can better use the medical resources in the unit to support the mission's objectives.



LTC KHAN: Keeping in view the 2012 national security strategy, which states that the U.S. is going to go for smaller operations and more partnerships, how, in your opinion, will this change military medical care?

LTC WILSON: I think that is a really good question. Most of our previous doctrine was based on fighting a large, land-based, conventional fight. Because of that, our medical doctrine has been one of care on a linear battlefield: There is a definite front line and a definite rear, and the further you get away from the front line, the more secure it becomes. As you evacuate patients to the rear, they can get better levels of care because each stop along the way back to the hospital has more resources. In Afghanistan, we had more of a non-contiguous battlefield where there wasn't necessarily a front line anywhere. When you are fighting an insurgency, the regular doctrine of echelon care doesn't necessarily apply. We have had to really adapt. Because our doctrine drives our manning and our resources, we have had to take the resources that we have based upon the previous doctrine and use some creativity in order to provide better care. For example, when I was in Afghanistan in 2007 to 2008, we had to split our aid station into two pieces, with myself at one base and my physician assistant at another. But we also had three satellite fire bases that were manned by only one platoon of infantry. A platoon of infantry usually has one medic. We could reach one of them only by helicopter, and if the weather was bad, they were completely isolated. So that is where you need to have some creativity and look at what are the risks, what are things that we can do to mitigate that situation.

I am a big believer in rehearsals, and I am also a big believer in doing mission analysis before deployment, because when someone is injured, that is not the time to ask, "Hey, what do we need to do?" You need to be running through those problem sets before they actually happen on the ground. You train your medics so that they can do more than just put on a tourniquet and stop bleeding. You teach them to treat muscular-skeletal injuries and basic non-battle injuries. You need to make sure you have good communication plans. Now one of the ways we mitigate that risk is our aerial medevac system. We don't rely on ground medevac in Afghanistan because of the terrain. But there are times where aerial medevac has been denied or is not available because of weather, so you have to think about that before and take actions to mitigate that. The national security strategy is focusing more on having a light footprint, so—especially in the realm of special operations and counter-insurgency—we are going to have small units operating outside the reach of an aerial medevac system. I think the way we are going to have to mitigate the medical risks is through partnership with the host nation. The alternative is that everywhere we go, we have to put a big medical footprint, and that is just not consistent with the strategy moving forward.

You are there in general to develop a partnership with the host nation. Well, part of that is to strengthen the medical systems of our partners. By doing that, I think we can develop interoperability but also provide some protection for our forces that are operating in other countries by making the medical systems of the host country stronger.

LTC KHAN: Can you specify what type of partnership you think is needed? Like providing care, or providing education to the partner countries? Or what specific area do you think is important?

When you are fighting an insurgency, the regular doctrine of echelon care doesn't necessarily apply.

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We can say, “Oh yes, that is great. We are going to help build the military health system.” But I would encourage people to think even beyond that.

LTC WILSON: Well, I think we are doing this pretty well at the tactical ground level, whether it be special operation medics or even general purpose force medics. When they partner with a host country unit, there is a lot of good teaching and training going on. A lot of it is based on the TCCC principles I mentioned before, on how to provide good unit injury care. I think there can be improvement in providing treatment at levels above that. Like I mentioned before, medical care is done in a network or a system. So that is great if our partners have medics on the ground to take care of injuries right away and prevent death at the point of injury, but the medics then need to have somewhere to send those patients. They need to have surgical capabilities; they need to have physicians who know how to treat those types of injuries; there needs to be a chain of care going back to definitive care at a hospital. I think that is an area where we can really partner a lot better, by developing both the



education and the training aspects of our partner systems. We can show that there is value in this. It is not just developing medical capability in general but having it focused specifically on supporting the security forces.

We can say, “Oh yes, that is great. We are going to help build the military health system.” But I would encourage people to think even beyond that. Think of it as not just the military but security forces in general, because if you are talking about police forces or local security forces, you can’t necessarily build a military medical system that is going to cover partner forces all

over the country. And so a lot of times, those host nation security forces are going to need to go to the local civilian clinics where they are already being served. I know some people consider this controversial in terms of the military partnering with civilian healthcare systems to strengthen them, but I think it makes a lot of sense as long as when we do it, we keep our focus on doing things that are actually going to impact security.<sup>3</sup>

There has been a lot of debate and discussion in the last five to ten years about the use of soft power and the use of medical diplomacy. I think there is a place for that, and we are already doing it in a lot of places, especially looking at pandemic flu outbreaks and weapons of mass destruction. We are working with ministries of health of different countries on their reaction program to pandemic flu, for example. I think that everyone realizes that if we ever have a flu pandemic, the risk will be everywhere. If health ministries are able to take care of their own area, then we can manage the outbreak in general. If everyone is looking to the U.S. or the World Health Organization to manage an outbreak, it will spread too fast and become too big of a problem for us to control. So I think the U.S. has a role in strengthening the other country's civilian healthcare system, but we haven't had a good focus on what exactly we are trying to do. Our work has bled into the priorities of, for example, the Ministry of Health as opposed to making sure those interventions actually support the U.S. Department of the Interior or Defense by directly teaching and developing those capabilities to support security forces.

I think, at the end of the day, we have different pillars of development. Security is the primary role of the military—to help establish and maintain security in the region. No other development can happen in an unsecured area. What the international organizations want, what non-governmental organizations want, is a secure environment into which they can go and do development. So if that is our armed forces' primary role, there is a need and a requirement to have good medical support for all security forces. That gives us a well-defined mandate to go in and work with the civilian medical system. A lot of the criticism we get comes when we try to do things that non-governmental organizations want to be doing with the host country's internal healthcare. I am not saying that is not important, and in some places that may be the biggest medical need in the area. But I think we have to take a larger view and say, okay, the way that need is ultimately going to be met in the long run is to develop security. So we need to make sure that the security forces are effective, and I think, especially in areas of low security or high risk, having good medical care available for those security forces is going to help them establish that security the quickest, which will then allow other organizations to come in and take over the wider medical care role. We have limited resources, too, so if we focus on things outside of security, then security may suffer and then the whole thing suffers. I think by focusing first on security, we can help set the conditions for the improvement of the system overall.

The challenge is that a lot of times, the Ministry of Health officials are focused on what their greatest needs are, so we don't necessarily want to go in and tell them what they should be doing. When your death rate for children is very high, when women are dying in childbirth, that is a real need and can have definite impacts on the future and economic development of that country. But, I think part of our role is to help them also see that medical care is needed for security. I feel very strongly that one of the main roles of military medicine is to develop medical care for internal security forces.<sup>4</sup>

The U.S. has a role in strengthening the other country's civilian healthcare system, but we haven't had a good focus on what exactly we are trying to do.

I think by focusing first on security, we can help set the conditions for the improvement of the system overall.

The first step is to ask what things are we doing already to develop as opposed to provide healthcare, and focus more on the security aspect of it.

Providing good, competent medical care helps with recruitment and retention of the security forces.

We have a large number of military physicians who have a lot of combat experience working in conflict zones—experience that can be shared.

LTC KHAN: My last question is regarding your recent study, done at NPS, on military medical care. Can you share some of your analyses or some of your thoughts on your study? What were your findings, and what did you propose for military healthcare where U.S. forces are operating?

LTC WILSON: A lot of what I have just been talking about springs from my own training and experience, and what I observed in Afghanistan for two years. It really echoes what I have just mentioned. The U.S. military should focus on developing host country healthcare to support the indigenous security force. I think the first step is to ask what things are we doing already to develop as opposed to provide healthcare, and focus more on the security aspect of it. My thesis specifically tried to answer the question, Does the quality of medical care impact the effectiveness of security forces?<sup>5</sup> The answer was very clear. Yes, there is a direct benefit to strengthening security, but there are also secondary benefits that can come from focusing first on developing the medical system for partners' security forces.

Different places have different models for their military. Whether you have a conscription service for your security force or volunteer service, providing good, competent medical care helps with recruitment and retention of the security forces. One of the problems that we have seen among Afghan forces is that there is a lot of turnover. If you are always training new recruits, you are not able to develop that core mid-grade officer, mid-grade noncommissioned officer, the kind of people who stay in the military for a while. Having that military medical care as a benefit can help with retention, which is a secondary benefit. To me, this concept echoes a lot of the spirit of the national security strategy, which states that we are going to strengthen our partners so that they can take care of themselves. Obviously this medical support would have to be tempered and modified for whichever country we are going into.

In some ways, our partners are building an institution that is bridging the gap between medical care and security forces. This can then be leveraged by the state to help itself, to protect and extend healthcare to areas that are maybe too insecure for the civilian medical system to go into. You could look at the region as well. One country's capable, forward-looking military medical system could be used to assist its regional neighbors, or used internationally as part of peacekeeping forces. Such a system also decreases the amount of requirements from other countries, or it increases the total pool of medical folks that could be used as part of international responses, whether it be complex operations or humanitarian assistance. But the only way I think you are going to gain this larger benefit is by working together and developing interoperability. That isn't easy. As one of my mentors once told me, "Anything worth doing is hard because if it was easy it would have already been done."

If we take this perspective that medical care for security forces is an important part of security building, and overlay that with what it takes to provide good tactical medical care as a system, we have all these different touch points for partnership. When you look at the skills and the human capital needed to maintain, operate, and grow a partner's medical system, the U.S. has that capacity in our military medical systems and our medical education program. We also have a large number of military physicians who have a lot of combat experience working in conflict zones—experience that can be shared.

But I think it would be a mistake to say that U.S. military medical staff have something to offer that nobody else has. When you talk about what

partnership means, it means that we learn from each other and that we do it together. Not only do militaries have different capabilities and experiences that others can learn from, the same is true in medicine as well. I like to say that good medicine is good medicine no matter who is practicing it. A lot of times, it is just the clinical application of knowledge that is lacking and how you apply that in a military context or security context. But the ability to partner at all these different levels, I think, is an opportunity that has been missed up to this point. The most current U.S. national security strategy, which is directing U.S. military forces to pursue small, light-footprint approaches, should stimulate us to develop those partnerships because we are going to rely on our partners to help provide medical coverage to our forces that are taking part in these light-footprint approaches.

LTC KHAN: Can you say something about training?

LTC WILSON: I think we missed a great opportunity. Every time we do a military exercise, medical response needs to be an integral part of that exercise. One of the challenges I think we have in the U.S. is that the military tactical side of medicine is relatively separate from civilian medical education and training. So finding touch points on institutional levels, whether it be medical school to medical school or hospital to hospital, and developing partnerships, as well as making those medical partnerships an important aspect of training exercises, could help build that partnership and interoperability. I think that is the big stuff.

LTC KHAN: Thank you very much. That was wonderful. ❖

Every time we do a military exercise, medical response needs to be an integral part of that exercise.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Wing Commander Kashif J. Khan** has served in the Pakistani Air Force for 20 years as a fighter pilot and flight instructor.

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#### ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEE

**LTC Ramey Wilson** serves as a general internal medicine fellow at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland, and is an assistant professor of medicine at the Uniformed Services University.

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#### NOTES

- 1 The Counterterrorism Archive Project aims to collect and archive knowledge on strategy, operations, and tactics used by military and other security personnel from around the world in the 21st century fight against global terrorism. Collectively, the individual interviews that CTAP conducts will create an oral history archive of knowledge and experience in counterterrorism for the benefit of the CT community now and in the future.
- 2 This interview has been edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the Naval Postgraduate School, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. government, or any other official entity. The original interview is available on video to CTFP members at [www.globalecco.org/archives](http://www.globalecco.org/archives)
- 3 LTC Wilson later clarified this thought: Where we get into problems is when we focus on areas that don't specifically support or impact security. By focusing on those parts of the civilian medical system in the host country that strengthen security forces, such as trauma care and evacuation, U.S. medical resources can support security development. In this way, the necessary conditions can be created for other agencies to help develop a lasting healthcare system.
- 4 LTC Wilson later noted: The civilian health community is the sector that needs to focus on providing care to civilians. Having said that, in areas where the civilian health community won't operate due to lack of security, we can provide needed care to those civilians as a bridge to civilian development while security is being established.
- 5 LTC Ramey Wilson, "Building Partner Capacity and Strengthening Security through Medical Security Force Assistance," master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, June 2013.



## ETHICS AND INSIGHTS

### The Real “Double-Bind”

*George Lober*

**George Lober** guides U.S. and international military students through the tricky terrain of ethics and critical thinking at the Naval Postgraduate School.

Those who serve and protect are generally perceived to be individuals who possess high personal moral standards.

Realistically, taking such a strong, personal, ethical stance is far, far easier said than done, even for the finest among you.

**I**F YOU’RE READING THIS COLUMN, ODDS ARE YOU’RE INVOLVED TO SOME degree in the service and defense of your country. The odds are even better that as a result of your service, you’re presumed to be a man or woman of high personal ethics. In most cases, that will be the default expectation, but there are, of course, exceptions. For example, I know a lawyer who contends that because of collusion and coterie, the police in his hometown are little more than “the best-armed gang”—but by and large, I believe those who serve and protect, be they military, homeland security, law enforcement, or national defense, are generally perceived to be individuals who possess high personal moral standards.

More importantly, I believe that individuals such as yourselves are fully expected to draw on and, when necessary, act on those high personal morals and ethics in a time of crisis. That, I suggest, is the deal. In situations where the majority of society would cave under the pressure or temptation to do “the wrong thing,” those of you who serve to protect and defend are expected to embrace your personal ethics and pick the harder path. You’re expected to choose the action or take the moral stand that accords not only with general societal expectations, but also with your own keenly developed personal moral standard. That’s why you’re often regarded as heroes, entrusted with badges, weapons, the uniforms of your Service and the sacred responsibility of protecting innocents. Realistically, though, I submit that actually taking such a strong, personal, ethical stance is far, far easier said than done, even for the finest among you who are reading this column.

I say that because I believe there is a competing set of ethics that individuals serving to defend and protect their society and country must confront and perhaps resist, prior ever to taking an ethical stance of their own. This set involves an organization’s own pervasive system of ethics. In times of crisis, most individuals who serve will find that the ethics of their organization strongly compete for supremacy over any system of personal ethics. The reasoning behind that competition comes in the form of at least three classic arguments. The first I’ll call the Collective argument because it argues for steadfast loyalty to the wisdom of the collective over individual conscience. Or, as more than one U.S. Special Forces captain has told me, “When you sign your name on the dotted line of your contract to serve, you surrender certain personal rights. Among them is the right to pass moral judgment on what you are asked or ordered to do.” In my experience, this is not an uncommon opinion. Most of us, I think, can accept the fact that, as Richard Miller succinctly points out, “Individuals who consent, tacitly or explicitly, to join the military waive their rights to life and liberty.”<sup>1</sup> It’s reasonable then to suggest that for some individuals, such a waiver of rights, by extension, also includes the right to pass moral judgment on orders, directives, missions, actions, and the like. And while this line of reasoning is definitely not universal among those who serve, from my observation, it exists to some measure across all branches, Services,

and agencies. For example, Roger Collier, senior editor of the *Canadian Medical Journal*, recognizes there are those in service who “argue that people surrender certain personal rights when they join a military, and that the mission of the collective trumps the rights of the individual.”<sup>2</sup> The problem I have with such reasoning is that it’s not accurate, at least not when it comes to ethics. There are limits to the legitimacy of an order or a mission, and officers and leaders in the service of their countries are expected to recognize and respect those limits at all times, regardless of whether they penned their name to a obligating contract.

This leads us to the second argument in favor of subjugating one’s personal ethics to those of the organization, which we can call the Effectiveness argument. This idea, which bears a close resemblance to J. Carl Ficarrotta’s “Functional Line,”<sup>3</sup> says that the organization couldn’t possibly function effectively if everyone reserved the right to filter every order or mission or action through his or her own personal set of ethics. As one U.S. Navy SEAL officer evocatively remarked to me, “Sir, we can’t have everyone charging a hill with their weapon in one hand and their copy of Rousseau or Mill in the other, checking to see if the charge is morally justifiable.” This officer is suggesting that for the sake of the mission and the safety of everyone involved, there comes a point when, even in light of strong personal doubt, individual ethics have to take a back seat to the common values of the organization. And for the record, I buy that argument to some extent—I get that personal ethics and organizational ethics are not always going to be in sync. As Davis Brown writes,

There is an inherent tension between these two dimensions of military ethics. On one hand, good order and discipline within a military organization is essential to its success at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels. Military success depends on commanders being able to rely on their subordinates to follow their orders, and also on the subordinates being able to rely on each other for mutual protection and support.<sup>4</sup>

My problem, though, is that this reasoning can lead to the presumption that during a time of high stress or crisis, one is permitted—even expected—to mute one’s ethical conscience and extend *carte blanche* approval to any order, regardless of its consequences, for the sake of unit cohesion and tactical, operational, or strategic success. I believe that such acquiescence ethically is not justifiable, even for the sake of success, and Brown himself quickly adds,

... the old adage “I was just following orders” has rationalized too many tragedies in military history. Individual military members must also be able to discern when the facts on the ground are such that blindly following orders would actually impede success—or worse, constitute a manifest violation of the law of armed conflict.<sup>5</sup>

Admittedly, such discernment is often difficult, particularly with regard to the third classic argument for suspending moral judgment that is, in essence, an amalgam of the previous two. I’ll call this the Greater Strategy argument. It asserts that since one can never be sure that the order or mission in question isn’t part of a greater strategic plan designed by more knowledgeable and, presumably, wiser superiors—a plan that a doubting subordinate may

There are limits to the legitimacy of an order or a mission, and officers are expected to recognize and respect those limits at all times.

“We can’t have everyone charging a hill with their weapon in one hand and their copy of Rousseau or Mill in the other.”

The subordinate officer trusts that those higher in the chain of command have a firm grip on the ethical justification for the action ordered.

be completely unaware of—the best and most loyal response is to fulfill the order or mission to the very best of one’s abilities in order to meet the strategic vision. In doing so, the subordinate officer trusts that those higher in the chain of command have a firm grip on the ethical necessity and justification for the action ordered. My problem with this reasoning, however, is that it’s open-ended and completely exculpatory. By implication, at virtually every level of command from captain to commander, one may simply choose to ignore personal ethics and execute orders on the presumption that those above are privy to a greater strategic vision or plan. Such thinking I find ethically dangerous. As Stanley Milgram warned over 40 years ago,

The most far-reaching consequence is that the person feels responsible to the authority directing him but feels no responsibility for the content of the actions that the authority prescribes. Morality does not disappear—it acquires a radically different focus: the subordinate person feels shame or pride depending on how adequately he has performed the actions called for by authority.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, Milgram also added,

“For a person to feel responsible for his actions, he must sense that the behavior has flowed from ‘the self.’”

The most frequent defense of the individual who has performed a heinous act under command of authority is that he has simply done his duty. In asserting this defense, the individual is not introducing an alibi concocted for the moment but is reporting honestly on the psychological attitude induced by submission to authority.

For a person to feel responsible for his actions, he must sense that the behavior has flowed from “the self.”<sup>7</sup>

Holding individuals morally responsible for their actions in warfare is by now a historical given.

What I’m suggesting here is that if one sees his or her actions flowing from a greater strategic vision, it may be difficult to also see one’s personal ethical responsibility for those same actions. In that case, in the competition between organizational ethics and personal ethics, the organization will have won.

Unfortunately, though, such victories are short-lived and often bittersweet for the individuals involved. The reality is that while a command structure or “collective” may be held morally accountable for certain policies and subsequent actions or atrocities,<sup>8</sup> the individuals involved in those actions are rarely



absolved of culpability. In fact, holding individuals morally responsible for their actions in warfare is by now a historical given. As Neta Crawford notes, “The notion of individual responsibility of both perpetrators and commanders was developed over several centuries in both European and American treaty and domestic law and is no longer disputed.”<sup>9</sup>

So where does this leave you if you’re a member of an organization or agency or branch of service engaged in defending and protecting your society? It leaves you with the reality that you can align your loyalties to the organization or collective, and you can subscribe to the ethics of that Service, but at the same time, you can never entirely avoid being held accountable for your actions if they depart from your own ethical standards. You can’t sign that accountability away on a contractual line, nor can you excuse your accountability because the mission or greater strategy required you to act contrary to your own conscience. In other words, despite the pressures and arguments from your organization, you’re still expected to be a moral individual “who must act responsibly in making ultimate moral judgments.”<sup>10</sup> As I said at the beginning, it’s not an easy trick. But bottom line: it is the one you’re expected to pull off. ❖

Despite the pressures and arguments from your organization, you’re still expected to be a moral individual.

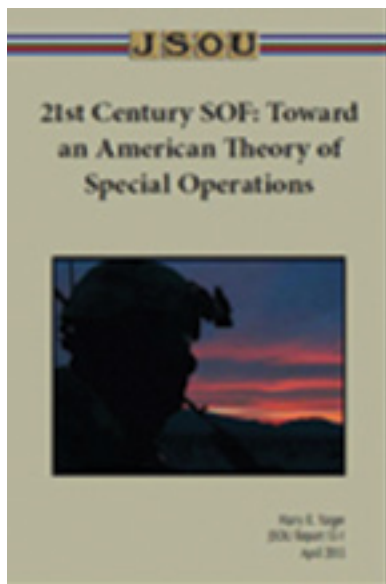
## NOTES

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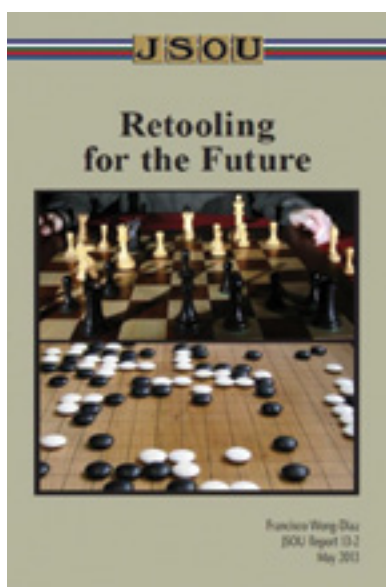


### 21st Century SOF: Toward an American Theory of Special Operations

by Harry R. Yarger

Issue Date: April 2013

In this concise JSOU monograph, Dr. Rich Yarger considers the 21st century security environment, previous work on special operations theory, and various other perspectives of SOF gleaned from his research to synthesize an American SOF school of thought. This concept, he suggests, provides the foundation on which to develop an American special operations theory for the 21st century. He offers definitions, premises, and principles that explain modern American special operations over the last 70 years, and which can serve SOF well into the future. Based on his research, Dr. Yarger also identifies major areas of concern for SOF leadership. As USSOCOM confronts the challenges offered by the 21st century and policymakers continue to look at SOF as a preferred means to address numerous and complex security issues, such a theory is essential to determine and explain the appropriate roles and missions for SOF in the 21st century.



### Retooling for the Future

by Francisco Wong-Diaz

Issue Date: May 2013

Dr. Francisco Wong-Diaz looks at the importance of China's strategic culture for understanding its future choices. While many see an inevitable strategic conflict of interests between the United States and China, others see the rise of China as an opportunity for the United States to collaborate on international security. At the same time, businesses see the potential for new markets. Whether the Chinese approach economic and military parity with the United States, however, is of secondary concern to the strategic vehicle they will use to influence regional and global behavior. Dr. Wong-Diaz analyzes the Chinese concept of unrestricted warfare (URW) to make sense of current and future trends in Chinese policy. Although URW will fundamentally challenge the United States' capability to engage China with a coherent strategy, U.S. policymakers do have an opportunity to proactively come to grips with the strategic challenges of a regionally dominant China.

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The *Combating Terrorism Exchange* (CTX) is a quarterly peer-reviewed journal. We accept submissions of nearly any type, from anyone; however, submission does not guarantee publication. Our aim is to distribute high-quality analyses, opinions, and studies to military officers, government officials, and security and academic professionals in the counterterrorism community. We give priority to non-typical, insightful work, and to topics concerning countries with the most pressing terrorism and CT issues.

### Submission Guidelines

CTX accepts the following types of submissions. Please observe the following length guidelines:

- **academic analyses** (5,000–7,000 words)
- **reports or insightful stories from the field** (2,000–3,000 words)
- **photographic essays**
- **video clips** with explanation or narration
- **interviews** with relevant figures (no longer than 15 minutes)
- **book reviews** (500–1,000 words); review essays (1,000–3,000 words); or lists of books of interest (which may include books in other languages)
- reports on any **special projects**

Submissions should be sent in original, workable format (in other words, we must be able to edit your work in the format in which you send it to us: no PDFs, please).

Submissions should be in English. Because we seek submissions from the global CT community, and especially look forward to work which will stir debate, WE WILL NOT REJECT submissions outright simply because of poorly written English. However, we may ask you to have your submission re-edited before submitting again.

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