

Decision Making at the Theatre Strategic Level: ISAF HQ

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It is by no means an easy task to understand the functioning of a Headquarters, oftentimes even to those working within it. Convoluting chains of command, decision making structures, and planning process can cause confusion – but so too can the effects of the political dynamics, contributions and capabilities of the various troop contributing nations that come into play in a Coalition environment. This paper aims briefly to examine these issues while providing my reflections on the function and challenges of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) headquarters (HQ) in Afghanistan.

To begin I will examine the various command and control arrangements in theatre, before briefly discussing the bodies established to execute strategic decision

¹ The views presented in this paper are the author's alone, and do not reflect the policies or positions of the Department of National Defence or the Government of Canada. They are general observations based on her experience during a year long deployment to Afghanistan in 2011-12.

making in the ISAF context. I will then provide some comments on how these bodies worked in practice with regard to campaign management and planning before closing with some comments on lessons for future Coalition operations.

ISAF Command and Control

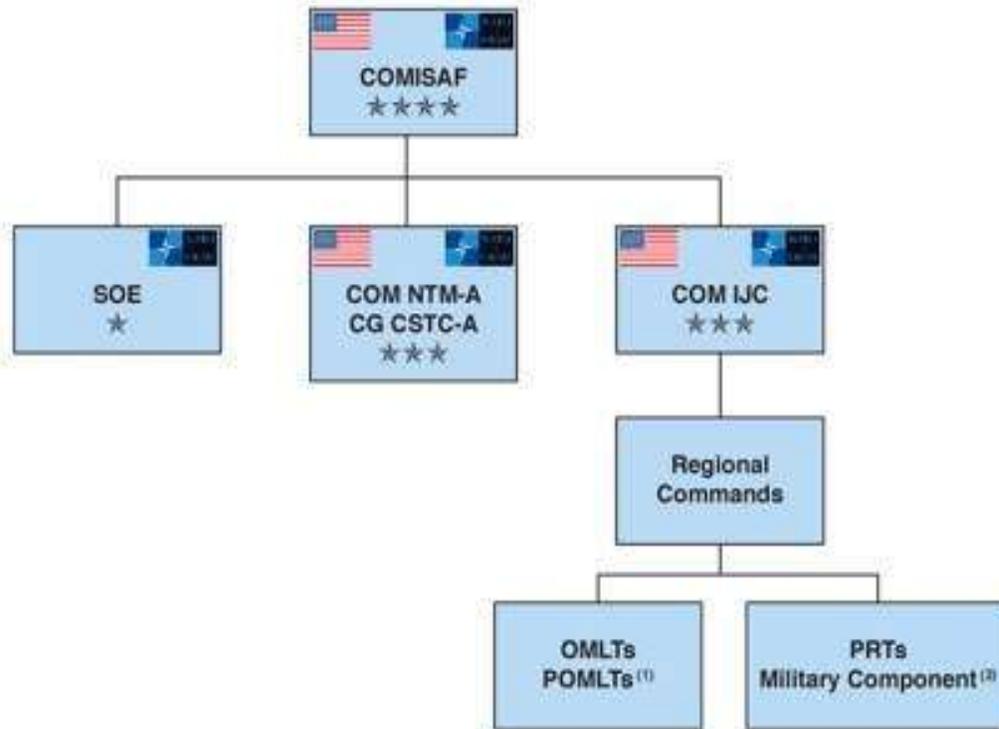
ISAF legitimacy is partly rooted in a UN Chapter VII peace-enforcement mandate, defined by the UN as involving “the application, with the authorization of the Security Council, of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force.”² At present there are 3 levels of command in theater. At the top of the command chain is the “Theatre” Strategic level – HQ ISAF. Above this sits the “Political” Strategic level, both in terms of Brunssum and SHAPE on the NATO side, and CENTCOM on the US. Commander International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF) has command responsibility over the Commander of ISAF Joint Command, the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan³ and Special Operations Forces. Under the operational level commanded by ISAF Joint Command (IJC), is the tactical level with the Regional

² UN, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*. NY: UN, 2008, p.18. (hereafter cited as UNPKO Principles). Some academics clarify this point as “operations intended to impose the will of the UN Security Council upon the parties to a particular conflict.” See A.J. Bellamy and P.D. Williams, *Understanding Peacekeeping*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity, 2010, p.8. For the ISAF Mandate see <http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/mandate/index.html> Accessed 1 March 2012.

³ Outside of the scope of this paper is establishment of a new NATO headquarters to oversee higher level training and mentoring for the ANSF in order to achieve a more co-ordinated and effective approach to training, announced in 2009. Under the new organisational structure, the US-led training and mentoring programme of Combined Security Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A) was integrated with ISAF efforts into a common HQ: NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A). The key elements of NTM-A include the provision of training and mentoring teams to the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP), and the institutional training of the ANA and ANP reform at the district level and below. CSTC-A continues to mentor the Afghan Ministries of Defence and Interior.

Commands.

ISAF Upper Command Structure



⁽¹⁾ Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLTs) and Police Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (POMLTs)

⁽²⁾ The civilian component of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRTs) is run by the ISAF nation leading the PRT

Figure 1⁴

This has not always been the case, as the establishment of IJC occurred only in 2010. The establishment of this command was aimed to focus HQ ISAF on the ‘up and out’, the strategic issues upwards to the political level, and outwards to the Afghan government and troop contributing nations. COMISAF in turn, would focus on the more strategic political-military aspects of the ISAF mission, synchronizing ISAF’s

⁴ Available at <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/isaf-command-structure.html>. Accessed 17 July 2012.

operations with the work of the Afghan government and other international organizations in the country.

IJC would be responsible for executing the full spectrum of tactical operations throughout the country, on a day-to-day basis. He has under command the Regional Commands, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the theatre enablers. In addition, he ensures the co-ordination of ISAF and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) operations.

The rationale behind establishing IJC was to allow ISAF HQ to focus on the theatre strategic level issues, while simultaneously establishing a presence at the operational level, in order to rectify an identified problem in the campaign to that point. Establishing an operational level HQ mirrored a similar construct employed in Iraq, which some Americans associated with the successful ending of the war in Iraq in 2007.

This command structure for the Coalition exists in parallel with the US Forces Afghanistan (USFOR-A) command structure for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). USFOR-A was initially tasked with two missions: First, to direct the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan to focus on force generation and institutional and ministerial development and, second, to transfer Operation Enduring Freedom units Operations Control COMISAF, thereby placing them on the ISAF Combined Joint Statement of Requirements.⁵ This was necessitated by the fact that not all U.S. Forces in Afghanistan were under the control of ISAF, and that OEF forces were mandated with a more aggressive mission, focused on counter terrorism. In some of the ISAF regional commands units report only to the regional commander (who was dual hatted as their higher command to USFOR-A.)

Both chains of command are controlled by the same dual-hatted individual (COMISAF/ Commander, USFOR-A) an improvement over the earlier construct

⁵ "Command and Control and Command Relationships," *COMISAF's Initial Assessment* 30 August 2009. p D-2. In March 2010 the Pentagon announced its intention to integrate nearly all of the remaining 20,000 US troops operating in Afghanistan under Operation Enduring Freedom into ISAF. Only small detachments of US Special Forces and a detention unit remain outside of the NATO command structure. See "Most US enduring freedom troops to join NATO's Afghan wing", Agence France Presse, 16 March 2010.

whereby the parallel structures of OEF and ISAF were headed by different individuals. This regime had violated the principle of unity of command, and increased operational confusion.⁶ As such in 2008 the U.S. gave General David McKiernan, COMISAF the additional responsibilities of Commander, USFOR-A to ensure synchronization of U.S. and ISAF forces and proper coordination of ANSF development efforts within the larger COIN strategy.⁷

However, there are distinct responsibilities linked to each title. As the senior NATO uniformed officer in Afghanistan, COMISAF is the in-theatre operational commander of all ISAF forces and subordinate to the NATO Commander, Joint Forces Command (JFC) Brunssum and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. He is tasked with: (a) employing assigned forces and conducting population-centric counterinsurgency operations; (b) enabling an expanded and effective ANSF capable of fighting their own counterinsurgency; (c) providing support to governance and development efforts to protect the Afghan people and to provide a secure environment for sustainability; and (d) evaluating ISAF security, governance, and development support activities.⁸ As Commander, USFOR-A, subordinate to Commander, U.S. Central Command, his responsibilities include exercising National Command Element and National Support Element authorities and responsibilities, ensuring that U.S. forces have the guidance, equipment, and funding they need to conduct their missions. This dual hatted role ensures unity of effort among all U.S. forces including those under the ISAF command and those forces not under ISAF command, such as those U.S. forces conducting U.S. detention operations and U.S. counter-terrorism operations.⁹ While

⁶ For a discussion of these issues see Hope, Ian. *Unity of Command in Afghanistan: A Forsaken Principle of War*. (Army War College: Carlisle Barracks PA, 2008.)

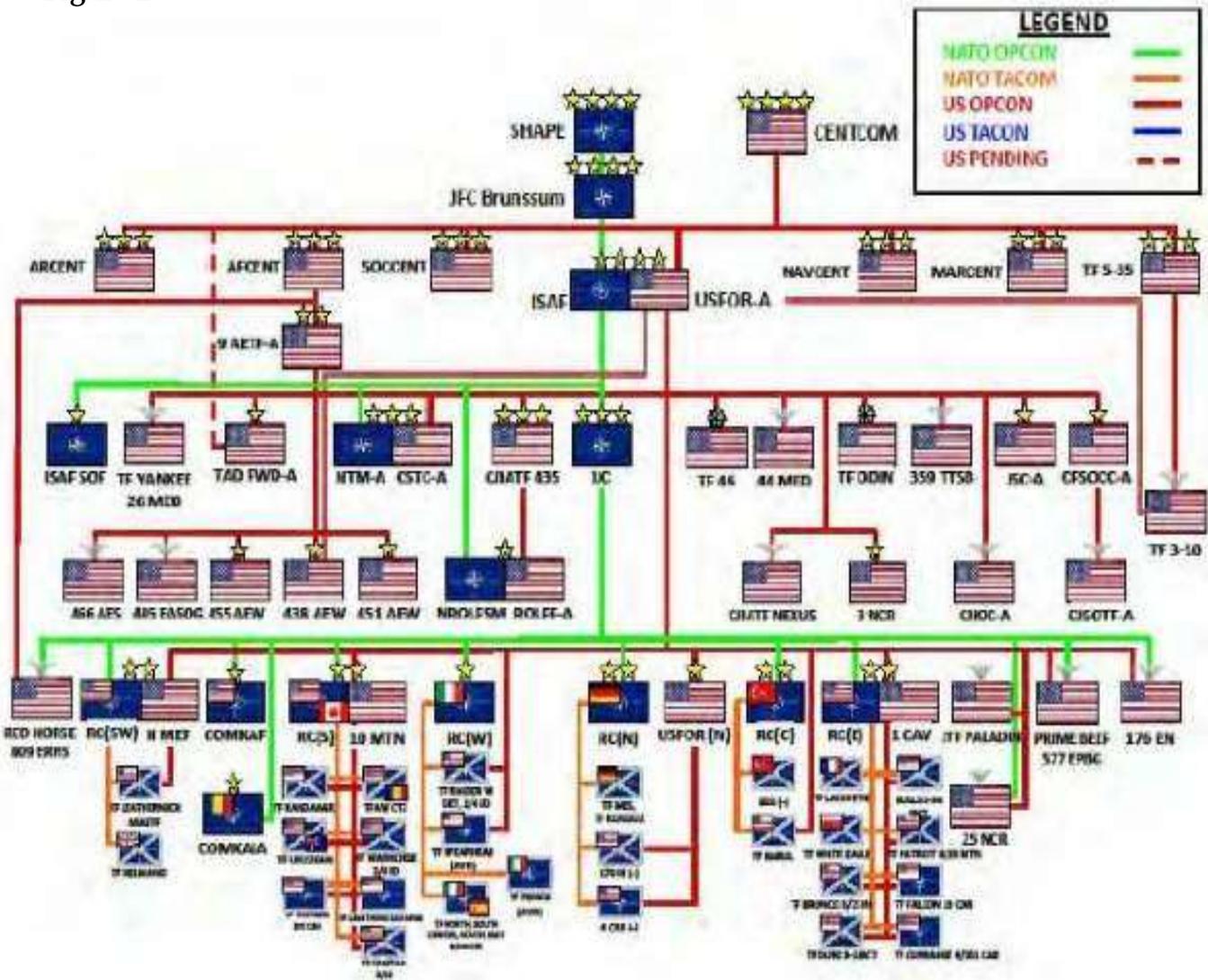
⁷ This issue of streamlining command and control were raised in the *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan Report to Congress* in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1230, Public Law 110-181), January 2009. p 27. Available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/OCTOBER_1230_FINAL.pdf

⁸ These descriptions are taken from the "Advance Questions for Lieutenant General John R. Allen Nominee to be Commander, International Security Assistance Force and Commander, United States Forces Afghanistan," 20 June 2011. Available at <http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2011/06%20June/Allen%2006-28-11.pdf>

⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolutions that have linked ISAF and OEF activities further reinforce this alignment. Jennifer Elsea, *Testimony before the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight of the House Foreign Affairs Committee*, (Hearing: "Status of Forces Agreements and

command and reporting chains are still incredibly complicated, the shift to a dual-hatted Commander actually represented a significantly more streamlined command and control structure over that of the pre-2006 period.

Figure 2¹⁰



UN Mandates: What Authorities and Protections Do They Provide to U.S. Personnel?" 28 February 2008. Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ "ISAF Command and Control Structure (as of September 30, 2011)" Diagram taken from *Progress toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan Report to Congress* in accordance with the 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (Section 1230, Public Law 110-181), October 2011, p 7. Available at: <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/>

Having discussed the basic command and control structure in theatre, I will turn now to a brief discussion of campaign management and decision making at the theatre strategic level. ISAF HQ, outside of being responsible for the 'up and out', develops and manages the campaign, through a yearly revision process and a series of meetings aimed at managing associated decision making.

Internal incoherence often characterizes NATO operations. As stated by Michael Innis, "overhanging byzantine structures and layers are the Alliance's organizational hallmarks, compounded by the usual array of local dysfunctions: variable staff language skills, high turnover rates, untrained personnel assigned to jobs they're not qualified to perform, lowest common denominator politics, continually changing political goals, and resources under a perpetual state of review or flux."¹¹ Competing priorities and personalities created unwarranted growth in staff, duplicative functions and processes which stymied the completion of tasks, creating unnecessary redundancies and distracting areas of focus. The HQ suffers from many of these challenges – a common feature not only of any multinational, multifaceted campaign, but also any large, bureaucratic organization.

The campaign plan is drawn from the comprehensive COIN campaign proposed by Gen McChrystal to Washington in 2009, the basic premises and fundamental tenets of which were adopted as the conceptual core of President Obama approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹² The President announced his new strategy at West Point in December 2009, and, supported by U.S. diplomatic efforts, it won the support of America's major allies in NATO and ISAF by the time of the London Conference in January 2010.

The approach used to develop the plan was unconventional. Rather than following doctrinal models where plan reviews cascade down the chain of command,

¹¹ Michael Innis, "A New Command Structure in Afghanistan," *Foreign Policy*, 18 March 2010. Available at: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/03/18/a_new_command_structure_in_afghanistan

¹² For a description of how this campaign plan was derived, see Matthew C Brand, *General McChrystal's Strategic Assessment: Evaluating the Operating Environment in Afghanistan in the Summer of 2009* (Air University Press: Alabama, 2011).

this was a bottom-up process starting at ISAF HQ, and trickling upwards.¹³ In addition, the campaign plan derived from campaign planning models developed by NATO nations in the 1990s. These models identify tactical actions along defined lines of operations, the successful completion of which leads to the campaign end state, and therefore a tidy completion of the mission. Of course, it is difficult to find many military campaigns that perfectly align to this causal process.

Certainly, a comprehensive civil military campaign to resolve the complex issues inherent in Afghanistan would not easily follow this model. As a result, there is a need for clear prioritization of objectives, which is difficult to achieve with so many faces to a campaign, all of which are interconnected. However, if prioritization does not occur the result in a plethora of 'strategic priorities', many of which are inherently similar in nature, resulting in nothing being truly a priority. Watching a staff officer grapple with monitoring numerous 'priorities,' devoid of clear direction on which are truly of primary concern can make one appreciate the nature of the often overused term of 'complexity' to describe modern war. However, one must wonder how much of this apparent complexity is self-imposed.

While counterinsurgency (COIN) theorists describe COIN as a tactic, in practice terminological confusion has led to COIN being referred to predominantly as a strategy. In essence, what COIN offers is insights and guidelines, collected from past operations, which, if used and adapted in a manner sensitive to local context, can help in the design and execution of a specific campaign plan.¹⁴ However, it can become easily misconstrued, and even cause other problems if it is either insufficiently developed, or if forces blindly adhere to the concept without adapting to both the specific conditions and the operational level. According to David Ucko, "To the degree that the principles and practices of counterinsurgency worked in Iraq, it was because they were tied to a campaign plan informed by the specific enabling factors *relevant to that operation*. Few of these were in place in Afghanistan, yet this did not inform the attempted

¹³ Alexander Mattelaer, "How Afghanistan has Strengthened NATO," *Survival*, Vol. 52. Issue 6, 2011. p 130.

¹⁴ David Ucko, "Counterinsurgency After Afghanistan: A Concept in Crisis" *Prism*, Vol. 3, No. 1. 2012.

implementation of similar techniques and approaches. To put it succinctly, *best practice is not best strategy*" (emphasis added).¹⁵

In such a situation, it becomes natural to focus on what is understandable and for many military personnel, by default that tends to be the tactical aspects of COIN.¹⁶ COIN's premise that the population is the center of gravity for both parties reinforces this tendency. This approach is less problematic if one is a platoon commander in the field but can have damaging results at higher levels as, "if these psychological conditions take hold of a higher headquarters organization, it will, by sheer mass smother any attempts to develop a sound operational concept."¹⁷ This can be extended to the strategic level, where strategic thought derails if staffs expend too much focus on tactical levels. This "results in an information overflow, and a sort of micromanagement in both current operations and planning efforts, that are counterproductive."¹⁸ It also results in numerous issuances of guidance and analysis emerging from the HQ focusing on what are certainly tactical level issues, the *Tactical Driving Directive* being but one example.¹⁹

These challenges result in the HQ intuitively directing its focus downward – rather than focusing on the 'up and out'. This downward focus is exacerbated when the campaign planning methodology used is one that identifies the previously mentioned causal process, wherein tactical actions along lines of operations lead to the campaign end state, and ultimately to the strategic objectives of the campaign. As a result of this planning process, campaign assessment occurring at the strategic level is focused at the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This should not be surprising given that military personnel are promoted from the junior ranks based on performance at the tactical level. Understanding of tactics and strategy, and the complications contained within, are two very different tasks.

¹⁷ Niels Klingenberg Vistisen, "The Missing Operational Level: COIN, Afghanistan, and the IJC," *Small Wars Journal*, 7 February 2012.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *COMISAF Driving Directive*, August 26, 2009. As referenced in "DOD News Briefing with Gen. Allen via Teleconference from Afghanistan .S. Department of Defense" *News Transcript*, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), 10 August 2011.

<http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4862>

tactical level, reinforcing the HQ's 'strategic' level's already inappropriate attention to tactical issues.

The dual-hatted nature of COMISAF's position can also cause challenges for campaign management and execution in multinational operations. With the parallel chain of command under USFOR-A, there was often a risk that if NATO was unable (or politically unwilling) to take on a task, it would simply be staffed under Operation Enduring Freedom.

Similar problems were inherent in campaign planning. From what I observed, campaign planning at the HQ level is very much a US driven effort. This has not always been the case. For example, in 2007, a more balanced planning cell represented a wider selection of ISAF contributing nations. Beyond that the British Commander of ISAF, General David Richards established the Policy Advisory Group. This group, which met weekly at the Presidential Palace, was composed of national representatives concerned with the campaign in RC South (the US, UK, Canada and the Netherlands and a sampling of Afghan government officials) to discuss campaign planning and process.²⁰ This forum allowed Afghans and key contributors to the campaign to interject their perspectives into the campaign plan quite successfully. With time, though the group became a victim of its success – membership grew to include major troop contributors, plus the UN and EU, which appeared to prompt a decrease in Afghan participation. The meetings degenerated into stock occasions with no real debate, and no serious decisions taken. They eventually became irregular and disappeared completely.

From that point forward, no formalized group drew together ISAF, key contributing nations, and Afghan leadership to discuss the campaign plan writ large or progress toward its achievement.²¹ Problematic in and of itself, the lack of such a forum

²⁰ For a brief discussion of this group see, Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul* (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, 2012).

²¹ Certainly there are many working groups with representatives from ISAF commands and the Afghan government to discuss various issues and topics related to various aspects of the campaign. However the need for a regular discussion on the broader campaign, with all key contributors is still lacking. At the highest level there is the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), with Afghan government ministries, embassies, ISAF, and NGO representation. However this Board aims to synchronize the competing priorities of the *Afghan National Development Strategy* (which excludes kinetic efforts), and has

is a noticeable gap given the impending transition of the campaign and security responsibilities to the Afghans. No Afghan officials have participated in the drafting or management of the campaign plan. Moreover, they are unable to view it given its classification level, despite the fact that they will one day inherit it. Designed without them in mind, one could question how much ownership the Afghans will assume of the campaign when they inherit it. Moreover, as critics have posited this is detrimental, “for successful transition and the longer term stability of the country, as development can only contribute to stability if it is defined and legitimized from the perspective of the population – otherwise it is merely a foreign imposition that will lead to growing polarization and conflict.”²²

It is worth turning to a discussion of how the output of this process has manifested itself in the Coalition’s campaign execution. As a ‘failed state’, Afghanistan had provided safe haven for terrorist entities like Al Qaeda. The resulting political aims for the mission at the outset were straightforward. Simply put, these were to eliminate Al Qaeda, defeat the Taliban and to help Afghanistan to develop into a stable and democratic state. The Campaign Plan translated these political aims, circulating upwards through Brunssum for NATO approval.

However, the application of this strategy has suffered as differing national approaches resulted in an expanding and unfocused effort. “Real political differences among the international actors in Afghanistan about the prioritization and sequencing of activities,”²³ have challenged the Coalition’s ability to achieve unity of effort and, in some cases, national interests have resulted in disparate applications of the strategy. While all members have signed on to the comprehensive COIN strategy, various

not been immune from criticisms. Co-led by the Afghan government and UN, the board focused more on process than progress. Critics allege that, “issues going to the JCMB are either precooked or watered down to ensure consensus. Major disputes or differences in approach are often necessarily pasted over.” See Joshua Welle, “Civil-Military Integration in Afghanistan: Creating Unity of Command,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 56, 1st Quarter, 2010, p 56.

²² Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit, “Grounding International Engagement in Afghan Realities,” *Speaking from the Evidence: Governance, Justice and Development* (Kabul: Afghan Research and Evaluation Unite, 2009), p 4.

²³ Helge Luras, Neils Nagelhus Schia, Stina Torgesen and Stale Ulriksen, *From Coherent Policy to Coordinated Practice: Are We Delivering Coherently in Afghanistan* (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2008), p 3.

national interests and mandates (for example, the promotion of women rights), have dominated some nation's operations despite playing a minimal role in the broader campaign plan.²⁴ In other instances, such as the differing beliefs on which methods are best to deal with the Afghan narcotics industry known to finance the insurgency, the result has been the creation of multiple disconnected programs to combat one problem. As well, troop-contributing nations with substantial commitments, including the United Kingdom and Canada during its tenure in the south, developed national strategies for their nation's civil and military contributions, often focusing on signature development and reconstruction projects at the expense of devoting attention to the fight at hand. While these strategies may not have technically conflicted with the campaign plan, the utility of having national strategies within a Coalition strategy is debatable.

In the best case, a disconnected campaign results. In the worst case, as the international military forces and US special forces were described by Gen McChrystal, results in organizations working, "at cross-purposes, you got one hand doing one thing and one hand doing the other, both trying to do the right thing but working without a good outcome."²⁵ Gen Richards put it more bluntly, saying that collective disunity had created a situation 'close to anarchy' in Afghanistan.²⁶

Adoption of the comprehensive COIN campaign in 2010 resulted in the emergence of a new articulation of the ISAF mission, whereby "ISAF, in partnership with GIRoA, conducts population-centric counterinsurgency operations, enables an expanded and effective ANSF, and supports improved governance and development in order to protect the Afghan people and provide a secure environment for sustainable stability."²⁷ Ideally, this new mission, with the associated new campaign plan, would

²⁴ National interest also impacted how operations were actually conducted, which occurred according to national preferences and priorities. See for example, Nicholas Kulish, "German Limits on War Facing Afghan Reality," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2009. Available at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/27/world/27germany.html?_r=0

For a broader analysis of these issues see, David Auerswald and Stephen Saideman, "Caveats Emptor: Multilateralism at War in Afghanistan" Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, February 2009.

²⁵ "U.S. Is Reining In Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*, 15 March 2010 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/16/world/asia/16afghan.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

²⁶ David Richards, "NATO in Afghanistan: Transformation on the Frontlines," *RUSI Journal*, 151 no.4 (2006), pp. 10-14.

²⁷ "ISAF Mission," ISAF Website, Accessed 21 July 2012. <http://www.isaf.nato.int/mission.html>

overcome the problem of collective disunity, providing a new collective banner. Moreover, it would serve as a bridge between the more kinetic and COIN-focused former Enduring Freedom mission with the politically necessary vague and softer ISAF mission statement focused on 'providing security and stability.'

However, shifting national, and personal, interests over the course of the campaign did not allow the realization of this vision. As but one example of how a shifting personal interest fundamentally altered the trajectory of the campaign, take the additional guidance from Gen Petraeus inserted into the campaign plan. It stated, "ISAF [...], will support and encourage development of responsive and accountable governance, including sub-national and community government, recognizing that this is of equal priority with security,"²⁸ thereby elevating counter corruption to a pivotal aspect of the campaign. Initially a small subset of 'improving good governance,' and not generally thought of as a result ISAF could achieve in a meaningful way, Gen Petraeus' words resulted in the establishment of a whole line of operation aimed at curbing corruption in the Afghan government. This shift occurred despite a perspective amongst some staff that the solution to corruption would not occur in the short term and perhaps a preferred approach would have been to reduce corruption to the extent Afghans were willing to accept.²⁹ Not only did the counter corruption effort distract from the core effort of conducting population-centric counterinsurgency operations, it seemed to permeate every planning effort at the HQ.

As the attacks of 9/11 fade somewhat into memory a decade later, it became more difficult to provide a clear rationale to drive Coalition engagement in the country. Coalition members struggled increasingly to connect national interests and the success of the mission, a relationship not at all self-evident in most cases. Unlike military operations undertaken to defend the homeland against direct attacks or invasions where "the threat to the community is so self-evident and unambiguous that public support for putting the armed forces in harm's way and spending treasure on all means

²⁸ Initially contained in COMISAF OPLAN 38302 rev 4, as cited in Regional Command East, "Stability Operations," May 2011, slide 2. Available at: <http://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-StabilityOps.pdf>

²⁹ Author's not for attribution interviews with selected ISAF HQ personnel, July 2012.

necessary to repel attackers can be assumed, if not entirely taken for granted,”³⁰ as the engagement in Afghanistan shifted to being termed a stabilization mission, the rationale for the participation of various Coalition members became unclear.

So as the American contingent to Afghanistan surged under the comprehensive civil military campaign, other nations looked to draw down their contributions, as domestic politics in troop contributing nations figure prominently in decision making related to strategy. More so than they had previously in Afghanistan when consensus on Coalition objectives was stronger, events at the tactical level increasingly had strategic implications both for the campaign and the Coalition. Consider, for example, the green on blue incident in January 2012, when an Afghan non-commissioned officer killed 4 French soldiers and injured another 14 while they were completing physical training. This in turn prompted a revised timeline for French withdrawal. Previously President Sarkozy announced 1,000 troops (of 3900) would withdraw from the country by the end of 2012, ahead of full NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Following the shooting, this timeline shortened to see all French forces leaving Afghanistan by the end of 2013, and a public French announcement that it intended to ask NATO to consider a total handover of NATO combat missions to the Afghan Army during 2013.³¹

The French decision, based to some degree on its national interest, and more prominently playing to politics during a national election year, was outside the HQ's and alliances' control. Still, while France has the fifth-largest contingent in Afghanistan, this decision had more of a symbolic than strategic weight. Troops had been in a largely defensive posture for the past year or longer, centered in Kabul and Kapsia, and were unofficially focused on preventing any further loss of troops' lives given the sentiment

³⁰ Kim Richard Nossal, “Making Sense of Afghanistan: The Domestic Politics of International Stabilization Missions in Australia and Canada,” Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand (University of New England, Armidale, 2010) p 3. See also John W. Western, *Selling Intervention and War: The Presidency, the Media, and the American Public* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 20–21.

³¹ See “France to begin Afghanistan withdrawal in July: President”, *Defence News*, 9 June 2012.; Statements by Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic, at his joint press conference with Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan, 27 January 2012

regarding causalities and the engagement in Afghanistan at home.³² Nonetheless, it required the commander, and NATO HQ, to selectively encourage some troop contributing nations to increase their contributions to augment the loss of the French. Perhaps more damaging, the decision possibly encouraged the forces fighting the Afghan government, who may believe that attacks on NATO and Coalition troops would push governments to leave Afghanistan sooner than planned.

Uncertainty in planning and decision making continued in the lead up to the Chicago Summit held in May of 2012. While plans and negotiations with the Afghan government for what ISAF's presence may look like post 2014 have been ongoing, they have occurred for the most part without structured awareness of national intent, or preferred levels of troop contributions. In some cases, such as that of the UK, or more prominently the US, agreements were reached before Chicago occurred, tying them to commitments regardless of the Alliance's decision.³³ Regardless of these unknowns, the planning has continued on how to transition from the counterinsurgency mission to one of security force assistance.

Lessons for the Future

The example of the Coalition HQ in Afghanistan presents some lessons to improve future multinational operations. The first relates to the methodology for campaign planning developed by NATO nations and campaign management. While campaign planning methods that identify tactical actions along lines of operation that lead to achieving the strategic objectives of the campaign are useful, they should be

³² See Steven Erlanger and Rod Nordland, "France, Breaking With NATO, Will Speed Afghan Exit" *New York Times*, 27 January 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/28/world/europe/france-to-speed-afghan-withdrawal.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

³³ Most notable of these is the agreement between the United States and Afghanistan. See, Enduring Strategic Partnership between the United States of American and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2 May 2012. Text available at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/2012.06.01u.s.-afghanistanspassignedtext.pdf>. For additional examples see, Enduring Strategic Partnership Document between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Afghanistan, 28 January, 2012, Text is available at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/global-issues/conflict-prevention/uk-a-strat-partner>.

exercised with caution. Otherwise, they can result in the strategic level of the HQ devoting an inordinate, and inappropriate, amount of attention on tactical issues, especially when fighting a COIN. Streamlining of HQ processes is essential, with less nugatory planning and more effective passage of information which, in turn, requires prioritization of efforts as a first step.

National governments will always join a Coalition if it suits their national interests. However, these national interests can result in a need to shift strategy and campaign execution in ways that planners cannot anticipate, or and the shifts may conflict with planning objectives already completed. Moreover, the development of national strategies that may be inconsistent with that of the Coalition is not ideal.

Unity of effort throughout a theatre of war is important. Situations like Afghanistan where multiple forces operate (an independent U.S. force, USFOR-A, and a Coalition predominantly lead by U.S. personnel, ISAF), present unique challenges that must be acknowledged. The practice of 'Dual hatting' a Commander can overcome some challenges, but it might create other risks within a Coalition environment. However, simple solutions to command and control will usually be elusive when one country necessarily dominates the HQ and the operating environment.

These challenges are not necessarily unique to operations in Afghanistan, but it remains prudent to recognize and acknowledge them for future operations. The inherent complexities of large scale Coalition warfare means that some degree of friction and inefficiency may be unavoidable, but by recognizing, understanding and anticipating these challenges and how they might affect strategy and campaign planning, their impact can be mitigated. This is of utmost importance because, while wars may not be won or lost at the HQ, it is there where strategy develops and, more broadly, where alliances can succeed or fail.