



# The Five Fights of the Surkhagan and the Future of ISAF

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*“And you have to forget your wealth in this war. You have to make it a war of the poor. You have to ask infinitely more of men than the materiel.”*

— Jean Lartéguy, *The Face of War*

**I**T WAS MY fourth day in command, and I was returning from a visit with one of my teams. We rolled up just as a dust-off lifted off next to a wadi intersecting Highway 1. On board: one dead Romanian captain and two wounded Romanian soldiers. Welcome to Zabul, 2009.

It was April, and I was the new provincial lead mentor for the Afghan National Police (ANP) in Zabul, southern Afghanistan. I arrived with a somewhat nebulous mission to “mentor” the local police forces. The mission was nebulous in that I am an infantryman, not a police officer, and the Afghan forces are not quite soldiers but not police officers, either. I had a collection of assets to help me in my mission, including Afghan police officers in pickup trucks, an ad hoc team of various National Guardsmen, and a sprinkling of active duty leaders and Navy corpsmen—not exactly the “book force” for mentoring or counterinsurgency.

I did have a wide-ranging, if self-defined, mandate. The successes and failures would be largely mine. This allowed me room to experiment and led to some tangible, positive tactical results and a template for employing indigenous and NATO forces as the American mission in Afghanistan moves forward.

My deputy chief of police rolled up with four green ANP Ford Rangers. Impeccably dressed as always, he informed me that his intelligence indicated an improvised explosive device (IED) cell had fled to the Sur Ghar Mountains via the Surkhagan Valley.

Wishing to make a good impression, I told him, “I think we would be wise to pursue and catch them.” He was testing me, and my answer proved to be the one he was looking for. He smiled and walked off to lead the way.

This would be the first of five separate fights and well over two dozen missions in three months in and around the Surkhagan Valley.

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PHOTO: The author overlooks the Surkhagan Valley from a hard-won-fighting position. (Photo courtesy of author)

## The Five Fights

The Tarnak River parallels Highway 1 in Zabul Province. During the springtime, fording sites are at a premium. Consequently, it took several minutes for us to find one. We then drove due east at a leisurely pace in deference to the terrain, the dust, and our up-armored HMMWVs' creaking suspensions. Traveling near the back of the convoy, I saw our HMMWVs and police trucks suddenly spread out and the crews dismount while PKM, .50-caliber machine guns, and MK-19 grenade launchers opened up to engage an unseen enemy. The Taliban had gone back to their objective rally point 10 kilometers east of Highway 1 in the orchards surrounding the town of Ebrahimkhel. The Taliban were clearly surprised, yet apparently unconcerned at our arrival. Here, I was witnessing Pashtun warfare for the first time—an 800-meter live fire exercise featuring the boom of rocket-propelled grenades firing and exploding, Hungarian automatic assault rifles firing at a 30-degree elevated tilt to accommodate the long range, and a Russian machine gun fired at the hip by a slowly walking Afghan policeman who was scattering his comrades only meters in front of him with comedic results. The cacophony of sound with the occasional

snap and hiss of ineffective return fire proved as exhilarating as it was worthless.

Grabbing the nearest interpreter, or “terp,” I got the deputy chief of police to remount his troops while I relayed the same order to the three U.S. HMMWVs. Unfortunately, the “action front” battle drill had left one HMMWV mired in the flooded fields. The Afghan police, in no mood to move any closer, and the U.S. soldiers, wisely unwilling to leave a truck behind, took 45 minutes to fix the problem. By that time, the Taliban had fled to the safety of the mountains 10 kilometers further east. We rolled up to the villages of Abdulqader Kalay and Surkhagan well after the Taliban's hasty retreat and conducted a dismounted patrol in each village—to no effect.

Thus ended the first fight of the Surkhagan. Lessons learned:

- Afghans like to shoot their guns.
- However, they do not like to engage close enough to get shot.
- They will deliberately engage at nonlethal distances to ensure they get to shoot their guns without getting shot.
- The Americans followed the Afghan lead.

Following this fight, the standard order to my



Team Viper moves to a suspected roadhouse along a known Taliban rat line, Tarnak Wa Jaldak District, Zabul Province, April 2009.



(Photo courtesy of author)

**American combat advisors go over the plan with their Afghan counterparts, Zabul Province, 7 June 2009.**

teams was to pursue until you can longer do so—by vehicle if possible, by foot if necessary. Do not stop. Only days later, the revised techniques, tactics, and procedures (TTP) were proofed.

The second fight of the Surkhagan was similar to the first—at least at the outset. We received a call at Forward Operating Base Apache, our base in Qalat, reporting an ambush on Highway 1. We rolled in 10 minutes, linking up with the deputy chief of police en route. Speeding down Highway 1, my team quickly encountered an Afghan army company arrayed formidably along both sides of the road with a U.S. embedded transition team accompanying them. The “Zeus,” the Afghan nickname for the twin 23-mm cannons on the back of an 8-ton truck, stood prominently on a small hill. My deputy chief of police went to the Afghan army commander while I went to his American mentor. It took but a minute for both of us to get the same story: “We were ambushed, we shot back, the enemy fled east, we won, battle over.” I walked over to the deputy and said simply, “Surkhagan.” He silently smiled yet again, and we repeated the actions of our fight less than two weeks ago.

The Taliban had adjusted their TTPs as well. They had pushed their objective rally point back

another six kilometers to the town of Abdulqader Kalay, where they engaged us again at the predicted 800-meter range. The Afghan police started its “action front” battle drill, but U.S. forces sped forward in the face of the Taliban’s ineffective fire. The Afghan police, shocked, quickly remounted and followed.

The standard TTP for operating in built-up areas with three HMMWVs is for two of them to maneuver cross-country on each side of the town, covering for “pissers,” or escaping Taliban. The third HMMWV would then push through the center of town with the Afghan police following. It was a decent tactic as long as the Taliban played along. We were fortunate because they did. The Taliban had not anticipated our spirited pursuit. Two died in the town, and the Taliban left their bodies behind as they fled on motorcycles to the town of Surkhagan and we continued our pursuit. As I was in the third HMMWV in the convoy as we rolled into Abdulqader Kalay, I became the lead vehicle in the main effort, driving through the center of the town.

We received ineffective fire from the hills and from within the town itself. I dismounted with one U.S. soldier, one terp, and six Afghan police and

continued the pursuit as planned, on foot. Our solitary antagonist was 200 meters away, ensconced behind a mud wall surrounding a vineyard. Using M203 grenade launchers, AK-47 and M4 rifle fire, and smoke and fragmentary grenades, we closed to within 50 meters of his position.

For those unfamiliar with southern Afghanistan's vineyards, a lack of wood and a preponderance of dirt cause farmers to use three-foot-high mud walls as trellises. These mud walls run parallel to each other three to five meters apart. We climbed over dozens of such walls in order to close with the remaining Taliban fighter. This was a slow and exhausting task. When we finally came within close range of the fighter, a well-placed M203 round silenced him. However, his bravery as the Taliban force's rear guard was rewarded. As we closed to his position, two Taliban PKM machine guns opened up on our force from the hills 600 meters away and 300 feet above us in altitude. The fire was effective, if nonlethal. An 18-inch-high mound of dirt to my front was adequate cover for me, and my physical exhaustion precluded a sprint to a wadi 50 meters in front of me. We exchanged indecisive fire with the Taliban for several minutes while the remainder of the U.S. forces maneuvered to put mounted and dismounted fire on the PKM machine gunners dominating my small element. The synchronized U.S. counterattack by fire finally silenced the guns, and I walked back to the center of town with my men. I had recovered physically, but the hills and heat had conquered me mentally. More so, I might add, than the Taliban's surprisingly well-executed break-contact battle drill. In retrospect, we should have continued the pursuit.

During our mounted exfiltration, we reclaimed the bodies abandoned in Abdulqader Kalay. One was Mullah Qayum, the Taliban military commander for Qalat District.

Thus ended the second fight of the Surkhagan. Lessons learned:

- Pursuit works, provided the Taliban do not know we are going to do it.
- Motorcycle-mounted Taliban move faster than HMMWV-mounted American soldiers and truck-mounted Afghan Security Forces.
- Ten miles of running per week is not enough to keep in fighting shape.
- Exhaustion results in part from carrying too much gear.

- Afghan police like killing Taliban. When properly led, they were more aggressive than I anticipated.

- You run out of hand grenades quickly in close combat.

After-action adjustments included allowing dismounts and track commanders to remove the side inserts from our body armor, but required them to carry more water and extra fragmentary grenades. I increased my daily runs to four miles. We realized that stopping to pick up dead Taliban is a good way to collect information. Had we delayed, they would have been stripped of their weapons and cell phones.

Still, I remained without an answer to the Taliban's superior mobility. Only helicopters could counter the Taliban's fast, all-terrain motorcycles, but dedicated helicopter assets were not available in Zabul Province at the time. We needed help. The death of Mullah Qayum gave my forces some credibility with the greater "Team Zabul." The team included a Special Forces advanced operational base with several A-Teams working throughout Zabul and could request dedicated helicopter assets. With a good plan, perhaps Special Operations Command (SOCOM) would provide helicopter support to alleviate my mobility disadvantage. It took two weeks to develop our plan and another two weeks for approval, allocation, and execution. Our final plan was resource-intensive and impressive. (The mandatory 45 slides were magnificent in their high-resolution imagery and detailed phases.)

The 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment's long-distance, heavy-lift helicopter would transport multiple A-Teams with foreign special operations forces to a landing zone right outside Surkhagan in the early morning. To quickly gain the high ground, additional small teams would insert themselves just next to the hilltops from which the enemy shot at me. Ground forces including Special Forces, explosive ordnance disposal specialists, Romanian Army soldiers, and Afghan police would converge on the town of Surkhagan from the north and west. B-1s, AC-130s, and Reapers would blanket the sky. No Taliban could escape this unstoppable force, and indeed, no Taliban did. Their complete absence made Surkhagan a dry hole that day.



Even so, it was about a 72-hour operation from start to finish. The 160th would not fly during the day. By 1000 hours on the day of the operation, we knew it was over. The ground forces stayed with the air assault force until 2200 and nightfall. While waiting, we did some presence patrols in Abdulqader Kalay, Bazugay to the north of Surkhagan, and Bar Kharowti to the south.

While exfiltrating, insult turned to injury. An Afghan police truck hit an IED in Sin Mandeh, the wadi we used for the exfiltration. Three Afghan policemen were severely injured and flown out. We remained on-site overnight, awaiting daybreak to continue our exfiltration. A B-1 circled overhead through the night; it relayed the presence of possible Taliban, but little more information than that. However, there was nothing we could work with, despite our desire to do so.

Thus, the third fight of the Surkhagan ended as a clear victory for the Taliban. Lessons learned:

- Taliban move. Where they were yesterday is not going to be where they are today.
- Any operation based on information 24-hours old, much less three weeks old, is already a failure.
- Helicopter requests require detailed planning, but the intelligence you use to justify those requests will be too old to act upon by the time you get your helicopters. Therefore, you cannot move on the ground faster than the Taliban can, ever.

Dusting off my old U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 90-8, *Counter Guerilla Operations*, circa 1986, I ordered my teams to “go old school.” We would employ night ambushes to interdict the Taliban’s movements. A night operation is laborious, risky, and usually fruitless. Despite these limitations, action was necessary. Highway 1 was suffering two lethal IED attacks or ambushes a week in Zabul Province. Hardest hit were the Afghan police and civilians.

Night ambushes were of limited value because they were almost invariably compromised during

infiltration. Fortunately, the Taliban proved largely incapable of countering them, as the ambush force was usually of platoon strength or greater. The lethal IED count did drop by half. The mere fact we were conducting night ambushes seemed to give the Taliban pause. For two weeks, my teams ran an ambush about every other night. Three teams were arrayed along Highway 1 from Tarnak Wa Jaldak District in the south (Team Viper), to Qalat District (Team Swampfox), and to the north out of Shajoy District (Team Nomad). We used rolling drop-offs and presence-patrol leave-behinds during the day, and long dismounted marches from the forward operating bases and combat outposts at night.

During the fourth fight of the Surkhagan, Team Nomad finally brought us success. I had authorized and encouraged cross-boundary operations for operational flexibility and for basic deception. Team Nomad used a long, 60-km cross-country movement to place an ambush in Qalat, Team Swampfox’s area of operations. While en route, they had a meeting engagement with a Taliban team and captured two Taliban with weapons. The Nomad commander made the decision to continue with the ambush, hoping that the Taliban would assume he would cancel it due to the earlier contact. However, the Taliban counter-ambushed him with a platoon-sized force outside the village of Duri. Team Nomad immediately responded with a decisive counterattack and aggressive pursuit of the Taliban, which resulted in three Taliban killed in action and recovered, light casualties among the Afghan police, and one U.S. soldier wounded but able to return to duty. Intelligence and enemy radio traffic indicated several more Taliban wounded, but they escaped or at least remained undiscovered in the desert night.

Team Swampfox immediately responded with reinforcements, resupplied Nomad’s depleted ammunition, gathered additional Afghan policemen, and pursued the enemy. We arrived an hour after the contact but found no additional Taliban. Afghan police from Qalat (part of Team Swampfox) searched the area and discovered one motorcycle and two bodies, while Nomad maintained the perimeter and redistributed ammunition. One of the bodies recovered was Mullah Karaman, the replacement for Mullah Qayum.

If luck is the meeting of preparation and opportunity, then we were indeed lucky. During the same

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Americans pull security in Shahbazkhl, Afghanistan, 7 June 2009.

week as the killing of Mullah Karaman—during the fourth fight of the Surkhagan—the 82nd Airborne Aviation Brigade detached a task force of Blackhawks and Apaches to Zabul. While the request procedures for the Blackhawks were laborious and long, the Apaches were available for immediate close-combat attack if a friendly element found itself in a “troops in contact” situation or under “imminent threat” of attack.

Also working in our favor was the fact that we had a Taliban informant supplying us with information. The informant let the Afghan police chief know that the Taliban’s *Quetta Shura* was unhappy with the deaths of two senior Taliban commanders and was sending a new commander from outside the province to the area. My chief of police suspected that any such foreign commander would need to execute an ambush soon after arrival to “prove himself.” He estimated that in about four days a platoon-sized Taliban force would gather in the Surkhagan Valley for this impending attack.

I concluded that if I couldn’t move faster than the Taliban, I would have to slow them down. The ambushes were working to a degree, but were certainly not decisive. Working with other members of Task Force Zabul, we envisioned Apaches fixing the enemy while the Afghan police moved

in to finish them on the ground. However, as the third fight demonstrated, if I wanted to defeat them on the ground, I had to know where to look. I needed better intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

I went to the U.S. liaison for the Romanians who made up the Task Force Zabul command team and asked him if he had any Predator coverage available. He did, but it was for the wrong day. After a few hours of deft negotiation with unknown higher and lateral task force headquarters, he secured Reaper coverage for me on the day I needed. Then I went over to the aviation battalion commander. She agreed that two Apaches would be on stand-by that day. Should a unit find itself in “imminent threat,” the Apaches would provide close combat attack aviation support.

The plan still needed refinement. The Apaches, flying at 7,500 feet in 90 degree temperature, could give me only about an hour of coverage. It took ground vehicles about three hours to travel from Qalat to Surkhagan. If I could not get to Surkhagan before the Apaches ran out of fuel, the Taliban would still escape to the Sur Ghar Mountains. We had to travel two hours without tipping off the Taliban as to our intent. Knowledge of the terrain and cooperation from Taliban spies provided the solution.

The Surkhagan Valley contains only two passes through the Sur Ghar Mountains that are passable with four-wheel vehicles: Dab Pass to the south and Shajoy Pass to the north. Surkhagan was key terrain for the Taliban because it provided a pass through the mountains for motorcycles, but not for trucks. The Taliban could use it, but we could not.

The Dab Pass in particular is a notorious choke point marked by a snaking trail lined with burned-out hulks of vehicles that were the victims of IEDs and ambushes. However, the Dab Pass was only 40 minutes from the Surkhagan Pass. If I could get to Dab Pass before the Apaches lifted off from Qalat, we would be able to get in close to the Taliban as they were being held in place by the Apaches and finish them. I asked my chief of police to let it slip to suspected informants that we would be going to the Dab Pass to inspect a nearby town (Shahbazkhel). Hopefully, the jittery Taliban would not consider our movement a threat.

The fifth, and final, fight of the Surkhagan went pretty much according to plan. Reconnaissance detected 20 motorcycles in Abdulkader Kalay near

the “start point” at 0500. This meant that somewhere between 20 and 40 Taliban were meeting there. My Afghan police force successfully made it to Shahbazkhel by 0800, and there still was no sign of movement from the Taliban. The Apaches were put on stand-by because of “imminent threat,” and as the Afghan police broke toward Surkhagan, the Apaches launched.

They caught the Taliban in the open desert only a few hundred meters from the Sur Ghar Mountains near an abandoned town called Surgay Tangay. The initial salvo caught the Taliban off guard, and killed many in a matter of minutes. The rest dropped their motorcycles and ran for the hills, but they soon realized that our circling gunships attacked any moving fighters they saw. As predicted, the Taliban took cover and tried to wait us out. By that time, however, the Afghan police were assaulting on line, guided by the Apache pilots.

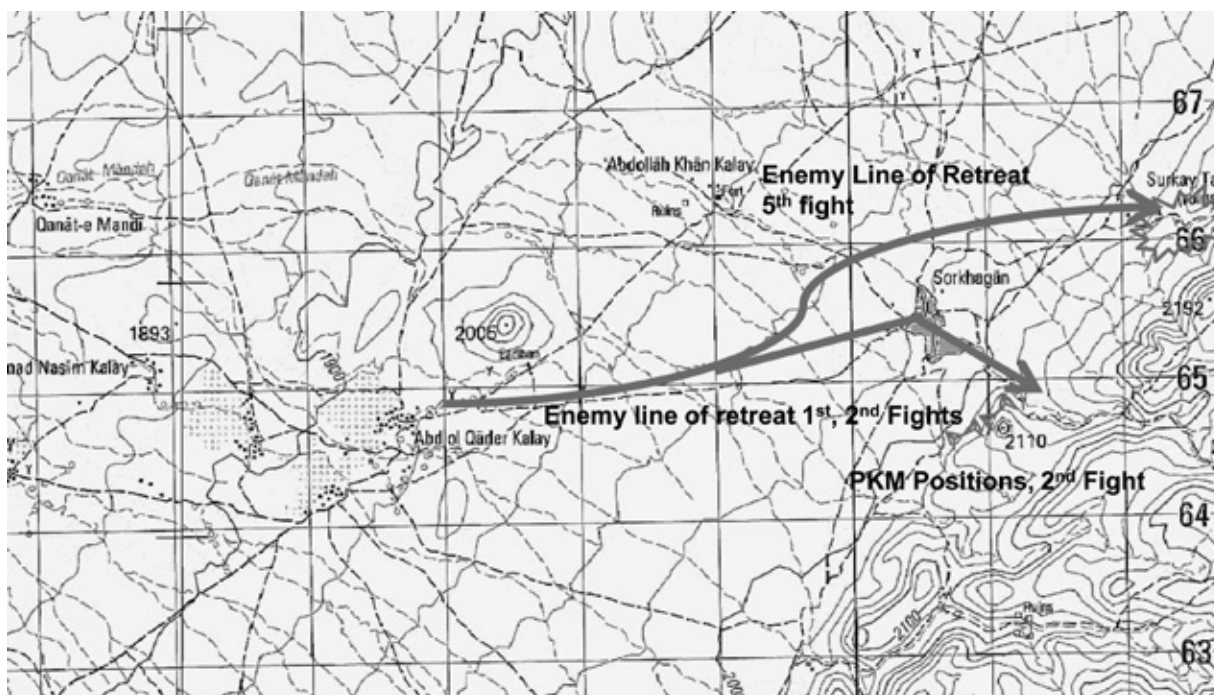
The Taliban were on the horns of a dilemma. If they stayed still, the Afghan police would discover them and shoot them (five Taliban died this way). If they ran, the Apaches would kill them. Based



(Photo courtesy of author)

The aftermath of an IED in Surkhagan Sands, Zabul Province, 7 June 2009.





Map depiction of the first, second, and fifth fights of the Surkhagan.

upon gun-camera footage, we believe the Apaches' 30-mm rounds, Hellfire missiles, and folding fin aerial rocket flechettes killed 15 Taliban and possibly wounded another 10, as most Taliban chose to risk being killed by the circling Apaches rather than face the advancing Afghan police and American soldiers.

The fight ended when the Apaches ran low on fuel and left the area. Those Taliban who were far enough away from the Afghan police sweep to make a run for it sprinted to safety on foot, having abandoned their motorcycles. We recovered 10 bodies, an equal number of weapons, and 12 motorcycles.

The Taliban had initially split up into two groups. The larger group went east to the mountains, while four Taliban went west to Highway 1. The Reaper stayed with the group heading west, and we achieved target hand-off, which the returning Apaches coordinated through the joint terminal air controller at Zabul base. All four Taliban in the group heading west were killed. Afghan police linked up with Romanian Army forces and recovered two of the four bodies.

The day was not an unqualified success. The Afghan police executed one captured Taliban. In a

cosmic irony of sorts, the man who was believed to have killed the prisoner died two hours later along with another policeman in an IED strike as we exfiltrated in the Duri Mandeh just a kilometer from the scene of Duri Ridge.

The new Taliban commander was killed, along with two other "mullahs." No lethal IED attacks took place for the next five weeks along Highway 1.

However, we could not replicate the results, as the Afghan police mentor teams stood down from active operations for over 30 days to train new recruits for the upcoming elections. By the time the training was over, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) coverage concentrated on large, deliberate fights in Helmand Province and elsewhere. Finding large groups of Taliban proved impossible without UAV coverage. The lethality of the Apaches working with Afghan police forced the Taliban to be extremely cautious about exposing themselves to attack.

Thus ended the fifth fight of the Surkhagan. Lessons learned:

- Air mobility is essential to countering the Taliban's mobility advantage.
- The Taliban do not plan weeks in advance, and we should not either.



- Know yourself, know your enemy, and know the terrain.
- Decentralize authority for control and execution to the lowest levels possible to match the flexibility of the enemy. If you do not trust your commanders to execute missions without prior approval, fire them and replace them with people you do trust.

## Follow-on Lessons

Regional Police Advisory Command-South and Afghan Regional Security Integration Command-South commanders understood the above principles. While we planned regular operations one week in advance, we delegated the authority to execute no-notice missions based on conditions on the ground.

Subordinate team commanders enjoyed the same freedom of action. Of the five fights described in this article, only two were planned, and the one with the greatest planning turned out to be the least effective.

My forces did not enjoy success because of any particular tactical insight, technology, or person (save our association with the local Afghans and their unmatched knowledge of the enemy and terrain). The one distinguishing feature separating my forces from others within Team Zabul was the freedom of action to move toward the enemy decisively based on the local commander's initiative.

We employed tactics well-known to the graduate of any basic officer leaders course. Ambushes, patrols, and pursuit are not revolutionary examples of the maneuver arts. They have been the foundation of counterinsurgency operations since Caesar's time.

American forces in Afghanistan have largely traded mobility for armor and firepower. In the Korangal and elsewhere, we have attempted to bring the Taliban to their demise through the "tethered goat" tactics that failed the French at Dien Bien Phu. The tethered goats—small, isolated combat outposts—while nominally justified as denying key terrain, serve mostly as enticements for the elusive Taliban to expose themselves. Yet, insurgencies are historically won by the force with the greatest mobility. The United States used air mobility and aero-scouts to great effect in Vietnam, but these efforts were resource intensive. The Rhodesian Light Infantry, restrained by their inability to field more than 5,000 soldiers and

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with limited airlift support at any given time due to crushing embargoes, used a similar though less resource-intensive version they called "Fire Force" based upon lessons learned in Malaysia.<sup>1</sup> We must learn from these examples. As troop counts diminish, we must increase our mobility and decentralize our planning and execution authority if we wish to maintain our hard-earned gains.

When empowered junior officers and NCOs lead American counterinsurgency campaigns, we can be very effective, as proven in El Salvador in the 1980s. We have a young officer corps with years of counterinsurgency experience. We must trust the most outstanding of these majors and lieutenant colonels to execute combined arms and air assault operations based on available intelligence, their experience, and their proven ability to work with mentored indigenous forces.

The war of the flag officers is ending in Afghanistan. The success of that war will be measured by historians. The war of the field grade officers approaches. It is that war we must now turn our attention to. Fortunately, our mid-grade officers and NCOs are ready.

The UAV revolution must provide actionable intelligence at the lowest levels possible. Taskings for strategic UAVs must come from the majors and lieutenant colonels to whom we will entrust our future Joint task forces, and those UAVs must send back intelligence to them immediately. Fixed- and rotary-wing air support controlled by these commanders must be available with the requisite command relationship. Our legacy air doctrine designed to defeat the Soviet Union's strategic power is incapable of doing this mission. Generals McChrystal and Petraeus's harsh but necessary restrictions on fixed-wing air support enacted to minimize civilian and friendly casualties from errant and poorly executed air strikes prove this. Cheap, reliable, persistent air support is the key to countering the Taliban's current

mobility advantage. Blackhawks and Chinooks must transport troops to battle. We must never again use a Chinook to fly troops or cargo from one fixed-wing-capable airstrip to another. We must reserve blade hours for moving forces to kill the enemy, not for providing tours for dignitaries. We must resurrect the light attack/armed reconnaissance and light mobility aircraft programs to support U.S. forces, not merely to train partner-nation air forces. In the words of U.S. Air Force spokesman Roger Drinnon, these programs are designed for “nations [that] need an aircraft that’s affordable, inexpensive, and easily maintained.”<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the United States is one of those nations, and if the Air Force cannot yet see this, then the Army must stand up and demand these assets. Whether Air Force captains or Army warrant officers fly them is inconsequential in the final analysis. IEDs are claiming the butcher’s toll. We spend billions on counter-IED technology and squander the billions invested in rotary wing aircraft by misusing or restricting their use. The first priority for COIN in the *Quadrennial Defense Review* is to “increase the availability of rotary wing assets.” The single best way to do that is never use helicopters when airplanes are the better choice.

The Army’s generals are not irrelevant to this new fight, but the arena in which they do battle must change to the political arena. That is where they can do the most for our Army squads.

## Conclusions

Our ability to gain the trust of the Afghans with whom we fight is the *sine qua non* of any success we enjoy. I cannot hope to lecture an Afghan general with 30 years of experience on how to fight in his home country. I can only suggest ways

to perhaps do it a bit better. Effective counterinsurgency depends on Afghan National Security Forces conducting highly dangerous yet essential presence patrols and daily security operations.

The Afghan National Security Forces are trained, equipped, and manned to do this now. The time has come for them to conduct these missions with minimal American assistance, and we must attribute any success we enjoy to them. They are unquestionably militarily superior to the Taliban, their competitors for the leadership of the Afghan people.

The drawdown in Afghanistan presents an outstanding opportunity to redefine our strategic commitment. The surge in Iraq seemed to suggest to some that America is not serious unless it dedicates masses of troops. While the surge’s necessity was debatable, its success is not. However, it has left us in the unenviable position of being expected to mobilize large numbers of forces to prove we are resolute. Contrast this with the deliberately small footprint the United States maintained in El Salvador to obtain an equally successful outcome.

In counterinsurgencies, time is more valuable than mass. The days of America being able to afford both are over. Our taxpayers, our allies, and our enemies must know that we can deliver American resolve effectively at a reasonable cost for as long as we must. We have invested untold treasure and blood in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the process, we have developed a cadre of officers and NCOs capable of conducting the future fight at reasonable cost. Properly empowered and equipped, these young leaders can fight future battles in Afghanistan cheaper, better, and safer than our current doctrine and TTPs allow. The future mission in Afghanistan is at hand, and the future leaders of the Army must stand ready to perform it. **MR**

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## NOTES

1. J.R.T. Wood, *Counter-Strike from the Sky* (30° South Publishers LTD, 2009), 33.

2. Dave Majumdar, “Budget Delays Stall USAF Light Mobility Decision,” *Defense News*, 24 January 2011, 7.