

# AFGHANISTAN

## DEFEATING THE TALIBAN'S SHADOW GOVERNMENT

### WINNING THE POPULATION THROUGH SYNCHRONISED GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY EFFORTS

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#### ABSTRACT

One of the enduring challenges of the war in Afghanistan has been the synchronised delivery of sustained population protection with robust good governance, development, and reconstruction efforts. Beginning in 2009, the United States began to send additional resources to Afghanistan in order to adopt a population-centric counterinsurgency strategy. Significant efforts were made to better organise US and NATO military forces to implement this strategy and the US Embassy also sought to better partner with the Afghan Government. This strategy was implemented in Marjah, Helmand Province in spring 2010 with generally positive results and may provide a future model for civil-military operations.<sup>1</sup>

One of the enduring challenges of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has been the synchronised delivery of sustained population protection with robust good governance, development and reconstruction efforts.<sup>2</sup> All too often, security forces have focused on either short-term clearing operations or intelligence-driven raids for specific targets or stressed the number of insurgents killed versus adopting a population security posture. Additionally, good governance, development and reconstruction efforts too frequently emphasised short-term programs, were insufficiently resourced, or were not coordinated with military efforts. Added to this challenge was the sometimes painful adjustment of bureaucratic structures geared towards solving problems of another era to the unique demands of counterinsurgency warfare today. As great as these obstacles were for the US to overcome in order to adopt a comprehensive approach to these insurgencies, the additional challenge of inadequate partnering with host governments exacerbated them. In many respects, this was simply an outgrowth of having no government to partner with or one that was capable of having an enduring presence at the local level. However, if the political conditions are right for success, a synchronised effort along security, governance and development lines of operation in partnership with the host nation can have significant and often quite dramatic results for the local population. Case studies of the successful pacification campaigns in Ramadi in 2006 and Fallujah in 2007 demonstrate how a tightly coordinated program along these lines of effort can defeat an armed insurgency and reduce the appeal of the insurgent's shadow government.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in late 2009, this integrated approach started to be organised in Afghanistan and through its application in the beginning of spring 2010, principally in Operation MOSHTARAK in Marjah, Helmand Province, encouraging and positive results were seen in the field and may provide a model for the country at large.

### RESOURCING THE SOLUTION

*The purpose in deploying static units is to establish a grid of troops so that the population and the counterinsurgent political teams are reasonably well protected, and so that the troops can participate in civic action at the lowest level ...*

David Galula<sup>4</sup>

Following the success of the surge in Iraq coupled with the Anbar Awakening movement, security conditions there began to improve to such an extent that additional US military resources started to become available for service in Afghanistan. Reflecting this newfound success, the Bush Administration initiated the beginning of a sizable increase of US forces to Afghanistan culminating in the early 2009 deployment of 17,000 additional troops by President Obama. These troop numbers were

increased even further by 30,000 in late 2009 following the Obama Administration's Afghanistan policy review and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Commander General Stanley McChrystal's strategic assessment. These additional US contributions were supplemented further by an additional increase of 10,000 troops from NATO contributing countries. These substantial increases in combat power were matched by a concomitant pledge to increase the size of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) (from 134,000 ANA in 2010 to 171,000 in 2011 and from 94,000 ANP in 2010 to 134,000 in 2011) and a dedicated effort to increase these forces for the long term to allow Afghanistan to secure itself. While these additional resources were the beginning of a solution to Afghanistan's security problems, it was General McChrystal's strong emphasis on positioning all military resources in a population protection posture that allowed these added forces the opportunity to confront the insurgency in a newfound way.

As security forces increased in Afghanistan, a complementary effort was also undertaken to increase reconstruction and development assistance by US Government civilian agencies. Besides an absolute increase in development assistance to Afghanistan, the US Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also initiated a civilian personnel uplift and sought to adapt some of their organisational structures to the unique needs of the conflict in the countryside. To these ends, they brought in additional staff at the embassy to include three new ambassadors, to increase the embassy's organisational muscle and to support a more robust effort in the field. Additionally, they increased the number of personnel in the provinces to around four hundred and placed them at provincial reconstruction teams, military task forces, and in the districts.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, reflecting the localised aspect of the insurgency, the State Department created a specialised team focused on governance and reconstruction at the district level called District Support Teams, which have three-man elements comprised of representatives from the Department of State, USAID and the United States Department of Agriculture. These teams are embedded with military units and provide tactical expertise, resources and mentoring to district Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) officials as well as non-kinetic enablers to co-located military units. The sum total of these efforts was that our civilian inter-agency partners were not only better positioned to assist military operations in good governance and reconstruction but were now able to assume a leading position in these initiatives over a greater area of the country in an enduring manner.

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**CREATING A COMMON OPERATING PICTURE**

*In conventional warfare, the staff of a large military unit is composed roughly of two main branches—‘intelligence/operation’ and ‘logistics’. In counterinsurgency warfare, there is a desperate need for a third branch—the ‘political’ one—which would have the same weight as the others.*

David Galula<sup>6</sup>

*A week after his initial meeting with Wilson, when his assignment had been confirmed and he had finished his processing, Vann went to the embassy for a political briefing on the province. The political section could not find its sparse file on Hau Nghia, and he left.*

Neil Sheehan<sup>7</sup>

A perennial challenge of operating in Afghanistan has been not only understanding the human terrain but having the wisdom to appreciate the sources of conflict the Taliban exploit to separate the people from their government. All too often, military intelligence efforts were focused on finding the enemy to kill or capture, identifying threats to coalition troops, or on recruiting human sources for intelligence. Information gathered on leading indigenous personalities, tribal structures and settlement patterns, as well as reconstruction and development projects was either not captured or, if it was, retained at a local level and lost once a unit rotated out of theatre. While subsequent military training has adapted to this challenge, emphasising the need to understand the local population, and some programs such as the Human Terrain System have provided tactical enablers to military units to study the population, the general effort of collecting non-intelligence information was undeveloped.

To begin the process of centralising human terrain information and operationalising it so that it was useful to military units as well as civilian agencies, General McChrystal initiated the Rich Contextual Understanding project in Washington, DC. This initiative used subject matter experts on Afghanistan and Pakistan to not only provide advice on the region, but to produce research products on specific subjects for the military enriched by academic, archival and field research. These efforts were supplemented by the military’s adoption of a USAID program called

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the Tactical Conflict Assessment Planning Framework. This tool has a series of questions and training programs that military units can use to help them understand why communities were siding with the insurgency as well as identifying local sources of conflict within those villages that insurgents used against the government. It also helped military units identify traditional leaders and representative organisations to work with such as shuras and jirgas. To collect and analyse this information, the newly formed ISAF Joint Command, led by Lieutenant General David Rodriguez, created the Information Dominance Centre (IDC) in November 2009.<sup>8</sup> The mandate of the IDC was to centralise as much information as possible on the human terrain and to undertake the kinds of assessments needed to support stability operations. Additionally, the IDC endeavoured to make this information available to relevant civilian agencies to facilitate information sharing and to create a common operating picture. Beginning in February 2010, under the leadership of Major General Michael T Flynn, the Chief Intelligence Officer for ISAF, the military began to create Stability Operations Information Centres at the Regional Commands to facilitate and incentivise the collection of this kind of information in support of the IDC.

As innovative as many of these efforts may appear to be, they have been in the mainstream of military thinking of how to gather the kinds of information needed to confront the insurgency. However, a major innovation was the partnership developed between the military, specifically the ISAF Joint Command, and its civilian counterparts, such as the US Embassy, on understanding the human terrain. The US Embassy, through its office of Interagency Provincial Affairs, sent two detailed surveys out to its members in the field to assess the status and requirements of local government, the leadership abilities and corruption of officials, and the freedom of movement for GIROA officials to conduct their work. They also polled their members on the presence of programs administered by GIROA, the United States and other governments, and non-governmental organisations at the district level to establish a common understanding of enabling capabilities to influence and sustain district government. All of these data were included in the assessments of districts and provinces by the IDC as they undertook a regular review of these areas to measure progress. In many respects, these evaluations created a forcing mechanism for the military and civilian agencies to work together on understanding and evaluating how stability operations were going as General McChrystal's strategy was being implemented. Additionally, through the embassy's efforts to gather this information from the field, it helped them to focus on improving their own management structures in order to create a more viable organisational counterpart to the military and

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to develop as an institution tying the ministries more closely to the field. The totality of these various efforts by the military and civilian agencies to improve situational awareness was that it better empowered decision-makers to evaluate progress simultaneously along both kinetic and non-kinetic lines. To this end, the ISAF Joint Command created a one-page matrix for both military and civilian agencies to use on each district focused on capturing kinetic and non-kinetic information as part of a shape, clear, hold and build strategy. The synchronisation and centralisation of this information was a substantial improvement in the ability of the coalition to undertake counterinsurgency operations through a better understanding of the people and their needs.

### ORGANISING FOR VICTORY

*If the forces have to be adapted to their new missions, it is just as important that the minds of the leaders and men—and this includes the civilian as well as the military—be adapted to the special demands of counterinsurgency warfare. Reflexes and decisions that would be considered appropriate for the soldier in conventional warfare and for the civil servant in normal times are not necessarily the right ones in counterinsurgency situations.*

David Galula<sup>9</sup>

While coalition forces have struggled to adapt to the unique challenges of counterinsurgency warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, civilian interagency partners have experienced no less dramatic adjustments with far fewer resources. Reflecting the need for greater coordination between civilian and military operations, US Ambassador Karl Eikenberry and ISAF Command

McChrystal agreed to and signed the United States Government Integrated Civilian-Military Campaign Plan for Support to Afghanistan on 10 August 2009. Reflecting this campaign plan and a renewed focus on conducting operations in the field, the US Embassy in Kabul made several changes to its organisational structure to make itself more central to conducting counterinsurgency operations. To improve the ability of its interagency field staff to reach back to the embassy and on to the central government, the US Embassy created the office of Interagency Provincial Affairs in July 2009. The Interagency Provincial Affairs office was not only focused on supporting the field and its operations but participated directly in embassy decision-making bodies with ISAF

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and US Forces-Afghanistan representatives and liaised directly with GIROA through its ministerial advisors and political section. To improve overall coordination of civil-military efforts at the embassy, a series of working groups, such as the Governance and Sub-National Governance Working Groups, were created with military and civilian representatives to shape governance and development policy decisions, to evaluate competing proposals, and to decide on courses of action.

To complement US Embassy efforts to operationalise ministerial programs, the ISAF Joint Command created a Ministerial Outreach program to the key ministries focused on providing services and positive government to the Afghan population such as the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and the Civil Service Commission among other bodies. This group was partnered with USAID and Department of State advisors to bolster the central ministries of Afghanistan as well as to help them operationalise the roll-out of their programs and services to local communities. To help tie the central ministries to the field and to improve civil-military cooperation at the operational level, the State Department created Senior Civilian Representative positions at each of the Regional Commands, as well as each provincial reconstruction team, to both coordinate and lead all non-Department of Defense US Government civilian elements in their respective areas of responsibility but to also act as a single point of contact for military leaders to assist in the general unity of effort. Ambassador Eikenberry and Lieutenant General Rodriguez also agreed to have liaisons between their respective organisations to improve civil-military cooperation in Kabul as well as supporting greater participation in each of the overall planning efforts of their respective organisations.

### BRINGING AFGHAN SOVEREIGNTY TO THE COUNTRYSIDE

*Social injustice, bullying by military or police, and corruption must be seen as grave weaknesses in the defense of a country, errors that can lead to its downfall and eventually, as our friends are eliminated, to the downfall of the United States.*

Edward Geary Lansdale<sup>10</sup>

*I believe that government starts at the bottom and moves upward, for government exists for the welfare of the masses of the nation.*

Former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay<sup>11</sup>

The military successes of the Taliban have been due in large part to a lack of security forces in the Afghan countryside. But the armed element of the insurgency was simply, as author Bernard Fall described it, 'a tactical appendage of a far vaster political contest



and that, no matter how expertly it is fought by competent and dedicated professionals, it cannot possibly make up for the absence of a political rationale.<sup>12</sup> The goal of GIROA and the coalition was to create this counter political rationale for the people. Community support for the Taliban was due not only to coercion by the movement but was also the natural outgrowth of the lack of a viable, positive and enduring government program that secured the loyalty of the people to their government. Because the Afghan Government was so undeveloped in Kabul and many coalition efforts were focused on building central government capacity from the start of the war, local government capabilities were largely non-existent, embryonic or imperfectly mentored. The Taliban took advantage of these weaknesses and stepped into the governance vacuum with their own political program. Additionally, the adoption of a warlord strategy in many parts of the country alienated the population due to their often corrupt and abusive behaviour, and because this was not acted upon by GIROA or the coalition in a sustained manner, some portions of the population either sided with the Taliban or tolerated their presence.

Beginning in 2007, GIROA created a directorate focused exclusively on empowering sub-national governance to address these abuses and to build local government capacity. The Independent Directorate of Local Governance, which answers directly to President Karzai's office, originally evaluated provincial and district officials, removed those who were corrupt, abusive or incompetent, and nominated replacement candidates for these positions. It also focused on incentivising good behaviour through performance funds and training programs. As part of the general effort to expand and improve GIROA's presence in the countryside, President Karzai signed a directive in February 2010 giving the Independent Directorate of Local Governance the authority to coordinate the central government's ministries to provide sustained services through a fully-manned district government. To support this effort, international donors provided additional funding as well as redirected their social service programs to support GIROA's efforts. The mechanism through which this was to occur was the District Delivery Program. The program consisted of three funding streams: the first funded the salaries of new and current civil servants as well as the operating costs of their directorates; the second was the coordinated delivery of services through the alignment of existing coalition programs in such things as health and education to empower Afghan civil servants with initiatives focused on the population's needs; and the third was a mixture of GIROA and coalition funding, principally through the Commander's Emergency Relief Program, to build the physical structures to house

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government officials and facilitate their work. All of these efforts at the local level were led and coordinated by an Afghan District Chief in partnership with a local representative assembly such as a jirga or shura. Through these combined efforts of enduring local security, the delivery and sustainment of Afghan-led government programs, and good governance focused on community participation, GIROA sought to create a positive alternative to the Taliban's shadow government as well as to prevent their armed wing from returning to intimidate or control the population. Additionally, by establishing the government's sovereignty in the countryside, thus winning the struggle with the insurgents over the political right to lead the population, Afghans saw that their future was with the government and not with whatever the insurgents could offer.<sup>13</sup> The end goal of these efforts is to create a legitimate, capable and effective government that the people of Afghanistan will support that will deny the insurgents support for a shadow government while simultaneously freezing out the armed insurgency's ability to intimidate the population.

### THE MARJAH CASE STUDY

*This is first a political war, second a psychological war, and third a military war.*

Lieutenant General Lewis Walt<sup>14</sup>

The area of Marjah in the Helmand Province district of Nad Ali has long been a safe haven for the Taliban insurgency. Its eighty square mile network of villages, canals and farmland served as a crucial base of operations for Taliban forces in the region and a key fundraising area for the insurgency due to its substantial poppy crops. Long neglected by GIROA and coalition forces, the local population had grown accustomed to Taliban rule and, in many cases, welcomed it due to the abusive and violent behaviour of the previous Provincial Police Chief and the lack of a sustained GIROA and coalition forces presence. As one local elder put it, '[W]e want this [Moshtarak] operation in our area—but do not leave, as you have in other areas, and let the Taliban come back. We want a sound government here. We want the government to pay attention to Marjah.'<sup>15</sup> Unlike many previous operations in Afghanistan over the last several years, the planned clearing of Marjah also included a sustained security presence as well as a GIROA-led effort to bring local governance to the population. Following months of planning, NATO forces, GIROA, and the US and UK embassies had prepared

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a ‘government in waiting’ to immediately make local government a real and vital institution in the community.<sup>16</sup> All that was required was an enduring security presence so that ‘counterinsurgent political teams [were] reasonably well protected, and so that the troops [could] participate in civic action at the lowest level.’<sup>17</sup>

On 13 February 2010, 15,000 coalition forces personnel, including the US Marines, British forces and the ANA, launched Operation MOSHTARAK to take back Marjah from the Taliban. Led by Task Force Helmand and Task Force Leatherneck, NATO forces began a systematic clearing and holding operation against Taliban fighters in the area. As military operations proceeded, diplomats and development specialists in partnership with the Afghan government initiated governance and reconstruction programs to quickly follow clearing operations. On 12 February the Helmand Civil Service Institute opened and began to train civil servants to work at the Nad Ali District Centre.<sup>18</sup> These government workers would be working for Haji Zahir, the newly appointed District Chief who had pledged to provide positive administration for the local population and who had rejected the abusive behaviour of previous officials in the area. On 14 February the Helmand District Development Plan Budget Workshop convened a meeting with Provincial Directors to develop line-item operational budgets for Nad Ali and to determine the capital investments required to deliver packages of services to the area.<sup>19</sup> To assist these GIRoA officials, District Support Teams, supported and manned by US and UK officials, were prepared to move into the Marjah area to continue mentoring these local officials and to provide quick impact projects through USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives. The actions of these teams and local government officials were informed by extensive polling of the population prior to military operations to ‘understand what local residents wanted; how they viewed local security; what they thought of Americans, the Taliban and the foreign jihadists fighting for local control; and what might give them confidence in the central government in Kabul.’<sup>20</sup> What the coalition forces discovered was that ‘those living in the area still harbor[ed] some friendly feelings for the Americans, remember[ed] how years ago they built dams in the region, and strongly favor[ed] an effort to oust the Taliban.’<sup>21</sup> These results were incorporated into coalition planning and were encouraging to commanders in that the population seemed ready to rid itself of the Taliban and to welcome an Afghan Government presence. While great emphasis was placed on minimising civilian casualties, some isolated incidents did take place but Afghan Interior Minister Atmar emphasised the overall benefits of the operation: ‘We may have lost nine people, but

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we managed to liberate thousands of others'<sup>22</sup> and 'It's not just a military operation. It is an integrated civilian, military, and development operation.'<sup>23</sup>

As security conditions improved, the District Chief visited the Marjah area and began to convene shuras with local elders in order to keep them abreast of the latest security initiatives as well as to make sure they understood that the government was going to be staying in Marjah and that it would address the community's development needs. On 17 February Helmand Province Governor Mangal visited Marjah for the first time to reinforce this message. While GIRoA officials conducted the necessary political work to encourage the population to support the government's programs, American and British development specialists moved quickly to work with locals and to identify projects that would have an immediate impact. By 21 February they had 'already ... identified 33 potential quick-impact projects to help the local population—including fixing schools and drilling wells—and have received authorisation to spend almost \$1 million in military funds on such activities.'<sup>24</sup> While crucial political and development work was being undertaken, a '400 man brigade of specially trained Afghan police accompanied by 80 US Marines established a base in Marjah to continue local security.'<sup>25</sup> Twelve days after the start of the operation, an Afghan flag was symbolically hoisted over the Marjah area and by 27 February local commanders indicated that Marjah had 'been cleared.'<sup>26</sup> Even though clearing operations were largely done by late February and Afghan forces had begun to patrol the area, it is expected that the Taliban will test the new security and governance arrangements. In a cautionary note, US Department of State advisor John Kael Weston stated: 'Marja will be a test for everyone. It's a test of the US Government's ability to help build local government in Afghanistan. It's a test of the Karzai Government's [willingness] to be responsive to what its population needs. And it's a test of whether the Afghan people will take responsibility for their future.'<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The strategy for the war in Afghanistan has gone through a number of phases reflecting, in part, a shifting of goals for the war and learning on our part but also an adversary that adjusted its behaviour to maximise the few resources it had to seize the opportunities it could. Though the war had long suffered from too few resources, it was the poverty of thinking about the conflict that was the greatest obstacle to victory. Afghanistan lends itself to a certain level of romanticism where advocates of different approaches see the people as either implacable xenophobes hostile to outside powers or a tribal people desiring government by warlord. Other variations of this view include 'they only understand force' to 'these people are religious fanatics' or, as a colonial British Officer once stated it, 'they are priest-ridden'. The strength with which people adhere to these views is often inversely proportional to their direct

and first-hand experience with the Afghan population. Military approaches to the war often suffered from similar shallow thinking where some proponents offered a simplistic solution of pin-point airstrikes, regardless of collateral damage and its potential for blowback, to robust clearing operations without providing a sustained security presence for the population. Other strategists supported a 'by, with and through' warlord strategy that purchased security at the expense of justice, galvanising the population to tolerate the Taliban's presence or, at worst, to embrace it. What was significant about the comprehensive counterinsurgency approach adopted by General McChrystal, Lieutenant General Rodriguez, and Ambassador Eikenberry was that it was informed by each man's direct, first-hand experience with the Afghan population and seeing the war as it was and not as they would like it to be. It was only through these shared experiences that incomplete, faddish or nonsensical approaches were set aside or subsumed into a holistic approach for success in Afghanistan. The coordinated and synchronised delivery of sustained local security for the population attuned to the needs of the people with robust, Afghan-led good governance, reconstruction and development efforts tied to the central government in the Marjah campaign is the intellectual and operational high-water mark of thinking in the Afghan War. As we continue to implement this strategy in the next few years and security conditions improve to the point that Afghans are better able to govern their country, Afghanistan will no longer be considered the graveyard of empires but will be a frontier of freedom and a bulwark against Islamic Radicalism and its false promise of a better future.

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, p. 107. Vann shared Porter's ideal of the soldier as the champion of the weak.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Daniel R Green, 'The Fallujah Awakening: A Case Study in Counter-Insurgency', *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, December 2010, pp. 591–609.
- 4 David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, Praeger Security International, Connecticut, 2006, p. 78.
- 5 Though this increase has generally been beneficial, its overall effects have not been as great as anticipated due to a number of challenges with the uplift.
- 6 Ibid., p. 64.
- 7 Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, p. 503.
- 8 Ses Colonel George Franz, Lieutenant Colonel David Pendall and Lieutenant Colonel Jeffery Steffen, 'Host Nation Information Requirements: Achieving Unity of Understanding in Counter Insurgency', *Small Wars Journal*, <<http://smallwarsjournal.com>>, January 2010.

- 9 Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 66.
- 10 Edward Geary Lansdale, *In the Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1991, p. 373.
- 11 Former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay, Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation website <<http://www.rmaf.org.ph/>>.
- 12 Bernard B Fall, *Street Without Joy*, The Stackpole Company, Pennsylvania, 1961, p. 375
- 13 Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, pp. 4–5.
- 14 Lieutenant General Lewis Walt, USMC, on Vietnam, February 1967.
- 15 Dexter Filkins, 'Afghan Offensive is New War Model', *The Washington Post*, 13 February 2010.
- 16 Thom Shanker, 'Afghan Push Went Beyond Traditional Military Goals', *The New York Times*, 19 February 2010.
- 17 Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice*, p. 78
- 18 US Department of State field reporting, 13 February 2010.
- 19 Ibid., 14 February 2010.
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- 21 Ibid.
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- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'As Marja Assault Progresses, Coalition Considers Challenges in Rebuilding Area', *The Washington Post*, 21 February 2010.
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- 26 Nasrat Shoib, 'US winds down Afghan Assault but Bigger One on Way', Associated Press, 26 February 2010; Alfred De Montesquiou, 'US, Afghan Forces Clear last parts of Taliban Area', Associated Press, 27 February 2010.
- 27 Chandrasekaran, 'As Marja Assault Progresses, Coalition Considers Challenges in Rebuilding Area.'

## THE AUTHOR

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