



*“MIZH DER BEITABORA KHALQ YI.”*  
**PASHTUN RECONCILIATION PROGRAMS**

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*“Mizh der beitabora khalq yi.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Pashtun Reconciliation Programs

Any reconciliation program developed with a goal of impacting on a rural insurgency will be very complex and fraught with both surprises and unintended consequences. While the Pashtu quote above was derived from the Mehsud tribe, it fits all Pashtuns as they *are* very untrustworthy people and any agreement entered into must be both verifiable and enforceable or it *will* be violated.

In addition to being chronically untrustworthy, Louis Dupree noted in 1979 that an essentially Shi’a custom of “dissimulation,” or protective lying, was also present in Afghanistan. The custom, *al-Taqiyya*, allowed dissimulation to save life and protect property against discriminatory taxation, to obtain and hold government jobs that were normally denied to the Shi’a, or to prevent unpleasant situations from arising. *Al-Taqiyya* was practiced freely between Sunni and Shi’a, but it is very probable that all Afghans can lie freely to foreigners, especially those who are Christians.<sup>2</sup> Given the violence that this society has experienced during the past thirty years, the safety of a clever protective lie must be especially widespread.

Reconciliation is the natural avenue to the end of any insurgency and must be pursued, but there are real problems with the Afghanistan insurgency. First, many of the combatants are Pashtuns living in Pakistan – making this nearly a foreign invasion. It is relatively simple to divide the Taliban into two groups, depending on their country of origin. Given this reality, it is much easier to reconcile Taliban who originated from within Afghanistan’s borders than it would be to reconcile the “invading” Pakistani Pashtuns.

Taliban may also be divided into two groups, based on their views of nationalism. Many are Pashtun nationalists who view the hostilities as a way to regain control of Afghanistan for the Pashtun majority that has traditionally ruled the country. The second group contains – or consists of – men who are essentially opportunists, criminals making a good living under the cover of being insurgents. Reconciling nationalists is straightforward while it may be impossible to make any “arrangements” that would result in the opportunists giving up the fight.

Another split within the Pashtuns who form the Taliban involves their particular desired end state, the real reason they are fighting. A large number of them are “traditionalists” whose goal has generally involved moving Afghanistan’s political system back to the period prior to 1973 when the king, Zahir Shah, was overthrown by modernists seeking to create a modern nation from Afghanistan. The second, opposing groups are basically “revolutionaries” seeking to impose a new form of governance upon Afghanistan, *Sharia*. Traditionally, these parties have been supported and funded by outside interests, chiefly from Pakistan’s madrassa system and from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. These opposing “coalitions” entered into a civil war following the Soviet Union’s withdrawal and the defeat of President Najibullah’s communist government. This civil war is continuing with the Taliban and their Muslim extremist allies representing the “revolutionary interests” against the “traditionalists” supporting Hamid Karzai and the

1. Howell, Evelyn, *Mizh: A Monograph on Government’s Relations with the Mehsud Tribe*, Simla, 1931, pg. 63. The translation is important to anyone considering a reconciliation program among the Pashtuns, “We are very untrustworthy people.”

2. Dupree, Louis, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Oct-Dec. 1979, pp. 680-682. Dupree commented on *al-Taqiyya* practiced by Shi’a groups such as the Qizlbash, but many experienced individuals comment on the Afghan proclivity to tell falsehoods, especially to save themselves embarrassment or to escape a risky or hazardous situation.

current government of Afghanistan. Those members of the revolutionary coalitions had experienced foreign influence, control, and financial support that allowed many of them to enrich themselves far beyond the aspirations they had as self-ordained country mullahs. Reconciliation may not be an option they would welcome.

Another important factor related to reconciliation involves *Pashtunwali* and its requirement for revenge for wrongs suffered at the hands of others. During the Taliban period, many people were punished for little reason, executed cruelly after being tortured, and jailed for minor transgressions. Taliban considering reconciliation must consider the possibility that their previous victims and their relatives will exact revenge if they return to Afghanistan. Pashtuns are uncommonly patient about the timing for the revenge they plan and one folk saying is relevant here: “If I get my revenge before a hundred years have passed, I am not a Pashtun.” Reconciliation in the face of this potential threat makes the process even more difficult.

Revenge may come from the Taliban who are being “deserted” by those deciding to reconcile. Mullah Khaksar, the Taliban’s Deputy-Minister of Interior, was the first defector from the senior levels of that government. He was later murdered on the streets of Kandahar. Potential reconciling Taliban must also consider the possibility that the Taliban might actually win their war. If this happened, those considering leaving the Taliban know they would face harsh punishment.

Afghan police, security, and military corruption are factors that those Taliban considering reconciliation must consider. Much like the Mafia, the Afghan security services can be expected to demand “protection money” to ensure that former Taliban members would not be harassed. Arrests and forced bribes to gain release are real factors of Afghan life and the members of the Taliban know this as well as the common Afghans.

There are other Afghan ethnic groups to be considered when Taliban reconciliation is considered. Many of them, particularly the Hazara, have been the victims of Pashtun aggression in the recent past and currently occupy their own regions as well as positions in national and provincial governments because of the “shield” provided by American, NATO, and ISAF military force. The Tajiks, in particular, have managed to become a significant political force now that the Pashtuns are split between Hamid Karzai and Mullah Omar. Any Taliban reconciliation success would be viewed as “Pashtun reunification” by the other ethnic groups and they will work behind the scenes to ensure this effort is not successful. The Tajiks, for example, would lose half of their political power if the Pashtuns were united in a single political force that opposed them.

Finally, there is a widespread belief – that is not altogether inaccurate – that the United States and its allies have prepared lists – “black lists” – of Taliban commanders who will not be allowed to reconcile. This group of “irreconcilables” is frequently referred to, but no one has ever seen the alleged list. Taliban leaders and commanders considering reconciliation have no way of knowing if they are on this “black list” and fear that reconciliation could lead to a prison cell, or worse.

Based on the above, any reconciliation effort in Afghanistan is very difficult to create and manage. But it can and should be attempted.

First, Taliban leaders are like any other Pashtun group and they will call their trusted subcommanders into a shura, a religious gathering, where they will discuss the potential reconciliation. Given the fact that Pashtuns cannot keep a secret, the potential reconciliation will soon be the subject of widespread gossip. Hard line Taliban leaders will soon hear the rumors and the individual considering reconciliation – a process that the Taliban

will view as “defection” – will no longer be trusted by his colleagues. Increased security surveillance is possible, discoverable, and the suspicion that will automatically develop makes reconciliation more likely. This is a winning scenario even without the actual reconciliation.

Second, any key Taliban commander suspected of harboring plans for reconciliation with the government of Afghanistan will quickly be viewed as a security risk by those individuals and organizations affiliated with Pakistan’s security services. Their natural course of action involves surveillance and arrest as soon as the potential reconciliation is corroborated by another source or two. Given the Pashtun proclivity of denigrating one another at every opportunity, it wouldn’t be long before the arrest is made. As in the first case, this is also a winning scenario as it removes a Taliban leader from the organization while creating suspicion within the Taliban leadership that expects additional colleagues to also consider the reconciliation option.

Finally, the actual reconciliation of a Taliban leader from any of the identified “tiers” can have a cascading effect on the remaining insurgent leaders. This is especially true if the reconciled leader is able to live a relatively normal life and is NOT forced to make public statements repudiating his former colleagues. Any Taliban leader returning to Afghanistan should fear only the Taliban and should be allowed to live as normal a life as possible. The impact on those others considering reconciliation could be dramatic. Naim Kuchi, a former Taliban and the leader of the Ghilzai Ahmadzai tribe was arrested and incarcerated at Guantanamo, but when released and allowed to return quietly to his tribal position, he began to help with the peace process.<sup>3</sup> This model should be repeated widely.

### **CASE STUDY: Good Intentions Gone Wrong**

Amateurs should avoid Afghanistan’s internal politics. An excellent example was provided with the involvement of the “Ritchie Brothers” and their freelance affiliation with Mujahedin heroic figure, Abdul Haq, who tragically lost his life following a 2001 expedition into Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Convinced that they knew better than US planners, they presided over a well-documented disaster that left Abdul Haq’s tortured body hanging at Ariana Circle in Kabul as a grisly warning to others who might consider opposing the Taliban Movement.

A second essentially freelance attempt to “resolve” the Afghan fighting was attempted by two European diplomats, James Semple and Mervyn Patterson. According to open source reporting, Semple had been interested in methods utilized in Northern Ireland that resulted in the Ulster Volunteer Force ending its military operations and serving as a secret link between the “Loyalists” and the Irish government. Semple was an experienced Afghanistan veteran with experience with non-governmental organizations and he was a rarity among Europeans and Americans in that he spoke Pashtu.

Semple was reported to believe that the “Taliban thing is very localized” and that people often follow a local chieftain who happens to be Taliban and the Taliban was not a homogenous group. Later, Semple and Patterson were accused by the Afghan government of talking with one of the “irreconcilables” and were soon ordered to leave the country. Their defense involved accusations aimed at local officials, but it is obvious that they were repeating the error of the Ritchie Brothers, getting involved with tribal dynamics they knew little about.

In this case, Semple had drawn generally correct conclusions regarding the Taliban. They were not a homogenous group and local people frequently followed a local chieftain who happened to be Taliban, but he made a great miscalculation by assuming that the factors he identified were

3. The Guardian, February 16, 2008. Naim Kuchi met with Michael Semple, the diplomat expelled from Afghanistan for meeting with “irreconcilables.”

actually constants in Pashtun society. His greatest error involved his belief that Mansur Dadullah (AKA Bakht Mohammad) was one of the local chieftains in Helmand province who was followed by local people and his attempt to persuade Mansur Dadullah into reconciliation was a masterpiece of miscalculation – if the open source accounts are generally correct.

Far from being from Helmand province and a member of a tribe that local people might rally to and follow, Mansur Dadullah was a Kakar tribesman and a member of a tribe that was not well represented in Helmand province. Kakar territory is generally within Pakistan's Baluchistan province and while this large Pashtun tribe is widespread within the region, few Kakars are found in Helmand province. Knowing this basic tribal reality may have saved Semple and Patterson from a large mistake. These Kakars were from the Gurgusht group and were not allied closely with either the Durrani or the Ghilzai Confederations that dominated Helmand province – particularly the Durrani tribes.

Semple was reported to have drawn a comparison between what he and Patterson were seeking to achieve in Helmand and what the US had done in al-Anbar province in Iraq. He also believed that there were many people who served with the Taliban regime who were well placed inside the Karzai regime or else were pillars of Afghan society.<sup>4</sup>

Like with the Ritchie Brothers, Semple and Patterson were observing exceptions, not the general rule with the Taliban. Naïve and wishful thinking managed to dominate their reconciliation efforts as they apparently continued their efforts to gain access to Mansur Dadullah, the brother of one of the bloodiest Taliban commanders who was killed in Helmand province by British forces in 2007, instead of a local chieftain who also happened to be in the Taliban. The evidence is circumstantial, but fairly damning. Semple and Patterson were expelled from Afghanistan on December 25; Mansur Dadullah was sacked from his Taliban position by Mullah Mohammad Omar on December 29.<sup>5</sup> This was the primary error made by Semple and Patterson as they attempted to replicate the US success in al-Anbar province. The second error was made with their decision to leave the local government officials out of their operational plan. Governor Wafa was accused of playing local politics as Semple and Patterson were summarily expelled from Afghanistan, but Wafa and Hamid Karzai, left out of the planning and the actual operation, were left with suspicion as their only option when the reconciliation efforts leaked – as all things do in Afghanistan. Like Mullah Omar, they suspected treachery and reacted predictably by removing the objects of their discontent.

### **CASE STUDY: US Failure With Mutawakil**

Following the retreat of the Taliban from Kandahar in late 2001, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, the Taliban's last Foreign Minister who had been assigned to Kabul, also went to Quetta seeking safety in Pakistan's Pashtun region. From Quetta, Mutawakil carefully planned his personal reconciliation and discrete travel back to Kandahar.<sup>6</sup>

Arriving in Kandahar in early February 2002, Mutawakil was soon taken into custody by the US military where the fact that he was the highest-ranking prisoner from the Taliban soon doomed him to incarceration at Bagram rather than the personal reconciliation he had carefully planned and probably negotiated with the Afghan officials affiliated with the Afghan interim president, Hamid Karzai.<sup>7</sup> His actual move to Kandahar

4. The Guardian, February 16, 2008

5. Asia Times, February 5, 2008.

6. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/1810717.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1810717.stm)

7. <http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2002/02/09/taliban020209.html>

was facilitated by drug lord, Haji Basher Noorzai, who was subsequently lured to New York where he was also arrested by zealous Drug Enforcement Agency officers.<sup>8</sup>

After voluntarily returning to Afghanistan in what should be best described as a “defection” from the Taliban leadership, Mutawakil spent three years in US and Afghan custody before being allowed to speak freely – and even run for a position in the new Afghan Parliament. Soon, the Taliban sent him a highly unveiled warning by killing his brother in Quetta.<sup>9</sup> They had previously disowned their own Foreign Minister and stated that Mutawakil “does not represent our will.”<sup>10</sup>

Mutawakil represents a tremendous lost opportunity, the likes of which are seldom available in an insurgency. Since Mutawakil voluntarily sought reconciliation with the newly formed Afghan Interim Government and had belonged to the more pragmatic Taliban faction that was affiliated with the movement’s co-founder, Mullah Mohammad Rabbani, little effort would have been required to maneuver Mutawakil into a public stance from which he could disown his more radical colleagues who worked from Kandahar and were antagonistic toward Mullah Rabbani and his pragmatic faction. The decision to use Mutawakil as a “trophy,” after all he was the highest-ranking prisoner from the Taliban Movement, prevented his use by the Afghan government as a spokesman for reconciliation.

Second, and most important, the arrest and imprisonment of Mutawakil served as a warning to all other Taliban leadership personalities who might consider defecting into a reconciliation program. They knew that Mutawakil, the son of a famous Pashtun poet, was harmless and was essentially the Movement’s spokesman and if he was arrested and held in solitary confinement, they could guess about the treatment they would receive if they chose defection.

Third, the Taliban reaction that led to the disowning of Mutawakil and the murder of his brother in Quetta served also as a warning to anyone in a significant leadership position of the Taliban’s response to any defection from their movement. Later, the Taliban demonstrated both their reach and patience by killing Mullah Khaksar, the Taliban’s former Deputy-Minister of Interior and a close colleague of Mutawakil.<sup>11</sup>

From the very first, the US gave up an opportunity to take the initiative in the propaganda war against the Taliban. After ceding the initiative to the insurgents, the Taliban used their well-honed propaganda apparatus and deadly violence to show that potential defectors faced a fate far more devastating than just the three years of US custody experienced by Mutawakil. The US error and the Taliban reaction effectively halted any realistic leadership reconciliation efforts.

## **CASE STUDY: Afghan Government Reached Midpoint With Rais al-Baghrani**

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8. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/02/world/asia/02afghan.html?pagewanted=all>

9. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4649827.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4649827.stm)

10. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3209584.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3209584.stm)

11. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/14/AR2006011400983.html>

The case of Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani illustrates how much closer the Afghan government can come to managing a successful reconciliation of a respected Taliban commander. Abdul Wahid came to the attention of the Afghan government in mid-2004 when they learned that he had ordered that his Alizai subtribe, the Khalozai, register and participate in the presidential elections scheduled for later in 2004. He was an unusual Pashtun leader who seemed to be more of a Pashtun nationalist than a Taliban and he had never served officially within the Taliban leadership. He had been a member of the Jamiat-i Islami of Burhanuddin Rabbani during the anti-Soviet jihad and his willingness to find common cause with a Tajik – Rabbani – demonstrated his pragmatism.

Following Mutawakil, Abdul Wahid was the senior-most leader affiliated with the Taliban. He went further than Mutawakil from the first, agreeing to media interviews in May 2005. He said:

“My message to those still fighting is they should take this golden chance and come back and build the country,” he said in an interview here in late May. “We have an Islamic country and Shariah law, and we should accept the rule of the government.”<sup>12</sup>

With Abdul Wahid, the Afghan government managed a successful reconciliation of their own, but it made little difference because nothing else was done to capitalize upon their work. Returning to the relative safety of his Baghran District, Abdul Wahid brought nothing back from Kabul to demonstrate that his reconciliation was a positive step to his elders. Additionally, he was now an openly declared target for the Taliban. Abdul Wahid probably found himself in a situation not unlike that of a “tightrope walker” whose slightest error could be fatal. His own powerful elders and clergy must have been looking at him with crossed eyes when he returned from Kabul where he placed all of them in the Taliban’s sights – and he returned with no aid or assistance they were probably expecting after declaring themselves for the Karzai administration.

Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani didn’t make the decision to rally his Khalozai sub-tribe of the Alizai tribe by himself. He would have sat in numerous jirgas and shuras with his tribal leaders and his religious advisors prior to making the reconciliation decision. Additionally, his reconciliation meant that a majority of the Khalozai were in full agreement with his decision. Since early 2005, few – if any – deliverables such as schools, clinics, wells, and food aid have arrived in Helmand’s Baghran District. Instead, his Khalozai found themselves in a new battlefield that had previously been relatively calm. Democratically oriented Pashtuns, such as the Khalozai, have leaders serving at the pleasure of the governed and through his reconciliation without any positive results for the sub-tribe, Abdul Wahid’s position as leader is probably jeopardized.

He is probably surprised at the results of his efforts at reconciliation and the public endorsements of reconciliation that he made. He is now walking that tightrope between capture and arrest by Coalition forces, murder by the Taliban, and removal from his position within the Khalozai for his failure to bring development aid along with his reconciliation. When he is not worrying over these three potential fates, he must also be concerned over efforts by drug enforcement officials to find and arrest him for the opium trade that occurs in his region.

And hanging in the background is the nagging suspicion that Abdul Wahid sheltered Mullah Omar in the period after Kandahar was captured. His explanation makes perfect tribal sense, but the reports that he helped Omar escape might as well have been carved in stone:

“The American military once suspected Mr. Baghrani of harboring the Taliban leader, Mullah Muhammad Omar, in Baghran, his home region, in northern Helmand Province. He denied that, adding that Mullah Omar was from a different tribe and would never have trusted his life to a tribe

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12. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/02/international/asia/02amnesty.html>



other than his own.”<sup>13</sup>

Worse, potential Taliban leaders considering reconciliation are aware of the plight of Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani that resulted from his decision to reconcile.

### **CASE STUDY: DOD Manages to Construct a Policy Failure in 2001**

The general “instincts” of the Pashtun leaders in Afghanistan have generally proven to be superior to that of the western leaders when negotiations were considered. They know the natural flow of negotiations from their historical relationships while the leaders in the West must rely upon their personal backgrounds that are poorly suited to function in tribal situations.

Perhaps the best example involves the surrender of Kandahar and the possibility of ending the fighting completely in late 2001. Hamid Karzai had been able to rally reinforcements inside Afghanistan and move toward Kandahar from the north as Gul Agha Shirzai’s Barakzai force was moving toward Kandahar from the east. Finding their position untenable – and US air strikes daunting and unstoppable – the Taliban entered into negotiations by sending Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani to meet in person with Hamid Karzai, the new leader of the Afghan Interim Government. During the negotiations with Abdul Wahid, Hamid Karzai took the normal Pashtun approach toward an enemy and offered terms that allowed the Taliban to return to their homes with dignity rather than to continue the fighting.

#### **CNN reported:**

“The negotiations have been between the Taliban ... and the head of Afghanistan’s new interim government, Hamid Karzai. Now, Karzai has been heading a tribal military force that has been one of the forces circling the city of Kandahar over the last week or so. (Mullah Muhammad Omar is the leader of the Taliban, who is to turn over control of the city.) All the details of the surrender -- the negotiation terms and what this means for the Taliban and what they expect in return -- were announced by the Taliban’s former ambassador to Pakistan. There are some key things to look at in the terms of that surrender. Number one -- the implications that the Taliban leaders can go free, can go home.”<sup>14</sup>

Hamid Karzai had also been communicating with a key leader in the Kandahar region. Mullah Naqib, of the powerful Alikozai tribe, was a fellow Durrani Pashtun and had a large militia. Mullah Naqib was also close to the Taliban Defense Minister, Mullah Obaidullah, a fellow Alikozai, and the two felt that Karzai’s offer of amnesty for all Taliban leaders was something they could accept. Time Magazine reported:

“Kandahar sources say that the Taliban defense minister Mullah Obadullah has sent out feelers to Karzai, offering to hand over the city to him and to Mullah Naqib, a respected former Soviet war commander residing in Kandahar with a large tribal following.”<sup>15</sup>

Around this time, the Taliban withdrew from Kandahar and retreated to nearby Pakistan as Mullah Naqib combined his militia with forces belonging to a senior Noorzai leader, Haji Basher Noorzai, and they maintained order in Kandahar until the city could be turned over to Hamid

13. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/02/international/asia/02amnesty.html>

14. <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/central/12/06/ret.robertson.otsc/index.html>

15. <http://www.time.com/time/columnist/mcgirk/article/0,9565,186578,00.html>

Karzai's approaching force. The Taliban leaders, especially Mullah Obaidullah and Abdul Wahid, individuals most closely involved in the surrender negotiations with the approaching leaders, expected to be able to return to their homes peacefully – as Hamid Karzai offered.

Unfortunately, US policy toward the Taliban was soon set in Washington, D.C., by someone who knew nothing about *Pashtunwali*. The US Defense Secretary soon reversed Hamid Karzai and left the simultaneous disastrous impression that the new head of the Afghanistan Interim Government was an American “puppet.”

“Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said the US would not stand for any deal that allowed Omar to remain free and “live in dignity” in the region.”<sup>16</sup>

This was the moment that reconciliation efforts were made far more difficult than ever anticipated. Abdul Wahid Rais al-Baghrani returned to his home in Helmand's Baghran District to be searched for by US Special Operations teams as Mullah Obaidullah withdrew to Quetta, Pakistan, where he continued to manage aggressive Taliban operations. While it is only possible to speculate, if Hamid Karzai had been able to keep his word that was given during negotiations with Abdul Wahid, the war with the Taliban may have been over in late December 2001. The US Defense Secretary ensured that the Taliban would become an implacable foe rather than quietly return to their home villages.

Reconciliation Planning: Something that may actually work.

Given the complexity of any well-intentioned reconciliation program among the Pashtuns and the animosity from other ethnic groups a serious reconciliation effort would generate, caution is needed as these operations are planned and implemented. Communication is necessary between all parties involved, as well, to prevent suspicion as leaks occur. Both Mullah Omar and Hamid Karzai obviously came to suspect betrayal by Bakht Mohammad as Semple and Patterson initiated contact with the Taliban faction leader. Instead of generating suspicion, the first stage of any reconciliation program should involve a broad effort to publicize previous successful Taliban reconciliation activities. Semple highlighted the experience of Naim Kuchi in The Guardian interview, but his efforts would have been better served if Naim Kuchi had appeared on Tolo and Khyber television systems and on BBC Pashtu language broadcasts to show that he lived a life not unlike what he experienced before the Taliban period. As in any military operation efforts should have been made to prepare the propaganda battlefield. Semple and Patterson missed this point.

Second, the Taliban Movement is a “coalition” of like-minded combatant groups, many of them more criminal than nationalist. They need incentives to reconcile and the best tool available to encourage this response involves kinetic operations. Both groups are more likely to view reconciliation opportunities through a positive lens if there are increasing chances that they will become fatalities. The “trick” involves maneuvering the Taliban leaders and sub-commanders into situations in which no matter what actions they take; they lose. Getting them into negotiations through couriers is a good initial step. As pointed out previously, this will soon leak and create or increase the degree of distrust between the leader targeted for reconciliation negotiations and his Taliban colleagues.

Selection of a susceptible target personality is also a necessity. The Taliban leadership was far from being cohesive and while Ghilzai leaders tend to occupy many senior positions, there are numerous members of the Durrani Confederation within the leadership. The presence of the two groups forms a natural schism that may be taken advantage of through carefully orchestrated reconciliation efforts. Additionally, there were even two

16. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/1207/p1s2-wosc.html>

Taliban “factions” that didn’t work well together from the first. As a result, Mullah Omar managed to restrict his political enemies to Kabul while he maintained the Taliban seat of government in Kandahar. The group that was posted in Kabul was composed of Mullah Rabbani, Mutawakil (the first of the leadership to surrender), Mullah Zaeef, Mullah Razak, Mullah Kakar (the first defector), and others who were not fully trusted by Mullah Omar. These individuals and the Taliban officials assigned to Kabul instead of Kandahar, and those affiliated with them, would be excellent reconciliation targets.

Selecting an influential individual to conduct the negotiations is also a crucial variable. A highly trusted religious leader, for example, may be an excellent choice to start the long distance talks. If trusted by both sides, this individual would go far to develop the degree of trust needed to move the discussions forward. Most of the reconciliation targets important enough to go after in reconciliation efforts live in Pakistan’s safe havens and will have to be convinced to cross into Afghanistan. This will require the development of a high degree of trust. The more the two parties to the negotiations have in common, the more likely success will result. Common tribe, madrassa, jihadi party when fighting the Soviets, and similar things help ensure success.

Offering asylum in a foreign country is a very useful approach. The Taliban leaders know that their former colleagues will always be alert for any opportunity to attack them out of revenge and any offer of safe haven or being moved to a witness protection program will go far toward convincing a key individual to defect from the Taliban leadership. This should be reserved for individuals who might be expected to cooperate in luring others into a reconciliation program or to participate in specific psychological operations intended to inflict severe damage to the Taliban, but an offer of safety abroad would be a very powerful inducement toward cooperation and reconciliation.

The overarching psychological goal of any reconciliation program involves concentrated efforts intended to split the enemy into two groups. This has been partially accomplished by their own organizational problems with members of Durrani and Ghilzai confederations involved in the leadership. Durrani are the traditional leaders of the Pashtuns, and Afghanistan, for that matter, and most Durrani Pashtuns must resent the presence of Ghilzai “upstarts” within the leadership. For their part, the Ghilzai view themselves as the founders of the Afghan nation that was overthrown by Durrani usurpers, particularly the Popalzai tribe whose leader Ahmad Shah Durrani replaced the Ghilzai leaders long ago. In general, the Ghilzai appear to be more nationalistic and xenophobic than the Durrani and this is one split that may be exploited by a clever reconciliation campaign that focuses only on Taliban Durrani while leaving out the Ghilzai – to exacerbate the historical fault line between the two Pashtun groups.

Local Helmand province animosities between Alizai subtribes, between the Ishaqzai and Kakar tribes, and between Ishaqzai and Baluch tribes over the control of the narcotics trade are other schisms that might provide opportunities to exploit through reconciliation offers. Offers to one group while leaving out a tribal competitor is nearly certain to worsen relations between the two target tribes.

The most difficult aspect of ending an insurgency involves a final demobilization of hostile forces. The American military has not managed to accomplish this very desirable end state since the War Department became the Defense Department in 1947. Britain had great success in Malaya, but against insurgents who were actually a very small minority of the total population that was composed of an ethnic group that was essentially hostile to the insurgents. Often taken as a case study in the successful prosecution of a counterinsurgency, interesting results might be obtained from a case study that included a close examination of the population’s actual demographics as an analytical factor.

As military and police pressure is applied against insurgents and they begin to lose their ability to maneuver, recruit, and gain access to funds they are forced to move away from tactics normally found in guerrilla warfare, such as raids and ambushes, in favor of terrorist tactics. These new tactics always adopted by insurgents losing their ability to control events includes bombings, assassinations, kidnappings, and these tactics harm the very population they are seeking to gain their support. Civilian and non-combatant casualties begin to outnumber the casualties the insurgent is able to inflict on the security forces opposing them. As they become increasingly nihilistic, non-combatants suffer even more. Increasingly, operations conducted by insurgents come to resemble common criminal acts. It is at this point in any insurgency that the insurgent is most vulnerable as their attacks on the civilian population, especially the Muslim-on-Muslim violence that is forbidden in their sacred religious texts. Rallying the population against the criminal violence and attacks on innocent Muslims becomes increasingly easy to accomplish.

In the case of the Taliban, there are two easily discernable groups in operation, the Pashtun religious nationalists and those “opportunists” seeking to enrich themselves. This provides a situation in which the two groups may be split while potentially developing an impact on their ability to recruit reinforcements, acquire operational intelligence and safe haven from villagers, and reduce their ability to raise funds needed to continue operations.

This approach involves efforts to “criminalize” the criminal behavior of *individual* insurgents. Efforts have been made in past insurgencies, such as Northern Ireland, to criminalize entire insurgent groups, but this has been counterproductive and often leads to insurgent propaganda that results in increased support for the insurgency from their target audience. This factor can be eliminated by focusing only on the criminal behavior of individual insurgents. Formal indictments in criminal courts in the *United Kingdom* for those Taliban captured after wounding or killing a British service member is a good course of action to consider. Taliban members know that if they are captured and placed in custody of an Afghan security service, they will normally be able to bribe their way to freedom within three days. The assurance of a long prison sentence in a United Kingdom prison will be a significant deterrent to the less committed Taliban fighters and may aid in efforts to split the Taliban into nationalist and criminal groups. Being labeled “criminal” may also serve to drive a broader wedge between tribal elders and their villagers against the Taliban. Few people will willingly support individuals widely recognized as criminals.

The application of customary Laws of Land Warfare and the requirement of wearing a uniform or distinctive badge while bearing arms openly may also be a useful approach to demobilizing a failing insurgency. The threat of a “Drumhead Court Martial” and transfer to a European prison as an illegal combatant should also have a significant impact on insurgent morale. Even those seeking martyrdom and the customary 72 virgins should have second thoughts if faced with the assurance of extended prison sentences from which they would be unable to bribe their way to freedom. If this is applied only to Taliban field commanders and the penalty to be imposed is published widely, it should have a dampening effect on Taliban morale and their ability to recruit additional fighters.

Since the Taliban leaders believe that a list of “irreconcilables” exists but no one knows who is actually on it, this effectively stops any serious efforts to develop a reconciliation program. Ideally, no Taliban leader should be excluded from reconciliation talks. Even the worst of the Taliban should be able to reconcile, but with appropriate sanctions for past wrongdoings. Extended periods of house arrest, possibly in a third country as was done with Uganda’s Idim Amin, and even lifetime house arrest should be considered to get key Taliban leaders to abandon the fighting.

Reconciliation programs should focus only on leadership personalities. Rural Afghanistan, the origin of most of these leaders, is essentially

a feudal society and vassals can be expected to follow the example of their feudal leaders. Serious efforts should be made to attract key leaders into reconciliation negotiations, but the average rank and file fighter should be reconciled through the established mechanism of the PTS program.

Reconciliation programs are possible to design and implement, but this approach has been made increasingly difficult by the poor policy decision that reversed Hamid Karzai's amnesty offer to the Taliban in December 2001 that made many of the Pashtuns into enemy fighters. The arrest and incarceration of the first defector from the Taliban leadership, Wakil Ahmad Mutawakil, made additional defections – as the Taliban view the reconciliation process – increasingly difficult to obtain.

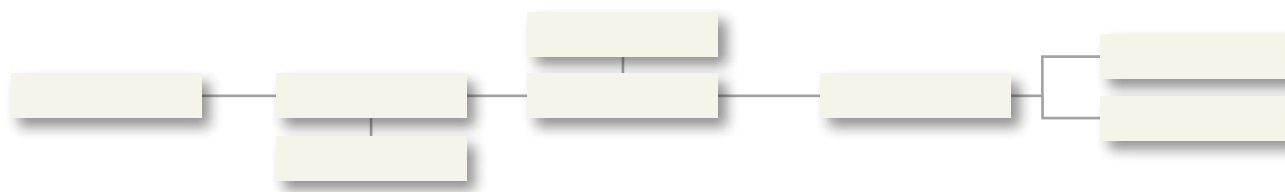
Careful publication of the stories regarding successful reconciled Taliban leaders would be very useful. Assuring that reconciliation can occur with no preconditions is also important. Long studies of the history of insurgencies will reveal no reconciling leader who is willing to denounce or help harm his former colleagues and any preconditions will generally doom a reconciliation effort. Offers of relocation to overseas locations and witness protection safety may be needed to attract important leadership personalities into a reconciliation program but depending on the targeted leader, this may be a real bargain. The Taliban have no real depth when it comes to leaders and the removal of a “keystone” personality from the Taliban “leadership arch” may result in its sudden collapse.



# TRIBAL ANALYSIS CENTER

Traditional anthropological research conducted among tribes inhabiting remote areas where insurgents and criminals operate has become increasingly difficult to implement. Studies carried out among people living in small-scale societies now are nearly impossible due to the physical dangers associated with the civil and religious unrest found in those areas. Swat, for example, has become so dangerous that Frederick Barth's studies only could be repeated at the risk of the investigator's life. Similar research is not feasible among Burma's Rohingya tribes located on both sides of the border with Bangladesh, as well as with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan's interior and within Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where even Pakistan's army enters with reluctance.

Given the difficulties of conducting direct fieldwork in conflictive areas, the Tribal Analysis Center utilizes an indirect approach. Using multidisciplinary research, we seek to collect and analyze data obtained from a wide variety of sources, both current and historical. In the absence of new ethnographic fieldwork to update our base of knowledge, the Tribal Analysis Center compiles and summarizes existing research and documents on tribal societies, combining this material with contemporary press reports and articles. We assume that much can be gleaned from well-informed observers who are not anthropologists, ranging from journalists and travelers to government officials.



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