Influence as a Measure of Success

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PHOTO: U.S. soldiers from Cherokee Troop, 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, and Afghan National Army soldiers near the end of a two-day patrol into the western Kherwar district of Afghanistan's Logar Province, 2 July 2009. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Jaime D. DeLeon)

THROUGHOUT THE FALL of 2009, politicians and military strategists debated the situation in Afghanistan to determine the probability of success for the NATO mission. While the accuracy of their conclusions is not yet known, the process they used to determine the probability is very informative. This method is not dissimilar to the decision making process used by tactical military commanders. Both the strategic analysts and the tactical commanders choose data points that allow them to measure the effectiveness of their respective plans.

However, they choose these data points in different ways, and for different reasons. The primary difference between the strategic assessment conducted by the NATO heads of state and tactical assessments made by commanders on the ground is that tactical commanders determine probability for success on a recurring basis, and normally without the benefit of an assessment tool that intertwines military capabilities with critical data points within the Afghan culture.

However, reliance on militarily important data does not fully depict the success or progress of the Afghan counterinsurgency. The number of attacks, enemy killed or captured, and total dollars spent does not fully illustrate whether our counterinsurgency approach is successful on the ground. _The true measure of success in Afghanistan, and one that is not uniformly evaluated, is the amount of "influence" that the government holds over the population._

My definition of influence in Afghanistan is the capacity or power of persons or entities to be a compelling force on the actions, behavior, beliefs, and opinions of the population.[1] The simplest approach to estimating influence is for a commander to conduct a subjective assessment based on population interaction, intelligence reporting, and his operational experience

in an area. Unfortunately, this is problematic because subjective measures of influence do not translate well between units and generally fail to create a homogenous assessment. Lack of an objective influence-measurement tool hampers our ability to recognize whether our actions and the actions of the Afghan government are having a positive or negative effect. If we are going to be successful in Afghanistan, we must be able to quickly and accurately determine where and when we need to reinforce success or revamp our strategy. Therefore, we need an objective method to identify influence over the population, measure it, and recognize methods for increasing influence it.

A Precondition for Success: Access to the Population

David Galula defines an insurgency as "a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order."[2] This definition of insurgency implies that the government is competing to maintain the existing order, but in actuality the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) is *competing for recognition as the legitimate authority.* In Afghanistan, this competition ultimately comes down to local preferences in underdeveloped locations because the government cannot forcibly control society and offers little in terms of government services. The population remains indifferent to the conflict, waiting for informal leaders to determine the likely victor so they can cast their lot with the winning side. Making the GIRoA appear as the probable victor is difficult, but the task is much easier when influence exists with the community leaders. This leads us to one of the key preconditions for success in Afghanistan: the GIRoA must find a way to create sustained influence with the informal (tribal) leaders to guarantee it access to the Afghan population.

To govern Afghanistan, the legitimate government does not necessarily have to obtain direct access to each individual person. The informal leaders can act as effective representatives of the government as long as they maintain an open dialogue with it. The informal leadership structure is based on tribal affiliation and geographic location, and the government should view it as a viable means to forge an enduring connection with the population. Each village has a select group of informal leaders who normally inherit the leadership role through their family's status. These elders combine with other elders at the tribe and district level to form a *shura*. The shura normally contains representatives from all the different tribal groups within an area. The district shura sends representatives to the provincial shura, and provincial representatives participate in the national shura. The GIRoA recognizes these informal groups as the traditional way of governing the tribal people, but does not give the informal groups any official legal authority.

Also important to the Afghan leadership hierarchy are the religious scholars that form a separate religious shura. Although the religious shura is a powerful body within the community, it is still subordinate to the elders. However, the religious leaders are often the mouthpiece to the population and their power lies in the cultural respect they receive for preaching. Simultaneously building influence in both the GIRoA and elder groups is a necessary practice for counterinsurgent forces if they are to eventually merge the separate groups to create access to the population for the GIRoA.

The Importance of the Traditional Informal Leaders

A survival code exists among the Pashtun tribes to protect the populace from external forces. This system of values traditionally governs the Pashtun culture and has several different tenets that dictate members' conduct. This code, called *Pashtunwali*, pre-dates any form of government in the Pashtun lands of modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan and is the cornerstone of the Pashtun identity.

One of the critical tenets of Pashtunwali is *nang*, or honor, which a Pashtun values more than life. Afghans will go to unimaginable lengths to preserve their honor and the honor of their family, and actively seek ways to appear more honorable. Two additional tenets that directly demonstrate an individual's honor are *melmastia* and *nanawati*, hospitality and protection. These tenets direct that any visitor must be provided sustenance and secure sanctuary by his host, and that the host cannot refuse a request for either.

The provincial governors of Nuristan, Langham, Nangahar, and Kunar huddle together prior to the start of the first regional *jirga*, **22 October 2009, to talk about peace, prosperity, and the rehabilitation of Afghanistan.**

Understanding cultural norms is crucial to examining certain behaviors and associations between the population and visitors. Individual and family honor depend on taking care of strangers regardless of the visitor's intentions. Even in villages heavily influenced by insurgents, the informal leaders must still offer hospitality to GIRoA affiliated visitors lest they violate their code of conduct. Because this code binds the culture of the Pashtun tribes, the enforcer of the code is society itself. By violating Pashtunwali, the offender risks his honor, and when honor is challenged a dispute will most likely arise.

Disputes are common in all societies and knowing the methods for conflict resolution is crucial to understanding the culture. Afghan conflicts, whether they involve land, resources, or personal honor, provide an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of the informal leader system of authority. An informal leader will mediate the dispute so that it does not become violent and turn into a matter of *badal*, meaning

blood feud or revenge. The informal leader who can resolve a dispute peacefully is highly respected within the community because he is able to prevent violence and maintain the status quo. This status quo is kept until external forces disrupt the Pashtun lifestyle to the point that peaceful means are not sufficient, casting the informal leaders to the fore to restore order by whatever means are necessary.

Prior to the establishment of official government, the Pashtun tribes depended on Pashtunwali for survival, and it still greatly influences their lives. Much of Afghanistan is still governed by this system, keeping the informal leaders heavily involved in making decisions for the population. This traditional system presents both a distinct opportunity and a threat to the counterinsurgent campaign in Afghanistan. Whoever—GIRoA or insurgent—becomes an influence on these local leaders gains a significant advantage over the other in the war in Afghanistan.

To convince the elders to support the GIRoA, the counterinsurgent must continually assess

progress to focus his efforts. The newest assessment methodology unveiled in Afghanistan is the Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework (TCAPF). The United States Agency for International Development is the proprietor of TCAPF and describes it as a means to "identify, prioritize, and mitigate the causes of instability in an area of operations." The purpose of the assessment is to clarify the true causes of instability in a region instead of basing counterinsurgency efforts on assumptions. There are four basic questions used to gather data, with further investigative questioning available to determine the reasons for each answer given. The four questions are:

● Have there been changes in the village population in the last year? Why?

● What are the most important problems facing the village? Why?

● Who do you believe can solve your problems? Why?

● What should be done first to help the village? Why?

The Tactical Conflict Assessment and Planning Framework is supposed to create data that immediately focuses efforts toward developing effective programs to create stability. This system seems valuable but has not yet been tested on a broad scale. It structures data collection to determine local problems, but lacks an implementation mechanism. Due to the social structure of Afghan society, correcting a source of instability is not as simple as implementing a logical solution grounded in Western thought. The local power brokers must approve of the actions or they will undermine any attempt by the government to stabilize their area. In essence, TCAPF is great for identifying problems in an area, but not in correcting them. *The ability to*

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influence local power brokers is the true key to enacting change and bringing the people to the side of the government.

Competing for Influence

The government in Afghanistan is competing with insurgents to be seen as a viable, dependable, and legitimate option for governance. Having influence with the local leaders is important to both competitors. Historically, the people of Afghanistan have fought against any external attempt at directly controlling them, most recently by defeating the Soviet Union. This natural resistance to occupation is the reason influence of the Afghan government is the predominant factor that will contribute to the overall success of the current mission in Afghanistan. *A system for measuring influence derived from data collected by patrols and population surveys would provide the ability to evaluate influence throughout the entire country*. To make this assessment system transferrable between units and different geographic areas, it must be standardized yet flexible enough to take into account regional cultural differences.

The physical interruption of Afghan lives creates discontent within the population. This discontent then becomes an opportunity for whichever side is best postured to capitalize on the situation. GIRoA or the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are often unwilling or unable to exploit these opportunities because they are either not aggressive enough or, more commonly, fail to recognize the potential to shift influence toward the government. Failing to recognize the importance of shifting influence toward the government is also a possible problem, but one that is most likely specific to ISAF. The insurgents, on the other hand, are more culturally attuned to popular sentiment and will seize all opportunities to expand their hold over the population. Because ISAF will never be able to compete with the insurgents' innate knowledge and cultural understanding of the population, it must have a tool that measures overall friendly and enemy influence to identify opportunities for expansion of friendly influence and support.

The Afghan informal leader decision making process is the most basic principle to understand

when attempting to sway elders' decisions. With roots in Pashtunwali, the Afghan makes decisions based on benefit to self, family, village, and tribe. During times of conflict, the informal leaders will make decisions for their people, which is the primary reason why the GIRoA needs to influence informal leaders to gain popular support. If a need is identified, the population must support the solution, and that support must be built through village and tribal leaders. The local leader will only champion a cause in his village if it provides personal social or economic benefit, directly contributing to his power base among family, village, and tribe. If the elder is not convinced that it is of at least neutral impact to his personal *nang*, then he withholds his support. It is frustrating when an elder refuses to endorse a program that better irrigates crops, but further investigation might determine that he currently controls the irrigation system. Unless the elder is convinced that the new irrigation method will not decrease his social standing, it will not win

his support regardless of the benefit it provides to the people. Understanding the decision making process of the informal Afghan leader is critical to enhancing support for government operations and increasing government authority in that area.

It is necessary to understand the motivation of individual villages that resist their government. While the hard-core insurgent leadership may wage war for theocratic reasons, the population mostly supports the insurgency for individual financial gain. The most highly contested areas in Afghanistan are usually the places where the insurgency has the most to lose through enduring symbols of GIRoA presence, such as the implementation of taxation, regulation, or law enforcement. The ensuing instability tends to draw financial resources because it brings additional security forces to counter the threat. As both friendly and enemy forces engage in conflict, *a market is created that allows supporters of both sides to prosper*. Examples of this include GIRoA infringement on the timber market in the
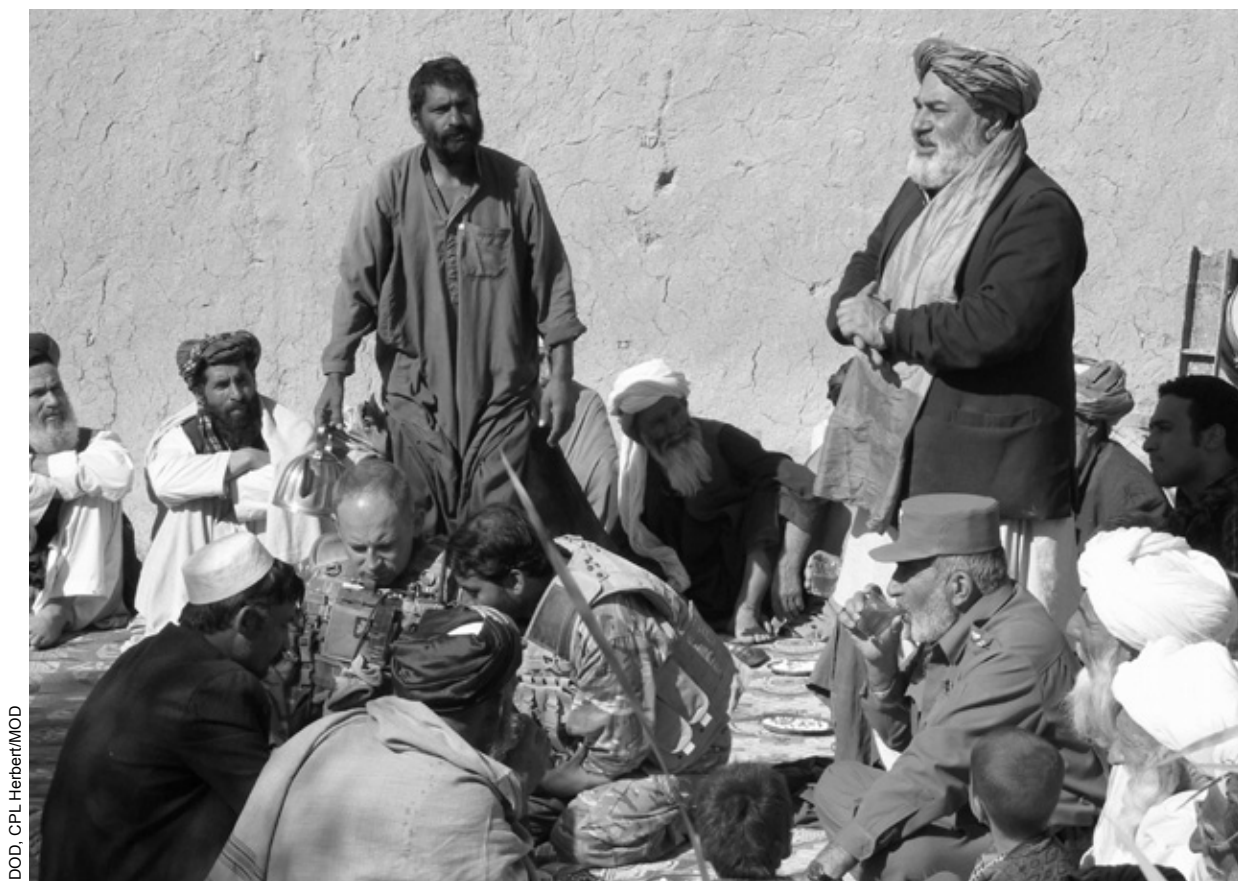
Up to 180 village elders and locals attend an outreach shura in Nad-e-Ali, Afghanistan, 22 November 2010.

northeast and the narcotics market in the south. People in Kunar and Helmand provinces resist the GIRoA because they lose timber or opium revenues; they benefit from the absence of GIRoA regulation. The elders will only intervene on the side of the government when an influx of security or reconstruction dollars presents an economic opportunity.

The areas that resist GIRoA or ISAF presence based on the tenets of Pashtunwali commonly feel violated by some previous transgression and have rationalized the existence of a blood feud because the informal leaders gained no benefit from resolving the conflict. This type of cultural dispute is not uncommon, and an antagonist can easily expand a seam because of the limited contact that the general population has with government security forces. The similarity between economically and culturally disputed areas is that the informal leaders insert themselves in the resolution process only when they gain an advantage. Offer an alternative benefit that outperforms the current arrangement, and the informal leaders will effectively lead the population in whichever direction reflects favorably upon them. Utilizing the TCAPF program makes it easier to identify the reasons for resisting the government, but combating those reasons will depend on the ability to convince the informal leaders that they benefit most from cooperating with GIRoA and ISAF.

The enemies of Afghanistan utilize influence and, when necessary, coercion and direct control to achieve their goals. For the enemy, influence starts at the social, religious, and cultural levels to recruit people and prevent GIRoA hegemony. Ideology is the strongest and most blatantly exploited tool of the insurgents to create influence because it provides an excuse for average Afghans to rebel. The commonality of religious background, and to a greater degree, the Pashtun culture, brings insurgents instant credibility. The insurgents harness this ethnic authority to capitalize on the Pashtunwali tenet of hospitality so they can live with and draw support from the people. Once the insurgents demonstrate the benefits they bring to the area (financial gain, community safety, or eternal salvation), the influence is strong enough for them to remain until a better alternative

is available. There must be a tangible benefit. Otherwise, the people would turn the insurgents away due to the economic strain of supporting non-contributing guests, or insurgent intimidation in the area once a legitimate government force is present.

After the insurgent has settled into an area, he can obtain almost everything he needs to continue fighting. Additional manpower is easy to coerce because the population is mostly agrarian, giving them idle time between planting and harvesting crops. Insurgents can win influence easily because most Afghans live well below the poverty line, which increases the desire for financial gain. With small amounts of money, the insurgent can hire local farmers to conduct low-risk harassment attacks against ISAF and the GIRoA. Unless the government or ISAF can influence the area, there is no cultural stigma associated with earning the extra money, especially when the economic benefit is combined with cultural and religious ideologies. When elements friendly to the GIRoA gain an influence foothold, an effective information campaign can defeat the cultural and religious undertones, but only effective military operations will increase the cost of harassment attacks. Fighting against the insurgent forces is necessary to demonstrate military dominance, which increases the cost of fighting for the insurgency. An increased cost to the population reduces its desire to participate in the fighting and also reduces the counterinsurgent's need to kill part-time fighters and risk a blood feud.

As the situation continues to evolve, the population may start to see a larger economic opportunity (increased employment and educational opportunities) in siding with the government. When security forces find an enemy safe-haven, they will often increase their presence in the area. The insurgents cannot overtly display their identity in front of security forces. The insurgent relies on anonymity, so he must wait for the security forces to leave. His influence must be strong enough that it prevents the population from giving intelligence to the security forces about him, or even turning him in. The first few times that security forces visit the village, it is relatively easy for the insurgent to maintain influence because he can exploit the temporary

nature of the government's presence. Any person that mentions discussing possible improvements offered by the GIRoA is intimidated or killed to demonstrate insurgent dominance and impending victory. As GIRoA-sanctioned visits continue, so will the intimidation and violence. The insurgent propaganda campaign usually comes across as "It was secure here until the government forces arrived." If the security forces are able to stay in the area and speak with the informal leaders daily, then the insurgent loses his influence and will have to leave the area to establish a stronger base of support. Allegiance will continue to shift to maximize the benefits to the informal leaders as they ally themselves with whoever remains dominant once the conflict is over.

Initial efforts at establishing influence must use the "carrot and stick" approach to population engagement. The tactical commander reaches several different decision points that will present opportunities for both. Americans tend to use only the carrot, wanting to remain positive toward the people and not hear complaints from the informal leaders. While this can go a long way toward establishing initial inroads, continuing to provide "rewards" for a population that does not deserve them makes the contributor appear foolish and not worthy of respect. The commander must recognize when progress ends and use the "stick," which can be merely a situation that puts the informal leaders in an uncomfortable position with their population. Commanders don't have to intimidate the informal leaders with overwhelming force, but simply challenge their influence. In implementing the carrot and stick approach, it is imperative to ensure that the coercive measures in place are easily removed. An enemy disinformation campaign can quickly undermine friendly influence measures by claiming that an undesirable change is permanent, so the counterinsurgent must remain flexible enough to take immediate action against any attempt to increase insurgent influence.

A valuable example of creating influence in Afghanistan was an operation conducted from August to November 2009 by 3rd Squadron, 71st Calvary Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gukeisen. The operation was a multi-phased population engagement that rewarded those areas that cooperated with the GIRoA through immediate village-level

U.S. Army, PFC Richard W. Jones, Jr.

U.S. Army LTC Gukeisen, from 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 10th Mountain Division, discusses options for establishing a patrol base with Polish soldiers, Kherwar, Afghanistan, 3 August 2009.

improvements. Several small-scale projects took place in a short amount of time, but that is not what made the operation a success. Gukeisen and his unit structured the project nomination process to start with the elder shura and require the approval of the district sub-governors. This forced the informal and formal leaders to work together to achieve progress. The rapid implementation provided visible evidence that the population could identify. Because the scale of the projects remained below specific thresholds, the unit kept the majority of the development money inside the local economy to increase the economic benefits of siding with the government. This operation benefited all parties. Government leaders were involved in the provision of resources, the local elders were able to harness the power of the government to help their people, and ISAF connected the people to the GIRoA in demonstrable ways. The International Security Assistance Force targeted cultural and religious centers for improvement, and the insurgent lost credibility, thereby weakening his influence.

The Measurement of Influence

Assessing influence over the population is a valuable tool if used to differentiate between areas that require military operations and areas that are ripe for programs such as the example given above. There is currently no objective assessment tool available with the detail required at the tactical level. Each commander defines influence in different terms and internalizes the assessments of his subordinate commanders to create a personal view of the effects achieved in his area of responsibility. An objective way of measuring influence gives a framework that is transferrable not only between separate tactical elements, but across unit boundaries and to follow-on forces. A common metric that standardizes an assessment for operational and strategic planning purposes would also create a common picture for brigade and higher commands.

Several hundred possible questions and observable attributes define influence. To make an influence analysis system that produces accurate information, one must use a basic approach that does not overburden the data collectors. Questions and data collected should resonate with the indigenous population as well as the military operators and analysts, but remain flexible enough to accommodate

regional differences. Much of the data that we already collect can apply to the study of influence, but some additional data must augment it to enhance understanding of a particular area. The primary collector is the individual soldier and small-unit leader who interact daily with the people as part of a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign. Emphasis on pre-deployment cultural training and basic engagement strategy are imperatives to fully understanding the influence factors at work. By teaching soldiers and leaders what to look for, the unit can draw the majority of the required information for analysis from a standard patrol report, if it elicits the relevant data points about influence. The following are examples of influence indicators for both enemy and friendly forces:

Signs that indicate enemy influence in an area:
● The population states they are being intimidated.
● The enemy resides within the population.
● The population provides logistical support to the insurgent.
● The population allows attacks to occur from within the village.
● No reporting of insurgent movements.
● The population asks legitimate security forces to vacate the area.
● The population rejects assistance from the GIRoA or ISAF.
● The informal leaders do not readily identify themselves.
● Kids throw rocks at security forces in the presence of adults who do not stop them.
● The population propagates insurgent rhetoric during face-to-face interactions.

Signs that indicate friendly influence in an area:
● There is a permanent presence of security forces in the area.
● The population has family members in the Afghan National Security Forces.
● The population provides information to the GIRoA or ISAF about insurgent activity.
● The population seeks the established government to resolve conflicts.
● The population sends informal leaders to voice grievances to the GIRoA.
● The population welcomes ISAF personnel into their homes.

● The population offers tea to GIRoA or ISAF personnel.

● When ISAF personnel arrive in a village, the informal leader immediately greets them.

● The population requests jobs from the GIRoA or ISAF.

Identifying *points of friction* for the people is a sound method for checking the accuracy of an assessment after estimating the extent of friendly and enemy influence. When one side has an obvious influence advantage, there most likely will not be an overt amount of stress on the population. The point at which the population will feel the most pressure occurs when friendly and enemy forces are simultaneously struggling to gain influence in an area. The insurgent will often turn to intimidation that can range from posting night letters in the bazaar to conducting public executions. The middle ground for insurgent action in a conflict area may be kidnapping locals for questioning, but even that has degrees of seriousness based on the fate of the kidnap victim. Instances of intimidation are embarrassing for the elders because the population may hold them responsible.

The Way Forward

Defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan requires the GIRoA and ISAF to establish influence with the population. That influence must be uniformly measured to depict progress. Evaluating the success or failure of the mission in Afghanistan by metrics such as number of attacks, enemy killed, or dollars spent does not begin to define the complex problems associated with fighting against the Afghan insurgency. The counterinsurgent can rarely gather enough information to understand a tribal dispute, much less predict and evaluate the second- and third-order effects of ISAF actions.

The proper metric for understanding success at the tactical level is the influence that the GIRoA and ISAF have over the population. Greater control of the population would benefit the counterinsurgency, but the cultural resistance to such control is far too entrenched. In lieu of such control, holding influence over the informal power structure can achieve the same effect. Once the requisite amount of influence is achieved in an area, the population will generally maintain a level of obedience that is acceptable to the government.

Objectively measuring influence to depict progress accurately is vital as units move in and out of Afghanistan. Numerous assessment models have been utilized in Afghanistan in over nine years of war, and none have proven effective at defining the problem and measuring progress.

The proposed metrics for friendly and enemy influence above may not be the best, but that does not decrease the importance of establishing influence in a country that cannot be effectively controlled by the government. Having spent over two years in Afghanistan, and having dealt with the population on an almost daily basis, I recognize the logic behind their decisions, but that logic is not always apparent to foreigners. By following cultural norms learned during pre-deployment training and adding a thorough understanding of Pashtunwali, foreigners can unravel the seemingly erratic behavior. Quickly identifying the informal leaders expedites the transition to an environment hospitable to the government and foreign security forces. Increasing friendly influence while reducing insurgent influence is progress toward improving stability and dialogue between the population and the GIRoA, an unavoidable requirement for successful accomplishment of the NATO mission. **MR**

NOTES

1. Random House Dictionary, "influence," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/influence> (14 October 2009).
2. David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964), 2.