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REPORT FROM THE FIELD

Tribalism and terror

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In the second half of the twentieth century, nations were predominantly absorbed by the Cold War and the splinter activities that resulted from the bipolar balance of power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many offered theories of how the world would be shaped in the post-Cold War era. In the nearly two decades that have elapsed since the end of the Cold War, Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* introduced the argument that the fault lines between different civilizations (i.e. the Muslim world, Western World...) will be the cause for conflict. This argument has obvious merit as it is becoming increasingly clear that in many ways Islam, in particular, is chafing with its neighbors in today's highly connected global environment. While Islam has confronted other great civilizations of the world throughout its history, a new vehicle for this confrontation is Islamic terrorism.

Another post-Cold War theory piece is Robert Kaplan's 'The Coming Anarchy', which envisions global strife centered upon the scarcity and degradation of resources and the failed states resulting from them. In most cases, these developing, and in many cases failing, states have strong tribal traditions and elements, and in some cases are dominated by them; '... much of the underdeveloped world: the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war.'¹ If, as Kaplan suggests, conflict is spurred on by the scarcity of resources (a historical impetus for tribal organization) and the failure of states, it only goes to reason that in these regions there will be reinforcement of tribal institutions. In these chaotic environments, it is often the unity and strength provided by the tribe that allows for security and survival. While security and control of life supporting resources are ancient sources of tribal development, there is no less need for security and life support today.

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While much of the world continues along its path of development, it should be noted that tribal groups and organizations are maintaining solid influence, particularly in developing and failing states. This situation is well known in Iraq, and Oliver Roy makes a similar observation in Afghanistan and Pakistan; 'The tribal system remains dominant within the Pakhtun ethnic group, particularly in the eastern part of the country.'² Throughout history, 'developed' countries have encountered and engaged (both constructively and belligerently) with tribal groups. Drawing upon and developing past knowledge and experience is crucial in preventing, confronting, or defeating the threats and challenges presented by tribal groups as, or before they appear. This takes on particular significance because the members of Islamist extremist groups commonly come from societies with strong tribal traditions.

Developing this knowledge is only the beginning of what needs to be done to engage with tribal groups. There is a requirement to shift operational techniques, with simultaneous modification or variance in doctrine. There needs to be an associated acceptance of new ways to work with foreign elements to counter a threat. It requires creative thought and innovation, not just in tactical actions, but in methods of engagement, especially those not utilizing force. It requires the military agent to employ flexible wit, savvy diplomatic skills and execute innovative concepts. It requires substantial authority at the tactical level to make decisions which will have strategic impact. While the concept of terrorism may be a relatively new entry into the list of significant international security concerns, tribal actors are not. Recognition of the threat and opportunities that tribal structures can present, especially through their linkages with terror groups, identifies the role tribal groups will play in future crisis and conflict, clearly illustrating the need for in-depth understanding of tribal systems and influences.

Tribal organizations offer a tremendous resource and capability in countering terrorism. This example continues into countering insurgency, as it seems that the two are more and more difficult to separate from each other.³ The basis of this comes from recognizing that terror groups commonly operate within tribal groups, such as the Arab tribes of Iraq or the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan in Pakistan. To make any effective use of tribal elements in countering terrorism, there needs to be a comprehensive understanding of tribal societies in general, and specific understanding of the local tribal agents that are going to be engaged. With an in-depth understanding of tribal organizations, one can begin to understand the motivations, operating concepts, and vulnerabilities of the terrorist enemy.

This opportunity comes from several angles: (1) as mentioned previously, in the majority of cases, terrorist fighters come from tribal societies; (2) terrorist organizations use tactics that have their roots in tribal warfare (guerilla tactics – ambush, raid, etc . . .); (3) it is often the case that where government writ is weak (or has failed altogether) tribes are the only functional social organizations – precisely the areas used by terror groups as sanctuaries. In recognizing these ideas, one can see how a better understanding of tribal society and warfare can be used to understand the terrorist agent that we are fighting. This can also, given the

appropriate techniques and/or approach, give us the opportunity to use tribal elements against terror organizations. This can be done through a variety of means, such as use as proxy operational forces, intelligence sources, or preventing terror apparatus from operating in tribal areas (area denial).

Recently, there have been notably different results in dealings with tribal groups in Iraq and Afghanistan/Pakistan. President Pervez Musharraf's various tribal initiatives from 2004 to 2007⁴ are seen as clear failures. While his attempts ended in failure, his recognition of the role that tribal groups need to play in combating terror groups is significant, 'Tribesmen should extend cooperation to the government to stamp out terrorism and play an effective role in driving out terrorists from the tribal areas.'⁵ The reasons for the repeated failures were readily obvious, '... Musharraf's regime undertook a series of controversial settlements with local leaders.... Early on, however, it became clear that the settlements suffered from weak enforcement, permitting the continued sanctuary of foreign terrorists and cross-border infiltration of militants into Afghanistan.'⁶ On the heels of Musharraf's failed efforts, the newly elected Pakistani government (spring 2008) initiated new policies towards tribal groups that include 'political engagement', economic and development incentives, the use of force (minimal), and respect for tribal customs and traditions.⁷ These opening rounds of discussions and deals with tribal militants in Pakistan quickly met with failure – for the same base reasons that Musharraf's efforts had failed – and ultimately led to military action in the end of June 2008 in an attempt to reestablish government control in the Peshawar region.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai, whose concerns echo those of Pakistan, has made clear that the tribal regions, also largely outside the control of his central government, are critical in combating the terrorist organizations operating within their respective nations. 'Karzai demanded the enhancement of "the role of tribal structures and community elders in counter-terrorist operations."⁸ While Karzai has made these demands, no notable progress has been made on this front. While Afghan and Pakistani efforts have proven failures, it is important to recognize the reasons for failure and make corrections to the method, rather than abandon the concept.

In contrast, over a similar period of time (since 2003) US military tribal engagement efforts in the Al Anbar province of Iraq have met with success.⁹ It is the methods and situations surrounding these attempts that have resulted in opposite outcomes. This is not to suggest that US forces met with immediate or consistent success since 2003. In fact, US forces in Al Anbar had long made inroads with the Sunni tribes, in some cases with moderate progress, but until 2006–7 they were largely rebuffed. In the end, it was the actions of the insurgents and terrorists, coupled with the persistent presence and 'open hand' of US forces that caused the Sunni tribes to respond and accept American offers. While Americans worked to restore order and protect the population of Al Anbar, the terrorists and insurgents attempted to keep the Sunni population, their operating base, cowed and controlled through brutal force and intimidation. After years of this terror program, the Sunni tribes of Al Anbar

were pushed beyond the tipping point and took hold of the long-open hand offered by the Marines and soldiers.

To begin to understand the reasons for success and failure with tribal groups in Iraq and Afghanistan–Pakistan, it is necessary to discuss some of the base elements of tribal societies and how they function, and how these tribal ways influence the conflict that they are immersed within.

Understanding tribal societies

There is no hard and fast set of rules or conditions that define tribal societies, ‘Within anthropology, the tendency to explain societies in terms of a single totalizing concept is nearly always countered by attention to cross cultural differences and to the relevance of a variety of domains, from political economy to gender relations.’¹⁰ That said, there are some common factors and conditions that have led to certain characteristics being consistent across a wide range of cases. With an understanding of the ‘cause and effect’ of influences upon these societies, one can better grasp the resulting thought processes and actions of actors with tribal origins (whether they are acting as members of the tribal society or not).

Hobbesian theory provides a useful baseline insight into the formation and sustainment of tribal systems. When discussing Hobbes, ‘scholars subscribe to the concept of international anarchy and the pursuit of survival to explain state behavior.’¹¹ This explanation can certainly be applied to tribal systems. ‘Hobbes argues that the social contract promises to protect the individual from the threat of oppression, death, and injury prevalent in the state of nature.’¹² While this explains in part the formation of tribal systems based on a desire for security, it can also be applied to explain the endurance of tribal systems in remote or chaotic areas – even in modern times – where securing access to scant resources is critical to survival. The continuous competition over resources is a prime contributor to the formation of tribal systems (as collective strength is greater than individual) and has helped to maintain their presence.

Hobbes asserts that conflict arises whenever men desire the same object (e.g., property) and cannot share it. They become enemies, and in the pursuit of this objective they will endeavor to subdue or kill each other. The matter is never settled, because other challengers will continually vie for the object as well. Under these conditions, man’s position is never secure. He must continually remain vigilant to threats from every quarter.¹³

The tribal basis for survival is further explained by Richard Tapper; ‘Most important is the nature of access to land for farming or grazing or wealth accumulation, whether individualized or communal. This in turn is the basis for the formation and nature of communities or corporations at determinate levels of tribal society as well as rivalries and factions between them . . .’.¹⁴ Tapper has also specifically cited the Durrani Pashtun in this competition for resources,

stating, 'Durrani are in continual competition for resources, both farmland and pasture, with a variety of other ethnic groups.'¹⁵

Resource competition and the need for security have necessitated collective defense of people and resources. This in turn bred a strong loyalty to the group – a loyalty that became a crucial strength in the survival of the tribe. This goes to describe the social organization of tribal groups, 'As a basis for identity, political allegiance, and behavior, tribe gives primacy to ties of kinship and patrilineal descent. ... Tribe stresses personal, moral, and ascriptive factors in status.... The tribal mode is socially homogenous, egalitarian, and segmentary.... *Tribe is within the individual...*'.¹⁶ As Tapper explained, this tribal concept of kinship is particularly strong. The strength of this kinship is further reinforced through the use of the Arab term for 'tribe', *qawm*, indicating a deeper meaning (with application across much of Africa, the Mid-East and Asia) to the term 'tribe'. In Afghanistan, *qawm*, as described by the anthropologist Canfield is a, 'common local term for a spatially and socially united group of people... The central intent of the word *qawm* is that members are united by agnatic kinship, have a common home territory, and enjoy warm social fellowship.'¹⁷

Along with *qawm*, comes the concept of *asabiyya*, as described by Thomas Barfield, 'Asabiyya was the product of close kinship ties or patron-client relationships that developed most strongly among tribal peoples. In times of warfare such bonds better ensured mutual aid and cooperation than did the weaker political or economic interests motivating the mercenary armies employed by states.'¹⁸

A crucial aspect of gaining an understanding of tribal society is to appreciate the 'The native's point of view.'¹⁹ Without doing so, any understanding of the study target will lack important perspective that will likely taint any findings with the ideological or social perspective of the author. Going beyond the initial assumption of perspective, '... the anthropologist must try to figure out what peoples' actions mean – to themselves and others.'²⁰ Success in understanding the actions taken by a tribal agent will largely depend on the ability of the researcher to apply the appropriate context of the local, cultural, and historical influences that have led to the decision and actions taken. Going further into the point of view, the tribal system should be considered a complex system, where the multitude of variables that impact it are typically blind spots for the foreigner. Additionally, a distinct aspect of complex systems – which is particularly relevant when discussing tribal engagement – is the notion of fleeting opportunities and shifting agendas; 'Complex social systems are never homeostatic: in both markets and world politics the frequent and temporary equilibrium points are always distinct phenomena. Each state of balance, like a human standing still through tensions between opposing muscles, is a fleeting event within a specific set of conditions, a point on a path of change.'²¹

As Tapper, Canfield, Barfield, and others have clearly identified in their studies of tribal groups, these groups should be approached with an understanding that they have developed social systems predicated upon absolute reliance within

their groups; systems that have been derived through time to ensure survival of the tribe.

The tribal 'default setting'

While much attention is given to the societal changes being driven by globalization and urbanization, there is substantial evidence to suggest that despite these monumental pressures, tribal groups are not losing their influence and foundations. In fact, it seems that in many cases, the tribal roots of individuals can serve as a 'default setting' that is returned to in difficult times and that even if the tribal roots are diluted in an urban environment, they are not totally cut.

Urban settings have provided a good example of dilution of tribal sway, clearly illustrating that while tribal influence may be lessened, it is by no means eliminated. This dynamic was recognizable in the greater Fallujia, Iraq area in 2005 with the Abu Issa tribe.²² In the Abu Issa tribal areas surrounding Fallujia, it was very clear that the dominant force was the tribe and its leadership. While the power of the sheik was not all encompassing, the sheik was certainly the most influential figure in the area. It was also clear that the sway of the sheik had more limits within the urban center of Fallujia. This was in many ways attributable to the mixture of people within the city, but also largely because civil institutions were better established and held control. Even so, it was clear that when the head sheik of the Abu Issa looked to influence situations in Fallujia, his desires were heard – clearly tribal lines still had impact.

The situation in Iraq is not unique. Though lines may become grayed, tribal bonds still largely exist and weigh heavily, especially in difficult times. This is similarly echoed in the Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Even with the press of urbanization, Pashtun tribal members still commonly, 'identify themselves with various clans despite this trend towards urbanization.'²³

Prosperity could be a hedge against tribal bonds – where there is no need for security, none is asked. When crisis presents itself, however, the tribal actor naturally migrates to safety among his tribal kin.

Blood, honor, shame, and revenge

I sacrifice my wealth for my head, but my head for my honor.

(Pashtun proverb)²⁴

The base unit of the tribal system is the nuclear family with the extensions from the individual families building the mass of the tribal unit. The importance of blood ties is captured by Ibn Khaldun in his assessment of Arab Bedouin tribes,

(Respect for) blood ties is something natural among men, with the rarest exceptions. It leads to affection for one's relations and blood relatives, (the feeling that) no harm ought to befall them nor any destruction come upon them. One feels shame when one's relatives are treated unjustly or attacked, and one wishes to intervene between them and whatever peril or destruction threatens them.²⁵

The aspect of blood relations is tied to shame as well as honor – and if one of these is violated, there is a good chance that the tribal code will require revenge. In many ways these concepts are inextricably interrelated and draw from each other while serving as a pillar of the tribal foundation. This foundational concept is exhibited in the Pashtun tradition of *Pushtunwali*, ‘a legal and moral code that determines social order and responsibilities. It contains sets of values pertaining to honor (*namus*), solidarity (*nang*), hospitality, mutual support, shame and revenge which determines social order and individual responsibility. The defence of *namus* even unto death, is obligatory for every Pushtun.’²⁶

There is no hard rule for the lineage and additions to the family though the basis is one of ancestry, ‘In theory, tribes view themselves as consisting of the descendants of a common ancestor, whose name often provides the name of the group. The internal divisions of the tribe are seen as consisting of the descendants of intermediate descendants of the founder.’²⁷ The significance of lineage is critical, however it is not the only factor in defining the identity and character of a tribe, ‘Ethnicity, then, is based on shared kinship traced through the father, shared customs, tradition, and language Finally, ethnicity, religious sect, tribe, family, and mode of subsistence intermesh and are to some extent indistinguishable.’²⁸

Of particular interest in the above study are the ‘indistinguishable’ aspects of tribal society; all of the variables that form the tribe and its culture fuse into one cohesive entity. This concept of fusion extends into intra, inter and extra tribal affairs; ‘The politics of personal life and the system of domination in the ‘domestic’ domain of the family and lineage intersect with the segmentary politics of tribal life; they are part of politics.’²⁹ Recognition that there is no separation between everyday life, culture, and politics within tribal society is critical in understanding that society, while it also presents a challenge in the interpretation of events. The impact of a decision or action, and understanding its motivation, takes on a whole new dynamic with such a seamless relationship that exists between personal and political.

Honor is a central value in tribal society,³⁰ and often extends beyond, and with differing conceptions, than the common Western application, “‘Doing Pashtu” connotes adherence to a code of behavior stressing honor (*namus*) and its defense, autonomy, bravery, self-respect, and respect for others A man’s *namus* is expressed through his ability to dominate and defend his property, including his household and his wife and female relatives.’³¹ The honor of the individual is to be strenuously protected; the violation of one’s honor, or that of his family, demands retribution. This can be done through accommodations made through tribal law (usually done through a tribal leader by payment made to the offended party by the offending party), or the violation can lead to a ‘blood feud’ that can develop into a long term feud between families, clans or tribes. Another aspect of the blood nature of tribal society is that members of a tribe, *de facto*, take on the burden of the actions made by their tribal kin. ‘Fellow tribesmen share in the responsibility for offenses committed by members of the tribe. Revenge

may be taken on any tribe member, although usually liability is greatest for those most closely related to the offender.... Tribesmen also share the burden for revenging a wronged tribal member.'³² In the tribal system, blood ties, and therefore blood obligations, extend beyond the immediate family.

Ethnicity and tribalism have both served to divide Afghans of different groups from each other and to unite Afghans with similar backgrounds.... Because both tribe and ethnic group are extensions of family, in order to unite Afghans from divergent groups it might be useful to extend the concept of family as far as it will go in order to include all the citizens in the same group.³³

The extension of family, and resulting broadened ability for acceptance, has been particularly important through history as a mechanism for cohesion between Afghan tribes in the face of an invader. In recent history this concept of 'extended family' has allowed for another group to gain access to, or at least the acceptance of, the tribes of Afghanistan.

This is precisely what the mujahidiin have done in appealing to the community of believers (i.e., all Muslims regardless of sect). Although there is no belief that Muslims share a common descent, the shared goals, opposition to other groups (i.e., nonbelieving atheists), affective ties, and group liability of mujahidiin are reminiscent of familial, tribal, and ethnic group construction.³⁴

Noting the success that the mujahideen (above) have had in gaining access to, and the support of, tribal societies in South and Southwest Asia, it should be clear that there is opportunity for engagement with tribal societies. Recognizing that mujahideen use these angles for access should be impetus enough for those fighting terrorism to look for methods to deny this access to the tribal organizations that is so vital to the terror movement, both in manpower and in provision of sanctuary.

Tribal warfare

Nomads are rough, savage and uncultured, and their presence is always inimical to civilization; however, they are hardy, frugal, uncorrupt in morals, freedom-loving and self-reliant, and so make excellent fighters. In addition, they have a strong sense of 'asabiya', which can be translated as 'group cohesion' or 'social solidarity'. This greatly enhances their military potential.

Ibn Khaldun, 'Abd al-Rahman (1332–1406)'³⁵

As has been learned numerous times throughout history, tribal warfare differs significantly from the Western-conventional style of warfare that has been the dominant form of warfare for much of recent history. While Western-conventional warfare has proven dominant, it has seen setbacks at the hands of the tribal warrior. British imperial history is spotted with defeats at the hands of tribal fighters, such as at Isandlwana against the Zulus, and in the First and Second Afghan Wars (1838–42 and 1878–80). An instance of the tribal warrior besting the British regular is the 'Fuzzy Wuzzies'³⁶ of Sudan as captured by Rudyard Kipling in his poem 'Fuzzy-Wuzzy' where he honors their fighting prowess:

So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, at your 'ome in the Soudan;
 You're a pore benighted 'eathen but a first-class fightin' man;
 An' 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, with your 'ayrick 'ead of 'air –
 You big black boundin' beggar – for you broke a British square!³⁷

In addition to the British examples, American history is replete with accounts of the legendary martial prowess of the Indian brave. These cases again illustrate that Western forces indeed have a history of combat against tribal forces, and have at times suffered setbacks in those conflicts.

Traditions of tribal warfare and histories of martial prominence lie at the heart of tribal societies and are the subject of admiration and emulation for the coming generations. Alongside this view, it is also important to recognize that the tribal warrior considers war from a significantly different perspective from the Western military professional. 'Tribal war is not a war; that is to say, the framework for violence remains that of ordinary society: the warrior is any adult man, the warlord is the civil chief, the "army" is the mass levy of warriors belonging to the group in question . . .'.³⁸ This perspective is coupled with a different perspective of the battle space, 'But the space as the Afghans see it is sociocultural: it is one of tribes, ethnic groups, or influence zones of a particular chief.'³⁹

An additional aspect of tribal conflict is a core tolerance, even acceptance, for long-term conflict. The term 'Long War' is a new entry to the US military lexicon, but *long war* is a concept well understood in tribal society. Tribal long-term conflict can be on the small scale of a blood feud or be a full-blown rivalry between tribes. These conflicts also commonly have short periods of fierce fighting separated by long periods of conflict dormancy; they may have been going on for generations, and may continue for generations to come – to the point where the belligerents may not know what they are actually fighting about; 'Feuds may last for several generations, and current participants may have forgotten the original cause.'⁴⁰

Base elements of tribal warfare are identified by Jeffrey B. White's, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare', in which he describes the motivations, characteristics, core methods, and the association of tribal warfare to what is now termed irregular warfare.

- Tribal warfare is an extension of tribal politics. These are inevitably the politics of feud, betrayal, old debts, and narrow economic advantage.
- Tribal forces usually have loose organizations, their order of battle is amorphous, and they generally do not make strategic deployments. Irregular 'units' are likely to reflect a tribe or clan bound to specific geography and a traditional leadership structure.
- Tribal forces specialize in raids, skirmishes, and ambushes where the assault rifle, machinegun, mortar, and mine are basic weapons.
- Tribal wars, however, are small wars, directed by the local leadership for local, perhaps personal, reasons. Divining such reasons is difficult because values, goals, and strategies and tactics are based on obscure, idiosyncratic, and remote (in time and place) factors.

- They are used to fighting on their own ground, are intimately familiar with their weapons, and can be quite adept at the tactical level.
- In a localized conflict, strategic and operational mobility may not mean much. Tactical mobility may be more important. Tribal forces are often expert at moving over their ground.
- Tribal forces avoid operations of extended scope, duration, and intensity. They move in and out of contact as determined by their leadership or in response to threats. Their history and culture provide the experience and legitimacy for this kind of warfare, while their weapons and ability to use them make them effective in waging it.
- [Tribes] do not seek a decisive battle, and they prefer to engage in raids, skirmishes, and ambushes. This keeps their casualties down, while inflicting some on highly casualty-sensitive Western forces. For modern soldiers, this is frustrating. But it is nothing new – the Greeks and Romans had the same experience against their barbarian opponents.⁴¹

In his essay, ‘The New Warrior Class’, author Ralph Peters describes the differences between the *soldier* and the *warrior*; “warriors” – erratic primitives of shifting allegiance, habituated to violence, with no stake in civil order. Unlike soldiers, warriors do not play by our rules, do not respect treaties, and do not obey orders they do not like.’⁴² While this paints a brutal, and not entirely fair, inclusive, or accurate, picture of the warrior, there is certainly some validity to his assertions. He goes on to give a description of the motivations and characteristics that are common to both soldiers and warriors in Table 1.

White provides a similar assessment, but instead of heavy focus upon motivations and group-type characteristics, he uses the context of *modern* versus *irregular* to identify the contrasts between the methods and tactics of professional-westernized fighters and those of their tribal counterparts (Table 2).

Although Peters does accommodate the ‘cause’ as a factor of allegiance and hence motivation, he misses much in his discussion of ‘the warrior’, especially where he generally views the modern warrior (as opposed to the soldier) as

Table 1. Where the soldier and the warrior diverge: the traits that define them.

The soldier	The warrior
Sacrifice	Spoils
Disciplined	Semi or undisciplined
Organizational orientation	Individualist
Skills focus on defeating other soldiers	Skills focus directly on violence
Allegiance to state	Allegiance to charismatic figure, cause, or paymaster
Recognized legal status	Outside the law
‘Restorer of order’	‘Destroyer of order’

Source: Peters, ‘The New Warrior Class’.

Table 2. Contrasting dimensions of war.

Modern	Irregular
Organized	Informal
Advanced technology	At-hand technology
Logistics dependent	Logistics independent
National direction	Local direction
Coherent doctrine	Ad hoc doctrine
Decisive battle	Raids and skirmishes
Soldier	Warrior
Allies	Accomplices
Segregation	Integration

Source: White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'.

a disenfranchised member of a group. While this may be the case in some instances, the *tribal* warrior is not brought about because of negative societal impacts. The tribal warrior is a product of his cultural/tribal environment, who fights on the behalf of his tribe and its perceived interests. This is echoed by White when he says,

The warrior is not taken out of the civilian part of society and placed in something different. He is within normal society in his role as a warrior. His skills and weaponry derive from what is available to his tribe. His knowledge of war probably is confined largely to that found within his society. He operates within a looser organization and a more relaxed disciplinary system. The warrior lives close to the land and the people on it.⁴³

Where Peters's argument for the role that disenfranchisement has particular relevance, however, including tribal actors, is in the modern recruitment of individuals for extremist Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Refugee camps and Madrasas have become prime recruiting grounds for these groups as they provide an ample supply of poorly educated and disenfranchised men with little prospect for the future. 'In Pakistan, Taliban recruits are drawn from Afghan refugee camps and the network of extremist madrassas in the tribal areas. Taliban foot soldiers tend to be uneducated, poor Pashtuns with few other employment prospects.'⁴⁴ If the tribal system has broken down or the tribal member has become disenchanted, without means, or pushed off his lands of origin, the tribal warrior then becomes a prime recruitment opportunity for extremist organizations.

While tribal units are by no means the cause of terrorism, it needs to be recognized that the majority of terror agents come from tribal societies. By extrapolation it can be seen that the type of war that they wage will have its roots in tribal traditions and styles. This is reinforced by the operational realities that terror groups face, as they do not have the ability to combat modern militaries in a conventional manner. Whether by default or by tradition, the type of warfare that is common to their origins is adopted; tribal roots provide for a guerilla type or

irregular warfare, with its modern adaptations, it is known as asymmetric warfare.

The tribal–terror link

The link between tribalism and terrorism presents a fairly straightforward case. Recognizing that a vast portion of the Islamic world is made up by societies that have prevailing tribal roots makes for easy demonstration. Reinforcing this is that while much of the Islamic world is somewhat modern in some contemporary sense, there is common recognition that many Islamic societies maintain strong tribal ties. This has even more significance when applying a quick study of recent Middle Eastern history. During the reign of the Ottoman Empire it was common practice to have a small Ottoman garrison in urban areas, and none managing the vast expanses of land outside. This, in practice or by omission, left the rural areas to be ruled and controlled by the tribal entities that had dominated the region for millennia. Even with the collapse of the Ottomans, and the arrival of the British and other colonial powers the region after World War I (as well as before) there was little effort, assuming the capability existed, to maintain definitive control over these vast, sparsely populated areas. Thus, well into the twentieth century, huge swaths of the Middle East and adjoining regions (such as modern Afghanistan – although it was obviously not under the Ottoman yoke, nor any comprehensive British one) were dominated by tribal groups. Regardless of the motivations of the terrorist, his origins are commonly tribal, and probably not far removed from ancient traditions.

Taking the notion that the majority of terrorists come from tribal backgrounds or societies, it is logical to draw the comparison that the base of their tactics and techniques come from the tribal understanding and practice of war. This is borne out in what we have seen of terrorist activities, with the notable addition of suicide attacks, which were not among the practices, and quite contrary to, those of the traditional tribal warrior.

Among the most significant concepts of the terrorist practice of war for Western minds to grasp is the previously mentioned *Long War*. In the terrorist interpretation of war, at least in part derived from tribal origins, is the *cultural* understanding of long running conflict. As demonstrated through the history of tribal conflict, there isn't particular need for a short or clean resolution to conflict – something the American population *expects* – and thus, terror agents *anticipate* conflicts of extended duration. In fact, they clearly count upon their ability to be committed to their cause for extended periods of time to be a decisive factor in their envisioned victory.

The well-known tactics of guerilla warfare have been the staples of warring traditions of tribal communities across the globe. While the most common cause of conflict between tribes was over scarce resources, there is recognition that warriors are also a critical resource of the tribe, a resource that needed to be preserved. The use of guerrilla, hit and run, raid type tactics are an ideal way to

preserve your combat strength while diminishing the capabilities of your opponent. Here is a case where the tactics of tribes may be the same as with terrorists, but the ends desired are radically different. In many tribal systems, the goal of raids was to take resources from an enemy or competitor, with deliberate effort made *not* to kill members of the opposing tribe. This is likely in order to preserve your own strength (by not becoming decisively engaged – which could lead to death on both sides), but also to avoid incurring a blood feud that could result in highly passionate conflict that could leave both tribes severely weakened. Obviously terrorists do not operate with the same concerns.

Opportunity can come in tribal form

Getting the tribe to 'believe'

One of the greatest challenges to enlisting a tribe to support efforts against terror entities is that of convincing them of the cause. To begin with, anyone who is attempting this course is likely to be at a loss for credibility (at least initially) with the engaged tribe. This is especially the case for a Westerner in South or Southwest Asia. The pre-existing notions of Westerners is not one of particularly good will. Emmanuel Sivan captures this well when he describes it having two primary components, ‘... *existing attitudes*, which were in place before the pressure of events and of propaganda, and *created attitudes* formed (or exploited) as a result of events or propaganda. These functioned as reinforcement for the existing attitudes.’⁴⁵ While many odds are stacked against success in such an endeavor, it is not a hopeless cause. Over time, trust can be established with tribal figures and this trust can be parlayed into an effective and sympathetic working relationship where all involved work towards a common goal. Deep understanding of the local tribes and environment are key to this. With understanding of local dynamics, sympathetic goals can be identified and worked towards. Security, a central element to the tribal system, is one such goal that can have mutual, sympathetic efforts directed towards it. Ironically, it is often the local tribe that is the best guarantor of its own security, but there may be a need for additional support or unrelated means to facilitate achieving this objective.

Perhaps the best avenue for access to tribal support is through their own recognition that terrorist organizations represent a grave threat to tribal society. As with any society, ‘Terrorism destroys the solidarity, cooperation, and interdependence on which social functioning is based, and substitutes insecurity and distrust.’⁴⁶ While Crenshaw’s discussion is aimed at the impact of terrorism on ‘target societies’ (i.e. the West), there have been countless cases of terrorist attacks against tribal interests – whether the specific target or not. Considering the role and the responsibilities of the tribal head, that his power is derived from his people, and that a core element of tribal origins is based on security, a threat to the tribe can be a strong catalyst to action. The challenge is one of recognition as to *who is the actual* threat; perception, propaganda and ‘information operations’ are central to how this recognition is developed.

As is the case in the Al Anbar province of Iraq, the Sunni tribes came to recognize that Al Qaeda terrorists are the true enemy. This realization, however, was a long time in its germination and growth and took repeated, egregious attacks upon the local Iraqi populous, partnered with unfulfilled promises, compounded by extreme and hypocritical social practices and prohibitions:

Some of these men will admit they were insurgents who switched sides because they realized that they are more likely to get what they want with a stable government. Al Qaeda promised them everything under the baking sun, yet al Qaeda killed people who smoked – and Iraqis like to smoke. They killed people who had satellite dishes or televisions, but al Qaeda would be drinking and with prostitutes.⁴⁷

A similar situation has recently played out in South Waziristan in Pakistan where Uzbek ‘Jihadists’ were initially accepted in their overt role in ‘fighting the infidel’. Through the application of brutal decrees, criminal activities (extortion or kidnapping for ransom), and the murder of well over 100 tribal elders (murders were part of criminal activities or for *suspicion* of collaboration with Pakistani or US elements), however, the Pashtuns of South Waziristan soon grew weary of the Uzbeks and violently ushered them out.⁴⁸

Separating the tribe from the terror

The South Waziristan and Al Anbar examples are not unique; terrorist incursions and ‘Talibanization’ have exacted a significant toll on Afghan and Pakistani tribal groups, ‘The rise of the Taliban has upset the political balance in the tribal areas, where there have been cases of tribal leaders getting killed for questioning the Taliban’s growing power or working too closely with Islamabad.’⁴⁹ While his attempts failed, Pakistani President Musharraf recognized the imperative of getting the Pashtun tribes to recognize the threat presented by violent Islamists, ‘He impressed upon the Jirga⁵⁰ that terrorist elements were pursuing their own selfish agenda. They were neither well-wishers of the tribesmen nor of Islam.’⁵¹ Additionally, ‘President Musharraf advised the tribesmen to differentiate between their well-wishers and foes and said that the foreign terrorists were using “our soil for the fulfillment of their nefarious designs and putting them (tribesmen) in trouble and danger.”’⁵²

Another fault-line between tribal members and Islamist groups also exists due to core ideological differences. These are presented in a variety of ways but are most acute in the twisting of Islam to suit the desires of the violent Islamist and in the clash of the Islamist’s ‘doctrine’ and goals as compared to those of the tribal agent.

From the onset, there are clear separations between the Pashtun code of Pushtunwali and Koranic doctrine, ‘Elements in this code of behavior are often in opposition to the Shariah,’⁵³ (this is especially in instances where the Pashtun code demands blood retribution). While the Islamist, by definition, follows a strict interpretation of Koranic doctrine, the tribal member’s traditional code is not dictated by the Koran, let alone an extreme variation of it.

The Taliban bastardization and manipulation of the Deobandi creed of Islam is illustrative of this, and the dangers that it presents,

The Taliban have clearly debased the Deobandi tradition of learning and reform, with their rigidity, accepting no concept of doubt except as sin and considering debate as little more than heresy. But in doing so they have advanced a new, radical and, to the governments of the region extremely threatening, model for any forthcoming Islamic revolution.⁵⁴

This danger is not just to established state governments, but to any people that the Taliban come to dominate, 'The Taliban represented nobody but themselves and they recognized no Islam except their own . . . [T]he Taliban's interpretation of the [Deobandi] creed has no parallel anywhere in the Muslim world.'⁵⁵ What brings this even more to point is the lack of knowledge that the typical Taliban fighter holds, 'The Taliban are poorly tutored in Islamic and Afghan history, knowledge of the Sharia and the Koran and the political and theoretical developments in the Muslim world during the twentieth century.'⁵⁶ As discussed earlier, the Islamist clerical abuses and excesses that were experienced in Al Anbar proved to be a chief stimulus in the Arab tribes rising against the terrorists and insurgents. Similarly, there is indication that the Pashtun, strong Sunnis that they are, do not have a traditional disposition for extreme Islamist ideology either, as Richard Tapper and Ahmed Rashid point out, 'Durrani Islam is a religion of moderation, piety and sobriety.'⁵⁷ and, 'Before the Taliban, Islamic extremism had never flourished in Afghanistan.'⁵⁸ These points taken together present the well-known image of an abusive, intolerant, extreme Taliban and sympathetic militant organizations. What this also points to is the massive likelihood of massive abuses and assaults upon the tribal societies that come under the influence of these groups. With enough time and pressure, and the proper actions taken by Coalition elements, it is possible to envision similar instances of an 'Al Anbar Awakening' among the Pashtu of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Throughout history the call to jihad has been a strong impetus for Muslims to unite against the infidel foe. Heeding this call, while the duty of every Muslim, has also presented a rift in the worlds of the tribal member as it pulled him from his traditional constructs,

It is declared by a religious leader, who is generally outside the tribal world; it does not occur at a private level, but opposes interior and exterior, Islam versus the infidel. It addresses each Muslim as an individual and not by his group, his clan, or his ethnicity. By breaking up the *asabiyya* in favor of the umma, it therefore effects a rupture with the world of tribal warfare.⁵⁹

More recently among the Pashtu, the call to jihad over the last generation has led to some undesirable and damaging effects upon traditional tribal structures:

Over history, sharply divided and independent Pashtun clans have unified periodically under the banner of charismatic religious leaders, typically in response to external pressures. This aspect of Pashtun identity has gained special prominence in recent decades, but with a new twist. During Afghanistan's anti-Soviet jihad of

the 1980s, local religious leaders, or mullahs, translated an influx of financial support into a massive expansion of extremist-minded seminaries, or madrassas, which trained a generation of students in Islamist militancy. In the post-9/11 period, a younger, even more radical generation has prevailed over – and in some cases eliminated – tribal elders, thereby upsetting traditional political and social structures.⁶⁰

As explained above, and in many other texts,⁶¹ the manipulation of Islam by violent extremists is a well-known aspect of their operations and agenda. While thus far that approach has yielded positive results for those malign organizations, it does not rule out the opportunity for others to use those distortions and mistreatments as opportunities to counter their activities. Nowhere is this more obvious and possible than in the places where the abuses fall upon population that is able to see that these actions are wrong – the key then becomes facilitating ample opportunity for them to do something about it.

Gaining access

In attempting to gain access to a tribal organization, there are several factors that need to be considered before any actions are taken. Chief among them is the ‘target selection’ process. In this, there must be serious consideration about which tribe (assuming there are more than one in the anticipated engagement area) is to be engaged, and who within the tribe is a suitable individual for contact. These factors need to be considered very carefully, as dealing with the wrong tribe or individuals within a tribe can compromise or destroy the engagement efforts and even lead to greater fallout as credibility is lost across the entire tribal system. This is particularly important when you consider that there will be many who would use well-meaning initiatives to shift power into their favor, either in an individual bid for power or in a tribal–regional context. Becoming a powerful proxy in internal conflicts is precisely what needs to be avoided.

Getting the proverbial ‘foot in the door’ is perhaps the most difficult aspect of working with tribal societies against terrorism. One must first identify *who* is the necessary person to gain access with. While this can seem as simple as identifying the Jirga representative from a tribe or the tribal head sheik, it is often the case that this person is a figurehead, for any number of traditional and honorific reasons, and little more than a mouthpiece with limited influence. While this person may not be the primary target for engagement, they will need to be dealt with carefully with the utmost of respect – and can not be discounted as an influential player in the engagement process. Through a long process of discourse, one can establish enough knowledge of the tribal group to identify its truly influential members. It is often the case that while tribal societies have a hierarchical nature,⁶² there are a number of individuals with significant influence, with varied motivations, loyalties, and objectives, that can impact an impending deal. This is further reason to understand that the ‘socialization’ process with tribal leadership is more than interfacing with a single leader but with all of those

that surround him. It is those surrounding people that essentially form the leader's staff and advisor groups, and who will be the ones who implement any new initiatives.

While operating from a position of strength is an important aspect of any dealings with tribal elements, it is unlikely that intimidation will be an effective way to gain leverage. Beyond the fact that the Western democratic society that we come from is very critical of the use of excessive force (something that most are aware of and can use against us), history has shown that brutal techniques of coercion and overt shows of force are rarely effective and can often run contrary to their intended objectives. The brutal hand that the Soviets exercised through their 1980s' efforts in Afghanistan is proof that brutal force, applied indiscriminately is an ineffective tool to ensure compliance. More recently, the Al Anbar 'Awakening' is an example of local tribes turning against Al Qaeda elements, largely due to their extensive use of brutal intimidation techniques.

Sometimes an opportunity for engagement can come from the tribe itself in a manner that may not be immediately recognizable. In Iraq in 2005, such an opportunity presented itself with the Abu Issa tribe and Third Battalion, Fourth Marines. An influential member of the tribal sheik's family made contact with Marines operating in that area under the veil of complaints about a damaged generator and a request for the positioning of a water supply point (at the time municipal water works were not operating and water points were provided by Coalition forces). Considering the highly influential position of this individual, the situation was addressed personally by the battalion commander (which had been the intent of the tribal member). Over a 'feeling out' period of several weeks, concessions were made to establish the water point and replace the generator that had been damaged. More significantly, over this period a positive rapport was established between the commander and the tribal agent, which ultimately led to a direct meeting with the head sheik of the Abu Issa tribe. This, in turn, developed into an unprecedented and functional relationship between the tribe and the Marine battalion.

Another avenue for access is one built on incentive. If the engaging element can provide resources or skills that benefit the tribe, there may be opportunity for compromise. This has been seen frequently in Iraq, as Coalition elements engage tribal groups by offering developmental incentives, such as construction or reconstruction projects aimed to benefit certain population centers. Interestingly, these projects often become targets of terror attacks as they represent a threat to the terrorist cause; if the Coalition does positive things for a group, it gains credibility and de facto pulls support from the terror cause. Terrorist attacks on these facilities can be used to strengthen the case against them with the tribe, but the key element for this is establishing a secure enough environment where the intimidation and psychological effects of the terror campaign do not dictate tribal submission. The use of development programs, in concert with carefully tailored combat operations, has a long history of success in Afghanistan. In 1848, British Captain John Jacob of the Sind Irregular Horse Regiment combined effective

mobile patrolling and related operations with a substantial development effort. 'He was also associated with an enlightened programme of irrigation and cultivation, and by 1848 he could state with some justification: "peace, plenty, and security everywhere prevail in a district where formerly was all terror and disorder."'”⁶³

Daniel Markey adds to the theme of the beneficial effects of development by pointing out that development projects can have a multi-tiered impact. Not only do they aid in modern efforts against terror agents by pulling tribes out from their sway, but these efforts can have the compounding effect of giving tribal leaders the *means and strength* to pull potential and actual members away from terror groups;

... development assistance represents a valuable political incentive over the short run as an indirect means for building influence with and empowering local leaders. In the FATA, delivering resources to tribal leaders – in the form of cash or small development projects like schools, wells, or a visiting health clinic – might help them compete for public support against a new generation of militants.⁶⁴

While there is no template that can be applied to ensure a working relationship with a tribal group, there are a variety of effective alternate techniques that can be applied. A careful study of the target group's specific history, traditions, and influences, along with identification of current issues, motivations, and desires can help to provide a point of departure.

The benefits of a tribal 'ally'

Tribal warriors can be a significant 'force multiplier' to any modern force. They bring with them local knowledge, skills, and abilities that Western forces do not possess. Among the obvious benefits are those that come from being natives of their environment. Familiarity with language, culture, and religion has a significant depth of benefit – with many nuances that aren't readily seen. Tribal warriors are familiar with the local operational environment and recognize things that are 'out of order' more readily than Western troops. In Iraq, this has been clearly seen by US forces as they work with Iraqi counterparts. The Iraqi soldiers were frequently tipped off by things that the Americans would pass over. These leads often led to discovery of arms caches or Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Interestingly, this Iraqi ability to notice the odd item is attributed to the long founded tribal relationship with smuggling.⁶⁵

As is intuitive, tribal members have a personal knowledge of local terrain and will commonly have corresponding tactical knowledge and understanding of how to use the land to support their advantage. Additionally, their familiarity with local tribal warfare can not be underestimated; the employment of tactical elements that share the adversary's perspective, history and understanding brings another element of capability to a modern military formation. If employed properly, this local knowledge of terrain and tactics can greatly enhance the tactical capability of a modern force, while taking away the advantages held by the opposing irregular force.⁶⁶

Area denial

While it can be desirable to have local forces operating overtly against terrorist cells within a region, this may not be a realistic expectation, due to either the strength of the subject tribe or, more likely, its willingness. Staying with the key theme of convincing a tribe that, at a fundamental level, terrorists operate against tribal best interests, tribal elements can be mobilized to deny terror agents sanctuary within their tribal domains.

While it is generally unlikely that a tribal head would mutilate or put to death a member of his own tribe who is working with a terror group, foreigners may not be treated with the same benevolence.⁶⁷ While a notable hole in the span of control of a tribal leader is in controlling foreigners within his tribal domain, as they are not members of the community that he heads, he is not without capability to influence them. His dominance of the locale is such that he can coerce certain behavior or force them to move on, and sometimes take more drastic action. At the least, the tribal head would not be constrained⁶⁸ by tribal codes in providing information concerning outsiders to other authorities (as opposed to providing information regarding one of his tribal constituents). Since it is common for terror agents to be from outside the local tribal community, with a focus upon the terror agenda rather than the well being of the tribe, they can constitute a serious threat to the members of the tribe. One only needs to look at the civil deaths caused in Iraq by Al Qaeda for evidence that terror organizations have no qualms with the killing of innocents, regardless of their ethnic or religious affiliations. This posture makes them a grave threat to the tribe, both from their own actions, as well as retaliatory actions taken in the attempt to hunt them down. Thus, this provides the tribal leader, in his position of responsibility of ensuring the security the tribe, little incentive to provide sanctuary to a terrorist.

This concept logically extends to the recruitment of tribal persons into the cause of the terrorist. While it is not believed that terror ranks are substantially drawn from *cohesive* tribal structures,⁶⁹ the potential for recruitment does exist. Tribal leadership engaged against terror recruitment within his territory can have a profound effect. The impact of the Al Anbar Awakening movement is evidence of the power of the tribal leadership in influencing its constituency.

In discussing area denial of terrorists by tribes, there is another geographical aspect to be addressed. That is the trans-national aspect of tribal units. By looking quickly at the political maps of Afghanistan and Iraq and overlaying those with associated tribal maps it can be readily seen that while political borders exist they have little meaning to the tribal inhabitants of the regions. The Abu Issa tribe inhabits areas stretching from central Iraq and well into Syria and Jordan. Pashtun tribes straddle both sides of the Durand Line that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan. Baluch tribal lands have substantial stakes in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. Through these few examples the trans-national reach of tribal groups is readily apparent. In a time where trans-national terrorism is a top national

security concern, it only makes sense to seek and enlist the help of tribes that inhabit, and move freely throughout the same regions.

Challenges of tribal engagement

*They made bad enemies and poor allies.*⁷⁰

Engaging with tribal elements is not to be undertaken lightly. Before embarking on such an endeavor, one should recognize that the situation, dynamics, and character of such environments can be very suspect and immediately involves entry into local and regional politics. By engaging with tribal actors, the new entity is now a factor in area politics and it can be counted upon that the actions taken in this new endeavor will be closely watched. Jeffrey White uses the Lebanon example to illustrate the dynamic and complex nature of such environments:

There have been few situations with a more convoluted history than Lebanon between 1975 and 1982. The complex interplay among family, tribal, ethnic, and religious groups was complicated by significant involvement by the Palestinians, Syrians, and Israelis. This resulted in a 'witch's brew' of shifting murky alliances, shady characters, and pure viciousness. Without knowing the history of the Gemayels, the Jumblatts, and the Asads involved, analysts and decisionmakers could not hope to unravel what was happening.⁷¹

Oliver Roy's observations of the Pashtun agree with White's description of the dynamics within Lebanon; 'Ethnic conflicts, family vendettas, the arrogance of a ruler or notable combine at the moment of crisis to define alliance networks, to which the state will be both judge and party.'⁷² The message to be taken is clear: be very aware and wary of engagements with tribal actors.

The situation surrounding the engagement will largely be dictated by local rules and traditions – rules and traditions that can be manipulated when convenient or necessary. However, it is strictly *verboden* for the interloper to manipulate the 'rules of the game' in the same way. In fact, any such attempt will likely be construed as an insult to the tribe and its traditions. This can put the whole initiative in jeopardy, or require a significant concession to repair the damage, which puts the visitor in a reactive position relative to the tribe – a dangerous and compromising place to be. Simply put, the visitor is in many ways at the mercy of the tribe and its rules, whereas the tribal member isn't necessarily obligated to uphold these same provisions with an 'outsider'; while an Arab sheik can dismiss his actions with a simple '*Insha'allah*', the American counterpart does not enjoy the same luxury.

When engaging tribal entities, there is significant risk of being drawn into local conflict. Shifting alliances and other dynamics may compromise initial objectives, and could lead to the outside agent becoming a de facto ally of a tribe in the furthering of individual agendas. Additionally, this can lead to being targeted outright by factional rivals to the engaged tribe as the new agent becomes (or is perceived as) a threat that could shift the area balance of power.

They understand the situation better, and they are capable of abrupt actions and changes of policy that upset the foreigners' goals and sensibilities . . . [there is] the risk is of becoming an 'accomplice' of the locals, at least in the eyes of the opposing factions; an accomplice can soon become a target. The outsider also can be quickly jettisoned in the interests of the locals. In these murky situations, it is difficult for the alien elements to match the footwork of their allies.⁷³

In concert with attempts to mobilize tribes to act against terrorist cells in Afghanistan and Pakistan, both Karzai and Musharraf have attempted initiatives to empower or deputize tribal agents to act on the behalf of the central governments. While this approach can yield positive results, there are also associated concerns: '... Karzai announced the government would arm some tribal men to form so-called "community police" to tighten local security and fight terrorists, a strategy some critics say may produce old-styled warlords and threaten the central government.'⁷⁴ This is a classic 'double-edged sword' type of situation, especially considering the traditional challenges of governing the Pashtu and other Afghan tribes. While the Afghan and Pakistani governments desperately need the support of their tribal groups to maintain law and order, increasing their authority in the name of state governance and countering terrorism, can bring about a secondary effect of actually providing the tribe a further degree of autonomy, hence reducing the real influence of the government.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in dealing with tribal groups is the intertwined nature of modern tribal conflict, religious conflict, criminal activity, and corruption. Clearly, working with a tribe that facilitates and prospers from the drug trade has some ethical and legal concerns for the Western agent. This is only exacerbated when the realities of the local environment are made clear, with the corruption of local officials and regular violations of human rights, by any and all of the power brokers in the area. As Westerners, the phrase 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' only goes so far when you balance it against legal, ethical, and human rights standards – the very standards that we hope to institute over time.

The weakness of the Afghan central government and resurgence of the Taliban has given rise to a new chaotic period of local strongmen, and significantly, a corresponding explosion of opium production. While Afghanistan has traditionally been without substantial resources, the opium trade provides a very significant source of income. As a result, tribal groups are likely to be greatly resistant to the destruction of opium production, or the drug trade. While the people of Afghanistan may be producing the opium, it is transported and facilitated by many – criminal organizations, corrupt government officials, the Taliban, and terrorists – thus illustrating the web of entanglement that exists.

Anyone attempting to interject oneself into the tribal world in order to make use of tribal capability against terrorists must recognize the links between tribes, criminal organizations, insurgent groups, and the terror organizations themselves. To be effective in the objectives of degrading and destroying terror organizations in these regions, it must be recognized that the tribes will likely not be operating

independently of these other elements. They may be tied to them through financial concerns and have their own members contributing at various levels in the different parts of the system (i.e. members of the criminal organizations or posted in local government positions). Interestingly, while intervention in such a situation seems a forbidding prospect, this scenario does provide opportunity. The decentralized nature of these activities presents a chance to break the tribe free of the cycle, assuming that the appropriate influences and incentives can convince the tribe and its leadership of the benefits. As with everything else, this will require a profound understanding of the tribe and the environment and a positive trusting relationship with the key tribal leaders.

Conclusion

*In thinking this through I came to the conclusion that I had to understand the use of force in a different way, that it had to be applied to alter a decision maker's mind, and that this understanding must affect my choice of targets.*⁷⁵

In the post-Cold War era it has become evident that the US and other Western militaries are going to be called upon to engage in conflicts and situations that differ significantly from what they were trained and equipped for during the Cold War. In this new era of conflict, Western militaries must be adaptable. While maneuver doctrine was conceived for use against a conventional enemy, it provides the basis for operations in irregular or asymmetric conflicts as well. Maneuver doctrine is founded upon identification and exploitation of *critical vulnerabilities* and *centers of gravity* while avoiding enemy strengths. These same concepts also apply to counter-terrorist operations; while the tactics differ significantly from those of conventional war, the doctrinal concepts, *if applied correctly*, remain relevant. What needs to be altered are the methods used to understand and defeat the enemy – many of which are *extra-military*.

A notable part of this shift comes from how Americans and our Western allies approach asymmetric conflict. Among the primary items for adjustment is the continued reliance upon technical equipment, rather than human, solutions to modern conflict. Attention needs to be given to, ‘... the more difficult and subtle problems posed by human behavior and regional history.’⁷⁶ While advanced technical systems will enhance the Western warfighter's capabilities, technology does not have the impact in asymmetric environments that it does in the conventional spectrum. ‘Irregular warfare, however, remains confoundingly unaffected by changes in technology. In an irregular conflict, sociology, psychology, and history will have more to say about the nature of the conflict, including its persistence and intensity.’⁷⁷

While Western-style forces will continue to dominate conventional and technical battlefields, many are taking note of the challenges and difficulties that the United States and Western militaries are facing in Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict in the summer of 2006 provided further evidence that unconventional techniques are an effective counter to

conventional prowess. This, coupled with the likelihood of the strengthening of tribal societies in developing nations and failed states, and the resulting warrior cast (as opposed to soldier), supports the belief that, 'The US Army will fight warriors far more often than it fights soldiers in the future.'⁷⁸ The warrior and his tribal system needs to be recognized and respected for its capability, '... be it Bedouin raids or Afghan ambushes, policymakers and commanders must be aware of the formidable fighting units and communal command-and-control structures that persist in traditional societies.'⁷⁹ Ignorance of tribal societies and their capabilities comes with peril.

Beyond the tribal warrior, recognition of the role played by tribal societies is critical to success against the terrorist enemy:

... gaining control over the population is the centerpiece of both the insurgency and the counterinsurgency. Hobbes suggests that the primary bond which holds society together is the promise of security. ... The struggle between the insurgency and the counterinsurgency thus revolves around which side can provide uncontested security.⁸⁰

As previously discussed, provision of security is a prime element in tribal organization. The lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, where it is often difficult to distinguish the differences between insurgents and terrorists, have made clear the need for local support. What is also clear is that the challenge of guaranteeing civil security against a terrorist or insurgent enemy is exceedingly difficult. While Coalition and NATO forces can not maintain a continuous presence everywhere in order to maintain the principles of Western law, terrorists and insurgents intimidate through all means possible, keeping the populations marginalized.

There are many principles and concepts that can help the Western soldier go forward into engagement with tribal and communal entities. While there is certainly no template for application of techniques, and *each locale demands careful and specific analysis before action*, there are numerous principles and concepts that should be considered as individual steps forward into the mist of the tribal domain.

- First and foremost, command flexibility must be maintained throughout tribal dealings, as situations and environments vary, so must techniques; while effective methods can be replicated, there is absolutely no template that can be applied to engagement of this nature.
- Study the environment. Become familiar with the different groups that are engaged in your objective area. Understand the intra and inter group dynamics. Be careful to identify local cultural issues that need particular recognition – items to be avoided, or used as opportunities.

Look for opportunities for engagement. This could be as simple as provision of municipal facilities or identifying a rift between competing groups within a region.

- Be patient and resilient. Recognize that the Western concept of time and that of most tribal actors are significantly different. Additionally, failure of a specific initiative does not necessarily mean that the entire program has failed.

- Understand the differences between Western and tribal concepts and practices of honor. Always recognize the import of a tribal leader maintaining face – and provide him an ‘out’ in situations that could compromise his honor. Also keep in mind that honor derives its base from the tribal perspective, so what you see as the breaking of a deal, may have been done for the benefit of the tribe, and is therefore honorable.
- Achieve and maintain an honorable position in dealings with tribal members.
- When engaging with a tribal actor, come from a position of humble strength. Strength is respected, but remember that you are the outsider and it is profoundly bad form to insult your new ‘host’ through your arrogance. Remember, the Pashtuns have fought and defeated the British and the Soviets – reason for you to respect them, and for them to have pride in their martial prowess.
- Offer something they don’t have that is beneficial; illustrate the positive effect you can have and the negative impact of terrorists (social fabric).
- Use milestones and make progressive deals conditional; the hands off approach has a flawed assumption that the tribal member of the deal will take steps supporting your interests without incentive (e.g. the Musharraf example in the FATA).
- While respecting their culture, religion, and associated systems (honor), don’t allow them to be used against you.
- Don’t allow yourself to become a tool or pawn in local politics. Listen to varied people and perspectives. Work hard not to become taken in by one group that initially seems most accommodating; be wary of being co-opted or usurped or manipulated to serve one group’s ends.
- Recognizing that you will likely be unable to out-cycle the propaganda efforts of the terror actor due to their communal advantage in communications, there is a need to develop an effective ‘Information Operations’ campaign. This campaign needs to emphasize truth and dedication to the safety and advancement of local communities while illustrating the catastrophic effect of the terrorist agenda. Central to the campaign is the establishment of your credibility and the legitimacy of your efforts and goals, while simultaneously destroying the credibility and legitimacy of your enemy.

In combating the asymmetric extremist threat, tribal societies are a potential ally. While the terrorist generally enjoys the advantage in engagement with tribal groups, his motives and goals often run contrary to the interests of these bodies. ‘Both the Afghan communists and Islamicists wanted to impose radical change on a traditional social structure by a revolution from the top. They wished to do away with tribalism and ethnicity by fiat, an impossible task, and were unwilling to accept the complex realities on the ground.’⁸¹ While Rashid was referring to the 1990s, the same mentality and thus, rift is apparent in today’s Taliban membership; ‘As seen with al-Qa’eda in Iraq, Islamist terror groups have a history of progressively alienating local support through radicalisation.

“The new Taliban are really emotional. They are very impulsive. They are war-addicted...”⁸² With extremist and tribal ideologies being as significantly different as they are, and the inherent gaps between motivation and loyalties, there exists an opportunity for access by other elements. It is into these gaps that the wedge must be forced, but access will only come through patience, and in-depth knowledge of the environment, society, and its interests. Success will come from the careful building of trust and having a responsive capability to react to situations as they develop and change – and an ability to deal and react with our tribal ally, a response capability (*decision and action*) that is quicker than that of the terrorist enemy.

Looking back at the scenario envisioned by Robert Kaplan, and comparing it to the current situation of the world, it appears that many of his notions were correct. ‘If Kaplan is right, or even partially right, the maps of the Middle East, Africa, and southwest Asia will be remade within the lifetime of those living today. Much of this redrawing will be done by what can be broadly described as “tribes.”’⁸³ When states fail, very few organizational structures survive. Tribal structures, however, with their ancient basis of survival are proving to be as durable in the modern world as they have been in the past.

As seen in Al Anbar province, tribal allies can be a determining factor in success against terrorism, ‘... what we have seen with the opposition to al Qaeda’s interference in domestic affairs by the Iraqis... [is] highly significant and [is a] clear indications of the terrorists’ vulnerability once they alienate the local population.’⁸⁴ Critical to this success is the openness to receive tribal support, in whatever form it may present itself, and willingness to operate in a manner that differs from traditional Western doctrine and constructs. Keeping in mind there are pitfalls to be avoided when seeking and enlisting the help of tribal groups, it is not that we want their help in combating terrorism, it is that we need their help if we are to be successful.

Notes

1. Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy’.
2. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 152.
3. This is illustrated by the notion of a global salafi insurgency, which presents the argument that terror groups such as Al Qaeda operate as individual agents within a greater global movement which has political goals – such as the establishment of the caliphate – thus making it a global insurgency. (Global Salafi Insurgency presented in lecture by Dr. Richard Shultz, PhD, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Spring 2007).
4. Markey, *Securing Pakistan’s Tribal Belt*, 9.
5. Anwar Syed, ‘Dealing with the Militants’, *The Dawn*, 6 July 2008.
6. Markey, *Securing Pakistan’s Tribal Belt*, 9.
7. Anwar Syed, ‘Dealing with the Militants’, *The Dawn*, 6 July 2008.
8. ‘Karzai Emphasizes Importance of Tribal Strength in Fighting Terrorism’, *People’s Daily OnLine*. Updated 26 June 2006, http://english.people.com.cn/200606/26/eng20060626_277268.html.

9. I am not trying to suggest that the US efforts did not meet with failures and challenges during this period, but as of summer 2008, there are clear indications that US efforts in working with Iraqi tribal groups have been broadly successful.
10. Abu-Lughod, 'Zones of Theory', 297.
11. Millen, 'The Hobbesian Notion of Self-Preservation', 1.
12. Ibid., 2.
13. Ibid., 4.
14. Tapper, 'Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople', 64–5.
15. Tapper, 'Holier Than Thou', 258.
16. Tapper, 'Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople', 68 (my italics). This also supports the notion that the terror agent acts with a tribal mindset and perspective, regardless of an active association within a tribe.
17. Library of Congress. 'Country Study – Afghanistan', 114.
18. Barfield, 'Tribe and State Relations', 154.
19. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.
20. Abu-Lughod, 'Zones of Theory', 272.
21. Harrison, 'Thinking About the World We Make', 11.
22. I personally observed this dynamic while being stationed in Fallujah in 2005.
23. <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Pashtun>.
24. Dupree, 'Tribal Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan', 270.
25. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah*, 98.
26. Library of Congress 'Country Study – Afghanistan'.
27. Ibid., 114.
28. Ibid., 108.
29. Abu-Lughod, 'Zones of Theory', 286.
30. It should be noted that there can be significant variance between the Western notion of honor and that of tribal units. Knowing that in tribal society virtually everything is predicated upon the well being of the tribe, it should be recognized that honor also exists to support the tribe. If something is done that would normally constitute a violation of honor, but the act supports the tribe and compromises someone outside the tribe, then there is little chance that it will actually be considered a violation of honor. Additionally on an individual basis in many societies, honor and *face* are to be maintained at all times and by all means, including in some cases compromising truth.
31. Library of Congress. 'Country Study – Afghanistan', 108.
32. Ibid., 115.
33. Ibid., 116.
34. Ibid., 116.
35. Issawi and Leaman, 'Ibn Khaldun'.
36. Members of the Hadendoa branch of the greater Beja tribe of Sudanese origins were called 'Fuzzy Wuzzies' by the British as a result of the 'frizzy' manner in which they wore their hair.
37. Kipling, *Complete Verse*, 399.
38. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 152.
39. Ibid., 160.
40. Dupree, 'Tribal Warfare in Afghanistan and Pakistan', 270.
41. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'. This list is taken from multiple portions of White's document and is not a comprehensive list of his research. This list was compiled due to its relevance to the aspects of tribal warfare in particular.
42. Peters, 'The New Warrior Class'.
43. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'.
44. Markey, *Securing Pakistan's Tribal Belt*, 14.
45. Sivan, *Isla et la croisade*, 7, as discussed in Wheatcroft, *Infidels*, 189.

46. Hutchinson, 'The Concept of Revolutionary Terrorism'.
47. 'The Ghosts of Anbar, Part II of IV: Through the Window, Clearly', Fox News, by Michael Yon, 27 August 2007.
48. Amir Latif, 'Pakistan Tribes Take on Uzbek Militants', *Islamonline.net*, 22 March 2007. See also: Ismail Khan, 'The Game is up for Uzbeks', *The Dawn Internet Edition*, 5 April 2007 and D. Suba Chandran, 'Attacks on Uzbek Militants in South Waziristan: Issues and Implications of an Internal Jihad', *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Brief No. 9*, 17 April 2006.
49. Zissis, 'Backgrounder', 2.
50. The Jirga is a form of 'tribal council'; the Pashtu model is generally considered the most elaborate form of Jirga and is emulated to varying degrees by non-Pashtu Afghans. 'It is argued that jirga as a time-honoured institution does not only resolve many local, tribal, and national conflicts efficiently and in cost-effective ways, but also acts as a powerful channel of communication among the people of Afghanistan. It, therefore, plays a central role in strengthening social solidarity among Afghans and contributes significantly to the maintenance of social order in Afghan society. However, the extent of the effectiveness of jirga as a mechanism of conflict resolution depends on the extent to which it is perceived as legitimate by the various segments of the Afghan population.' Wardak, 'Jirga', 1.
51. 'Army to Pull Out if Tribesmen Expel Militants: President', *The International News*, 27 April 2006.
52. Ibid.
53. Library of Congress, 'Country Study – Afghanistan'.
54. Rashid, *Taliban*, 93.
55. Ibid., 88.
56. Ibid., 93.
57. Tapper, 'Holier Than Thou', 260.
58. Rashid, *Taliban*, 85.
59. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 153.
60. Markey, *Securing Pakistan's Tribal Belt*, 4.
61. See Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, 288.
62. Although in both traditional Arab and Pashtun systems, there is a strong egalitarian aspect to their organization and function. In these cases, tribal leaders rarely enjoy dictatorial type powers.
63. Richards, *The Savage Frontier*, 60.
64. Markey, *Securing Pakistan's Tribal Belt*, 33.
65. Personal observations from operations in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. This is/was generally considered common knowledge and was considered to be a significant benefit to combined operations with Iraqi forces; 'they notice things we don't notice.'
66. While generally outside the purview of this study, it is worth mentioning that US Army General George Crook made extensive use of Crow Indian scouts when he campaigned against the Sioux for many of the same reasons outlined above. See: PBS, 'New Perspectives on the West: George Crook', viewed 14 April 2007, http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/people/a_c/crook.htm and *Strategypage.com*: 'Terrorism', 1 October 2001, viewed 14 April 2007, <http://strategypage.com/qnd/urbang/articles/20011001.aspx>.
67. It is interesting to note that the term 'foreigner', at least in Iraq, generally means anyone not from the immediate local area and is not reserved for those from other countries. It is reasonable to assume that this notion extends to other tribal societies as the basis for being labeled a 'foreigner' can be put into context with the core tribal concern of competition over resources.
68. The cultural constraints to which tribal leaders must adhere concerning their own tribe members are significant; compromising the integrity of the tribe to outsiders is a

very serious matter and must be done in a very measured and calculated manner. Tribal leaders are generally not, however, similarly constrained when dealing with those from outside their own tribe.

69. The Taliban, however, does have large Pashtu membership, which is not necessarily (although predominantly their membership comes from those in refugee camps) drawn from fractured elements of the Pashtu tribes.
70. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'.
71. Ibid.
72. Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, 148.
73. Ibid.
74. 'Karzai Emphasizes Importance of Tribal Strength in Fighting Terrorism', *People's Daily OnLine*.
75. Smith, *The Utility of Force*, 354.
76. Peters, 'The New Warrior Class'.
77. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'.
78. Peters, 'The New Warrior Class'.
79. Shultz and Dew. *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias*, 263.
80. Millen, 'The Hobbesian Notion of Self-Preservation', 7.
81. Rashid, *Taliban*, 86–7.
82. 'Younger Leadership for Taliban in Afghanistan', *Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 2008.
83. White, 'Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare'.
84. Salhani, Claude, 'Al Qaeda's Third Defeat', *Washington Times*, 19 September 2007.

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