

A Pivotal Year

Two noted specialists on Afghan affairs recently tackled concerns about allied military operations in Afghanistan. Former Australian Army officer *Dr. David Kilcullen*, now working as counterinsurgency specialist for the U.S. State Department, and *J. Alexander Thier*, Senior Rule of Law Advisor with the United States Institute of Peace, discussed the future of allied military operations in Afghanistan last fall during video conferences hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Ottawa and its Consulates in Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax.

Dr. Kilcullen believes that the Afghan federal election, scheduled for 20 August 2009, will be pivotal. If security is insufficient for the elections, and the government cannot take positive control, the political and military environment will deteriorate. Mr. Thier is somewhat more optimistic, believing that NATO forces have, perhaps, until 2011 to establish sufficient security.

Afghanistan has been a top priority for the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and NATO since 2002, but it is clear that NATO and other participating nations require an enhanced policy for the region. This situation is compounded by nations that are unwilling to work outside "the wire." Canada and the U.S. are unencumbered by government caveats.

Thier suggests that the political and military composition of the alliance in Afghanistan is breaking down with a loss of transactional relationships, adding to insecurity in the region. The United States, he says, is seen by some as a guarantor, and a hindrance to regional security by others.

Two distinct military actions are conducted concurrently in the region. U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom is a counterterrorism operation and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is a NATO-led security and development mission.

In addition to a significant drop in Afghan support for international presence, two principal factors conspire against effective management of the Afghan question: increasing violence and poppy production.

Cultivation of drug crops are highest in areas under Taliban control, but effective counter-insurgency would go a long way to resolve the problem, according to Kilcullen.

Drug cultivation is a \$4 billion per year industry, with only \$800 million going to the farmers. \$3.2 billion is profit and kickbacks to politicians and police. This is also related to a two million ton food shortage because wheat-growing areas are used for poppy production. To counteract this, the coalition needs to create a secure environment for development and aid agencies to

work. The Canadian Forces and CIDA have a system of cooperation that could be an effective model for others to follow.

Troop rotation presents another difficulty. U.S. troops rotate every 12 months, every four months for the Netherlands, and six to eight months for other nations. Currently, reservist intelligence analysts are on six month tours – relatively short deployments that deny them the ability to develop trend lines. Developing such capability takes time and cannot be effectively done in six month tours, contends Kilcullen. This continuous rotation of entire military contingents affects the conduct of operations. More effective situational awareness could be developed by maintaining designated intelligence and operational staffs in situ since the beginning of the mission. However, it is fundamentally unfair to keep them on longterm deployment, placing participating nations in a difficult position.

Another example is plan that was recently presented for counterinsurgency. but it was the third plan written for the same objective. This lack of consistent presence exacerbates problems with the mission, and compromises continuity.

Kilcullen underscored the challenges in the relationship between civil and military structures. National caveats require military forces to work within the strictures stipulated by their national authorities, often creating difficulties. As an example, helicopter airlift was requested when a soldier was shot in the ankle in Farar. The helicopter unit needed to acquire approval from its national capital to airlift him to a medical facility. What should have taken only minutes took so much time that the soldier lost his leg from an injury that, if treated in time, would have been minor.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have become intertwined, but the West hasn't recognized the extent of this, according to Thier, the Afghan security issue is compounded by Taliban use of Pakistan as a safe haven. It is virtually impossible to defeat an insurgent force that can retreat to a neighbouring state. De-radicalization of Pakistan should be a priority.

Kilcullen agrees. ISAF, he says, has failed to provide security to the Afghan

The Afghan National Army's goal is to double its strength to 134,000 personnel, enabling them to achieve their own security and stability.

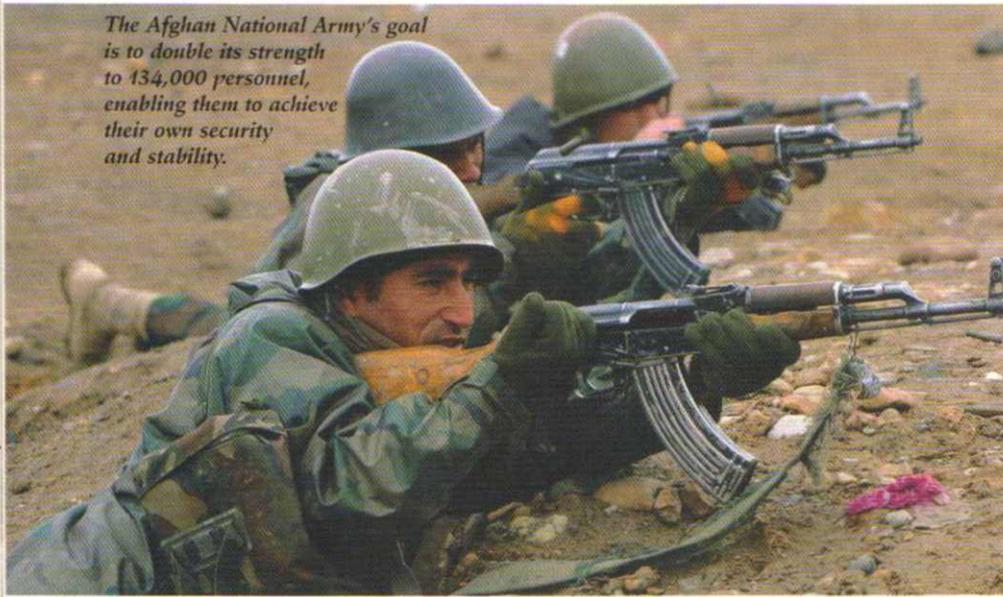


PHOTO: MCPL ROBERT BOTTRILL

« Afghan National Army soldiers conduct basic soldiering skills at the Kabul Military Training Center facility in Kabul. Coalition soldiers help train the instructors through the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) operating out of Kabul.



Canadian soldiers, Afghan National policemen, and an RCMP Officer (right) from the Kandahar Provincial Reconstruction Team, on a foot patrol in Kandahar city.

population, their communities and their homes, and the Afghan government has not delivered governance to the people. The Taliban has moved into areas where they dispense family law, settle inheritance issues, issue identification and passports, and appoint mayors, because the government is not.

Approximately \$41 billion in international donations have been directed to Afghanistan. Development advisors need to partner with local authorities to continue aid programs where the military is not present. Funding mechanisms, explained Kilcullen, are more flexible with USAID and CIDA than other nations. A gap in aid distribution can cause community leaders to swing back to the Taliban because they may have no indication of when aid materials will arrive. The loyalty of local leaders wavers because they fear they will be left to their fate. Kilcullen reminds us that we need to protect the people where they live and where they sleep.

Thier also notes that there are huge governance and justice issues. The Taliban are setting up courts and people are using them because they perceive the Afghan government is ineffective and corrupt. Elections should be a pressure valve, but in Iraq and Afghanistan they are rushed. Security is diminishing, creating a "bunker mentality" in Kabul, alienating the population from the national administration. This fuels insurgency and emboldens the Taliban.

The alliance needs an information campaign, Kilcullen says, to counteract the appearance that the Taliban is taking over parts of the nation. Otherwise, tribal leaders may lose patience with the international forces and take to arms again and recommence the north-south civil war.

For Kilcullen, another area of concern is the Afghan National Police, who are imitating the Afghan National Army and

conducting operations that are military in nature. The gap between the absent constabulary services and military security is being filled by the Taliban. Afghanistan needs community policing that deals from a position of strength over the Taliban.

Both Kilcullen and Thier feel that Afghan police forces need to carry out standard police functions in a counter-insurgency environment. The ANA and ANP must have different objectives and missions. The absence of a credible national police is hampering allied efforts.

It is important now to determine what we are doing well, what needs improvement, and what measures we should abandon. Priorities undoubtedly include holding the population centres, securing the areas between them, and helping reform the governance structure.

International terrorism is still a major issue, Thier says. It would be a blow to NATO's credibility if the Alliance leaves Afghanistan without a clear victory. This is particularly necessary with a resurgent Russia. In his estimation, we have perhaps until 2011 to make a marked difference in Afghanistan, or the populations of troop-contributing nations, of Russia, and the newly-emerging democracies of Europe may begin to see NATO as irrelevant.

Kilcullen is much more pessimistic, and says that the August federal election has to be effective and result in the rapid installation of an effective federal government. There needs to be more international troops in Afghanistan and he believes the Afghan National Army needs to be out front. If the international community is not successful in Afghanistan, it will quickly return to Taliban control. **R**

Tim Dunne is a recently-retired 35-year member of the Canadian Forces.

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