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by
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INTRODUCTION

In 1997, General Charles C. Krulak, the Commandant of the US Marine Corps created the concept of a Three Block War to describe what he envisioned as the typical twenty-first-century battlefield:

It will be an asymmetrical battlefield. Much like the Germanic tribes [who destroyed Varus's legions in 9 A.D.], our enemies will not allow us to fight the Son of Desert Storm, but will try to draw us into the stepchild of Chechnya. In one moment in time, our service members will be feeding and clothing displaced refugees, providing humanitarian assistance. In the next moment, they will be holding two warring tribes apart – conducting peacekeeping operations – and finally they will be fighting a highly lethal mid-intensity battle – all on the same day, all within three city blocks. It will be what we call the 'three block war.' In this environment, conventional doctrine and organizations may mean very little. It is an environment born of change.¹

This article will argue that, with due allowances for the non-urban nature of most of Afghanistan, the war in Afghanistan is a good example of the Three Block war concept. In order to win there, the Coalition (which includes the Afghan people) will have to succeed on all three blocks. Given the state of Afghan security and reconstruction in January 2002, this article will further argue that the Coalition is making admirable progress in every aspect of the conflict. The recent success of the 9 October 2004 Afghan presidential elections – the first time in 5,000 years that Afghans directly chose their head of state – is but another indicator of progress in the establishment of a better, more democratic Afghanistan.² For ease of reference, throughout this article, I will refer to different aspects or blocks of the Afghan conflict as follows: Block 1) combat, Block 2) peacekeeping and other stabilization activities, and Block 3) humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.³

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While differentiation between the blocks aids understanding of the problems of such wars, the reader is cautioned that conflicts should be viewed holistically. Indeed, inherent in the notion of the Three Block War is the dizzying simultaneity of activities on the various blocks, and the speed with which peaceful blocks can become combat areas, and vice versa. Some actors on blocks described below – such as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the Kabul region – actually move onto and off of all of the blocks, sometimes within the same day. Finally, the notion of a Three Block War should not be taken to mean that any one of the blocks is more important than any other one. To win a Three Block War means by definition that you have provided enough security for reconstruction to take hold and that reconstruction activities have created the political and economic means that allow the indigenous government to gain the legitimacy and stability that it will need to defeat the insurgents.

Character of Modern Three Block Wars

All wars share a basic nature. They are violent contests between hot-blooded human beings; they involve political goals (even if some of them appear to be religious or messianic); and, in varying degrees, they are characterized by uncertainty and friction.⁴ Every era, however, brings variations in the character of war which stem from the political, social, and economic context in which it is set. Today, for Western nations engaged in the global war on terrorism, the following conditions – and this is not an exhaustive list – will complicate and shape the three block wars in which we engage.

First, in contemporary military operations, the armies of developed nations hold civilian populations innocent. No longer, as in World War II, do we consider the population of enemy belligerents to be part of the strategic problem. Today, with precision weapons and amazing sensors, we are able to fight corrupt regimes or terrorists and, at the same time, attempt to protect the indigenous population. Warfare is not bloodless, but it is much safer for civilians than it was even two decades ago.

Our opponents of course, do not share this sensibility. In fact, our sensitivity toward civilian casualties can be used against us in many ways that range from hiding weapons in schools and hospitals to deliberately targeting civilians or aid workers. We want to avoid bloodshed, and our opponents in Afghanistan and Iraq will revel in it on every block.

Second, in its last six military operations, the United States has only entered into conflicts in areas that were undergoing a humanitarian crisis. In some cases, like Kosovo, the humanitarian crisis became the immediate cause of the war. In other cases, like Afghanistan, it was an integral part of the situation and the backdrop for a major counter-terrorist operation. Planning for operations in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq blended political, military, and humanitarian factors. We could not “win” these conflicts and “lose”

the humanitarian crisis, nor could we look on the conflict and the humanitarian crisis as amenable to a sequential solution.

The locale of recent operations forced soldiers and aid workers to plow the same ground. This was necessary but not always comfortable for aid workers, who desire an independent sphere of action and tend to reject aid efforts that are tied to political or military objectives. The peacekeeping and humanitarian blocks – Blocks 2 and 3 – are crowded ones and planners of every variety will have to grapple with that fact.

Third, in Afghanistan and Iraq, unlike in Bosnia and Kosovo, there was no discrete, post-conflict phase. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, an apparent operational victory partly obscured the fact that enemy combatants were not decisively defeated. In both cases, the enemy had not only the means but also the will to continue to resist. Accordingly, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, war “A” was followed by war “B,” which, in turn, was complicated by the need to conduct simultaneous stabilization and reconstruction operations, whose success became a requirement for strategic victory.

Fourth, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, after a few months, the insurgents – who lack any economic development program of their own – decided that they had to stop reconstruction in order to defeat the coalition forces and force their retreat from Afghanistan. To do this, they would also target or discredit the people who have worked with the coalition. At first, the insurgents tried to win by striking the coalition’s armed forces. They soon realized that this was dangerous and not producing the desired effect. Attack a soldier, and the next day you might meet 100 of his closest friends. Attack an aid worker, however, and you will get better results. The next day you may find them folding their tents, taking the benefits of government sponsored reconstruction programs with them.

While I believe that these tactics are ultimately self-defeating, terrorism directed against reconstruction has paid off in the short run for the insurgents. They have forced some NGOs and the UN to curtail part of its program in Afghanistan and much of it in Iraq. The pressure on Iraqis working with the Coalition, especially police officers, is fierce and deadly.

Fifth, for the soldier, the media today has gone from being frequently intrusive to being omni-present. All three blocks of contemporary war are under the eye of the media. In this respect, conflicts such as the one in Afghanistan and Iraq are far more complex for the combatants than the small wars of the early twentieth century. Nothing in the many years of US experience with small wars duplicates the effects of having CNN (MSNBC, BBC, Star, CBC, etc.) in your face every hour of every day.⁵

Today, the ugly realities of low-intensity conflict continuously stream into the living rooms of the Western public. The sense of gain or loss, or the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of operations is magnified greatly by the work of ded-

icated, relentless journalists, whose editors and producers freely admit that “if it bleeds, it leads.” The combat action on Block 1, where the most blood is shed, will dominate the coverage, creating the perception in some cases that the good work on Blocks 2 (peacekeeping) and 3 (humanitarian assistance/reconstruction) does not even exist. Negative media coverage wears down the public and tests the patience of Western audiences, making us wonder – like the attentive public in the Jack Nicholson-Tom Cruise movie, *A Few Good Men* – whether we can handle the truth about the character of today’s Three Block Wars.⁶

Finally, entangled today as the United States is in two simultaneous Three Block Wars, there is one central fact of life: armed conflict is a thing for soldiers, but wars involve entire governments and societies. The military can’t operate on Blocks 2 and 3 without help from civilians. As we navigate any Three Block War, we will find soldiers, diplomats, aid specialists, NGOs, and local government workers throughout the area in question, but especially on some parts of Block 2 and all of Block 3, where civilians will ultimately come to hold sway, and soldiers should take a back seat.

The Three Block War in Afghanistan

Afghans often compare where they are today with where they were in the early 1970s. This period of time has taken on an image as sort of a golden age in modern Afghan history and is often cited by Afghans as a benchmark for progress in stabilization and reconstruction.⁷ In the early 1970s, Afghanistan was a constitutional monarchy with a problematical but functioning parliament. It was a poor but developing country, and received aid from many nations. While there was a great socio-economic city-country divide in Afghanistan, there was law and order nationwide. The peoples of this multiethnic state – where Pashtuns dominate but are outnumbered by the combined numbers of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, etc. – were known to be both friendly and combative, with a well-deserved reputation for xenophobia. Among Muslims in the 1970s, the mainly Sunni Afghans were considered to be only mildly religious. Family, tribe, and honor were also vital concerns for Afghans on nearly every issue.

In general, Afghanistan was neither threatening to, nor threatened by its neighbors. It had a well-developed, draft-based Army and National Police Force, both of which were supported by Moscow. Afghanistan tried to balance its relations with both superpowers, but Moscow was much more interested than distant Washington was. Were they not subverted by Moscow and its willing accomplices, however, the Afghan government would have maintained a balance between the superpowers. Among all things, Afghans prized independence from foreign domination.

This “golden age” ended in 1973. Angered by lack of progress and from having been shunted aside by his cousin, King Zahir Shah, Prince Mohammad

Daoud, toppled the monarchy and took control of the government. After the Daoud coup, Kabul moved closer to Moscow in every area of concern. When Daoud, incorrectly dubbed the “Red Prince,” became concerned for his nation’s independence and tried to move away from Moscow, Afghan socialists, who were numerous in the Soviet-trained Army, struck. In April 1978 they took control of the government and killed Daoud and members of his family. The regime of the so-called “People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan” quickly became a flat-footed, ideologically driven disaster.

Less than two years later, amidst strife and confusion, the Soviet Union invaded to restore order and maintain its position of influence there. Millions of Afghans fled, moving primarily to Pakistan, Iran, India, the United States, and Western Europe. Nearly a decade later, the USSR, now under Gorbachev, was forced to withdraw its forces in what most analysts saw as a great defeat for the then failing superpower. The civil war among Afghans that followed the defeat of the Soviet Union added tragedy to great misfortune. The Afghan people suffered more than 23 years of highly destructive, continuous war.

In 1996, the United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Index – which looks at economic development from the perspective of population welfare – rated Afghanistan as 169 out of 174 countries that they were able to rate.⁸ It appeared that Afghanistan had hit the bottom of the global barrel, but things continued to get worse. What followed was: four years of drought, the disastrous rule of the radical Islamist Taliban, and a renewal of the civil war, this time with *al-Qaeda* money, assets, and training. This helped the black-turbaned Taliban fanatics to push the remaining resistance forces into a few disconnected pockets, the largest of which was in northeast Afghanistan.

In all, by late 2001, when the United States and its coalition partners reengaged, Afghanistan was a failed state, destroyed and deep in the clutches of a terrorist movement, some of whose Arab members received their start as *mujahidin* fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Much of Afghanistan’s educated and professional elite had fled. Its people were in danger of starving. The economy, educational establishment, and governmental institutions had almost ceased to function. Its rulers, the Taliban – an illegitimate offspring of Pakistani intelligence services – were among the most ignorant, cruel, sadistic, misogynistic, and inefficient tyrants in all of history. Much of Kabul and other cities had been destroyed during the civil war, and Afghanistan had become the most landmine-infested country in the world. This is the baseline from which we must measure progress in the Three Block War in Afghanistan.

Block 1: Military Operations

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September, the US and its coalition partners entered Afghanistan to destroy the

Taliban regime, kill or capture *al-Qaeda* elements, provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, and, later, help create a stable, more democratic Afghanistan that was neither threatened by nor threatening to its neighbors.

The story of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM military operations in fall of 2001 has already been told and will not be addressed in detail here.⁹ Suffice to say that US and allied Special Forces, and a few battalions of Coalition marines and soldiers – all supported by highly effective coalition air power – helped Tajik and Pashtun resistance elements to overthrow the Taliban government and oust the remnants of *al-Qaeda*. A few thousand Taliban or *al-Qaeda* forces were captured and later jailed in Afghanistan, with a few hundred of them later forming the original detainee population under US custody at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Unfortunately, in major battles fought in December 2001 and later in March 2002, some of the senior elements of *al-Qaeda* and hundreds of their fighters escaped into border areas of Pakistan. Today, although more than 75 percent of the original leadership of al-Qaeda and at least that much of the Taliban has been killed or captured, small-scale fighting continues at near record levels of frequency in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan.

Today, the Coalition has nearly 20,000 US and allied troops (five nations have contributed to OEF, 12 more have contributed to both OEF and ISAF), as well as 13,000 centrally-trained, Afghan National Army (ANA) troops, currently deployed in 16 provinces. Most ANA battalions are light infantry, but the ANA has mechanized infantry and armor units based near Kabul. Deployed ANA forces have attached US or allied advisors with them, and by most reports are doing exceptionally well on military tasks. The Afghan people also see the ANA as an important and valued national symbol.

Coalition forces are opposed by a few thousand Taliban, *al-Qaeda*, and *Hizbi Islami Gulbuddin* (HIG) insurgents, who operate, usually in penny packets, mostly in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. Enemy activity, unsuccessfully designed to disrupt or delay the Presidential election of 9 October, is currently at near record levels.

Coalition forces are divided into three regional commands (Northwestern, centered on Herat; Southern, centered on Kandahar; and Eastern, centered on Kabul) and one area of operations in the more peaceful northeast, under command of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, and centered on Konduz and Mazar-e-Sharif. In each of the three commands, all of which answer to the Commander of Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan (CFC-A), LTG David Barno, one officer oversees all the maneuver units, as well as the provincial reconstruction teams, which will be discussed below. This recent change allows units to form habitual relationships with local Afghan officials and to improve their knowledge of the terrain and the provinces under their surveillance.

Major Block 1 successes include these improvements in command and control, many successful counter-terrorism operations, and the development of the multi-ethnic, Afghan National Army, which will soon begin training simultaneously five new battalions at a time.

Significant problems remain. Despite an upsurge in Pakistani assistance to the Coalition, enemy forces have covert secure sanctuary areas both in Pakistan and to a lesser extent in eastern and southern Afghanistan. Monetary and material support to the enemy appears to be sufficient for their needs. Enemy efforts to thwart economic reconstruction and to sow fear among aid workers are having significant effects.¹⁰

Block 2: Peacekeeping and Stabilization Activities

The end of the war and the subsequent Bonn Conference left Afghanistan with virtually no national police force or national army. While there was a need for a nationwide peacekeeping force, there was little international support for it. The United States – not wanting to create another large troop commitment for itself or to be perceived as an occupying power – as well as the administration of Hamid Karzai pinned their security hopes on the rapid development of a new Afghan National Army and police force.

With the blessing of the United Nations, the United Kingdom lead the way in putting together the ISAF for the all-important Kabul region, leaving the remainder of the country to be secured by local militia, most of which came under local corps commanders and governors who were approved by the center. After a few six-month, *ad hoc* iterations of various commanders (UK, Canada, Turkey, and Germany) and units, ISAF in 2004 came under NATO. Currently, 36 nations and over 8,000 troops are participating in the force. ISAF's original mission was to provide security in the 250 square kilometers (km) around Kabul. It does this mainly by patrolling, but ISAF has also been useful in civil-military operations and in training Afghan troops. The successive commanders of ISAF have also been valued security advisors to the United Nations mission and the Karzai government.

While ISAF has been effective, it needs to improve efficiency. In a typical deployment, with pressing needs for national logistics and intelligence, only half of ISAF is in the NATO-commanded troop brigade. In total, only 20 percent of ISAF's total strength is available for patrol duties on any given day.

In summer 2002, faced with a call for more peacekeepers but a continuing international reluctance to provide them, the Coalition military authorities developed a plan for creating regional centers to promote security and reconstruction.¹¹ In words common at the time, this was an attempt to expand the ISAF effect without expanding ISAF itself.

These teams – at the personal insistence of President Karzai – came to be known as Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). The first of what is now 19 PRTs appeared in Gardez in April 2003. Generally built around a 50 to a 100-man military element, the PRTs also have civilian diplomatic, assistance, and in some places, agriculture and police experts. In many PRTs, an Afghan police general officer or colonel is present to help local police. Some PRTs also have adjacent facilities to host assigned ANA or Coalition combat units that may be permanently or temporarily posted to the area.

While each PRT is adapted to its own area of responsibility, they have three generic missions: extending the reach of the national government, enhancing security, and helping to facilitate reconstruction. Local adaptation is, however, the key to PRT success. In areas of least security, the PRTs will focus on broadening security and may have very active USAID (US Agency for International Development) or Civil Affairs-directed reconstruction programs. In areas of greater security, PRTs may leave humanitarian assistance and reconstruction activities entirely to local officials, NGOs, and UN agencies. The PRTs have generally not been involved in police training, but they have been helpful to local police and added to the climate of security that has grown up around regional police training centers. The UK PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif has also been cited for its excellent work in dampening the factional fighting that has dominated local politics in the northeastern part of Afghanistan. Similarly, the US PRT in Herat was instrumental in March 2004 in dampening factional fighting that resulted from the killing of an Afghan minister, the son of the then-regional governor, Ismail Khan.

In 2004, NATO and ISAF took over PRT operations in much of the north of Afghanistan. Today, there are 14 Coalition (also called OEF) PRTs – 13 led by the USA, one led by New Zealand – and five NATO ISAF PRTs, two of which are led by the UK, two by the Germans, and one by the Netherlands.

Many NATO officials had ambitions to take over all the PRTs nationwide, region-by-region, and ultimately to assume command of all Block 1 and Block 2 operations in Afghanistan. NATO's slow progress, however, in standing up the PRTs in a single region and its slowness in filling ISAF-Kabul troop and helicopter commitments suggest a lack of a sense of urgency on the part of some and over-commitment on the part of others. A NATO takeover of all of the PRTs is years away, if it will ever happen at all.

ISAF and the PRTs have generally been successful. They have won over the Afghan government, the United Nations mission, and many of the local people in the areas where they operate. Ironically, as Coalition and NATO forces moved into Afghanistan's provinces by way of the PRTs, many of the same NGOs who wanted a greater military presence nationwide found the PRTs to be not quite what they had in mind. Some declared that the PRTs were too intrusive on non-military issues, and others saw them as too small and not intrusive

enough on security issues. Many NGOs did not want military personnel participating in reconstruction or humanitarian activities under any circumstances.

The number of peacekeepers in-country – in the cities and the PRTs – remains a key issue. A recent RAND study noted that while there are 20 peacekeepers per thousand people in Kosovo, in early 2003 there were only .18 ISAF peacekeepers per thousand people in Afghanistan.¹² Even if one accounts for Coalition PRT personnel as peacekeepers (1,000 approximately), adjusts the RAND numbers for greater numbers of ISAF soldiers there now (8,000 versus 5,000), and adds in the ANA (13,000), you still have less than 1 peacekeeper per one thousand Afghans. If you add in all OEF troops as quasi-peacekeepers, you still will not reach the level of 2 peacekeepers per thousand Afghans.

Clearly, there are insufficient Western forces to field the 500,000 peacekeepers that would be necessary to bring Afghanistan to the level of Kosovo! In truth, a force in Afghanistan that was three times the size of US forces in Iraq – even if it were feasible – would be excessive and carry with it its own problems.

All this aside, however, it is clear from the logic of this situation, especially when an increase in the threat is factored into the equation, that we need to get the most out of our soldiers there, encourage greater deployments from NATO nations, and accelerate the development of the ANA and the Afghan National Police Force.

Police training and reconstruction proceeded slowly during 2002 and the first half of 2003. Germany is the Coalition's lead nation and at Afghan request has concentrated its efforts on developing police officers and NCOs in three-year and one-year courses. To date, the German system has trained 750 border police and 1,500 supervisory officers. From mid-2003 on, the US has taken the lead in establishing five regional training centers, which have produced over 25,000 Afghan police officers. Today, the most important unmet need is for the development of the Ministry of the Interior and intermediate levels of command from the national through the province and down to the district level. Removing old, untrained, or corrupt policemen is also a problem.

Two other issues in the security field require comment: DDR and Counter-narcotics. DDR (short for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) is finally making progress and 20,000 of 50,000 full-time militia fighters have been demobilized. Over half of the heavy weapons in the militia, and all of the heavy weapons in Kabul militias have been cantoned under the control of the ANA. The UN and the Japanese government have done significant work on this problem, but much remains to be accomplished.

Counter-narcotics policy and operations have both been failures. More poppy is currently in the ground than last year and the Karzai government – aided by the UN and the United Kingdom, the Coalition's lead nation – is not making significant progress in eradication. This is a particularly bad situation for

Europe. For example, British officials remind their audiences of their motivation on this issue: 100 percent of the opium-based products in UK come from Afghanistan. Such a severe problem cannot but damage long-term European support for Afghanistan's reconstruction. Moreover, billions of dollars of drug money distort the economy, encourage lawless behavior, and are fueling Taliban, HIG, and *al-Qaeda* operations. There are no quick fixes that one can recommend to this problem, but it must be solved or it may bring down all of our other efforts in Afghanistan.

On Block 2, the peacekeeping block, the supply of security may have improved but it has not kept up with the demand for higher levels of security for reconstruction. More security is again needed to support other aspects of reconstruction and political development that require free movement nationwide. More peacekeepers more efficiently deployed are in order. Remaining militia units and brigands also pose significant law and order problems for the Afghan people, adding even more importance to the rapid and effective development of the national police.¹³

Block 3: Part One: Humanitarian Assistance and Economic Reconstruction¹⁴

Block 3 activities are the ones that will directly address the most glaring condition of Afghanistan: underdevelopment. Poverty abounds, and over 70 percent of Afghans remain illiterate and infant/child mortality rates remain among the worst in the world.¹⁵ While the original concept of the Three Block War did not concern itself with economic reconstruction, this activity is the logical follow-on to humanitarian assistance. Moreover, soldiers conducting humanitarian assistance and reconstruction activities must also give way to more efficient means of conducting these activities. NGOs and UN agencies are capable of doing more and better work on Block 3 than soldiers are. To add to the complexity, economic reconstruction must be coupled with political development in order to achieve continuity and stability. This clearly is an area where civilian officials and NGOs must lead the way.

There has been much progress in Afghanistan in the area of economic and political reconstruction. Much of that progress is due to dedicated Afghan efforts, good work by the United Nations and other nations, and acceleration of work by, in particular, the United States. Unhappy with slow rates of progress in the past, in 2004, the United States doubled its aid, moved to tighten the ambassador's control over the country team, established a group of in-Embassy senior reconstruction counselors, and set-up in Washington a working level, inter-agency, Integrated Operations Group at the Department of State. To add emphasis to unity of effort, the President's Special Representative, the Hon. Zalmay Khalilzad, was posted to Kabul, where his knowledge of local languages and personalities would help to bring together international efforts.

While a full accounting of economic reconstruction is beyond the scope of this article, the following are some key indicators with an emphasis on the US contribution:

- The Afghan government received nearly 5 billion dollars of multiyear aid from over 65 countries at the Tokyo Conference in January 2002.
- As this aid was being exhausted, the international community pledged 4.5 billion dollars at the Berlin Conference for Afghan fiscal year that began March 2004 and ends March 2005. Pledges for the next three years total 8.2 billion dollars, significantly more than was pledged at Tokyo, and roughly equal to 69 percent of Afghan aid requirements.
- Many major roads have been improved, with the US and Japan completing the Kabul to Kandahar portion of the ring road and beginning (possibly with Saudi help) to work on the Kandahar to Herat portion of the ring road. Thousands of kilometers of secondary roads have also been constructed or repaired by many donors.
- Education has been an important focus of international effort. USAID alone has completed 199 schools, is working on 49 more, and has let contracts for the rehabilitation or construction of over 181 schools. The US has shipped more than 13 million textbooks to Afghanistan and trained over 14,000 teachers.
- Health care has been another area of concentration. The US alone is working on over 185 clinics and has trained over 3,500 healthcare workers.
- Agriculture is making rapid improvements. Wheat production increased 82 percent in 2003. The US has built over 115 market centers in rural areas to help the agricultural sector.¹⁶

In all, the legal Afghan economy grew 30 percent in 2003 and is poised to grow 25 percent in 2004. Experts believe that sustained growth rates of 15 percent are possible over the next few years.¹⁷ The new Afghan currency – swapped out in 2002 by the Afghan government’s finance ministry – is stable. The government has not accumulated any new debt. Over three million Afghan refugees – a significant vote of confidence in progress on all three Blocks – have returned with the great help of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to live in Afghanistan.¹⁸

The biggest threat to economic reconstruction is not the lack of funds, but the actions of the enemy. As noted in earlier sections, the enemy is targeting economic and political reconstruction. Particularly in the south and the east, the Taliban, *al-Qaeda*, and HIG forces attack aid workers and destroy schools, wells, and other economic projects. Some NGOs with long histories of working in Afghanistan – like *Medecins sans Frontieres* – have left after deadly attacks. Many others have curtailed their operations in certain provinces.

Some concerned NGOs have blamed the Coalition for not providing sufficient security. Others saw the ubiquity of the Coalition as the problem. They felt that the insurgents did not see the aid community as neutral, and are now treating aid workers as combatants. Still others realize that the real enemy of the insurgents is effective reconstruction. If reconstruction and democratization succeed, even partly, the insurgents will be defeated. Thus, as noted above, attacking aid workers has become a key part of the insurgent strategy in Afghanistan. There will continue to be many dark alleys connecting the three blocks in Afghanistan's war.

Block 3: Part 2: Political Reconstruction

The Karzai government has made much progress in the area of political development. It has managed the complex international aid effort, established Afghanistan's place in the community of nations, and begun the decades' long process of rebuilding the Afghan ministries. When I first visited Afghanistan in February 2002, many of these ministries did not even have a car, or a telephone, never mind a computer. Some occupied buildings that were not much more than empty shells. Today, many ministries are in the process of modernization and now have expatriate Afghan or other advisors funded by the United States or other nations.

In developing Afghan democracy, the Karzai government held two major, national political meetings in Kabul: an emergency *loya jirga* (grand assembly) to legitimize the Karzai interim government, and a constitutional *loya jirga* in 2003 to approve a democratic constitution, the first since the so-called golden age. On 9 October 2004, only a few months behind the schedule set up at the end of 2001, with great help from the United Nations, Coalition military forces, and the Afghan national police, Afghanistan held its first ever election for head of state, which Karzai won. Parliamentary elections are planned for this year. All of this was done in a land suffering from tremendous poverty and undergoing an increasingly active insurgency.

Even the scourge of warlordism and the rule of the gun is being broken. US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, himself a potent factor in the rebirth of Afghanistan, recently gave this glowing progress report:

Afghans with the support of the international community are breaking the back of warlordism. Customs revenues increasingly flow to the national government, rather than to the pockets of regional strongmen. President Hamid Karzai has appointed new governors and police chiefs in most of the country's provinces. He has removed leaders with private militias from positions of military command or transferred them away from the regions in which their personal networks and bases of power were entrenched . . . The job

is not done, but the days of those who have conducted themselves as warlords are numbered. The warlords know it. The sun is setting on their way of life.¹⁹

As if to underscore Khalilzad's estimate, just within the months leading up to the election, Karzai pushed aside Fahim Khan, the most powerful Tajik warlord and the Minister of Defense, and prevented him from running for Vice President on the Karzai ticket. He also removed the most powerful regional leader and reputed tyrant, Ismail Khan, from his post as governor of Herat.²⁰

Progress on the political part of Block 3 will remain an uphill battle. To succeed, Karzai must continue to: receive international support, work against the warlords, continue to demobilize the militias, modernize his ministries, prepare for parliamentary elections, and, most importantly, develop a political party that will ensure his power can be wielded effectively within a democratic parliament. Much depends on the continued health and well-being of Karzai and his key ministers, especially the finance minister, Ashraf Ghani, and the Interior Minister, Ali Jalali. Sadly, the assassination of key moderate leaders by terrorists or domestic rivals remains a problem for which contingency plans must be drafted.

What is to be done?

One is tempted to answer this question with a single phrase: "more of the same, but faster and better." In truth there is a long list of programs and innovations on each of the Three Blocks that must be continued. The following suggestions are only some of the most important action items that are on President Karzai's and the Coalition's agenda.

On Block 1, the Coalition must continue to integrate the Afghan Army into operations. At the same time, the military must be developed as an institution. Dozens of battalions do not an army make. The transport corps (air and ground), command and control elements, supporting logistical units, and a comprehensive military school system all need to be developed, as does the ministerial and general staffs. It is difficult to forego "tooth for tail," but that is just what the Afghan National Army will ultimately have to do to become a more coherent, independent, self-sustaining force. Many analysts believe that the planned 70,000-man ANA will be unsupportable for the Afghan authorities in the future.

In combat operations, the Coalition must continue to deepen its cooperation with Pakistan to deal with the sanctuaries where the rump of the Taliban, *al-Qaeda*, and the HIG are hiding. At the same time, Pakistan must continue to receive economic aid so that its government and people can see the benefit of cooperating with the Coalition. A key goal of US aid to Pakistan should be to undercut the religious schools that have become hotbeds for pro-terrorist propaganda.

On Block 2, the United States should continue to press NATO to take over more of the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan, including all or most of the PRTs. To date, NATO has not lived up to the modest commitments that it has agreed to. As this article was being written, France and Germany objected to NATO one day taking over the entire mission in Afghanistan, an idea originally proposed by a senior European general officer.²¹ Given this refusal, NATO should instead be encouraged to make an even larger, more accelerated contribution in the peacekeeping field.

On Block 3, institutional development must be the word of the day. Afghan ministries must be modernized and made to stand on their own two feet. On top of the great work done by the UK, the United States, and the UN, this will take more money for advisors, infrastructure, and ministerial support. Similarly, to prepare for parliamentary elections and operations, the Karzai government and its rivals must begin to form political parties – creatures alien to the Afghan experience – that will add coherence to Afghan politics.

In all, the most important thing that we can bring to the table is patience. We in North America live in an age characterized in part by speed, instant feedback, and immediate gratification. By that measure, we are not well postured to succeed in Afghanistan. A recent RAND study concluded that “among controllable factors [in nation building], the most important determinant is the level of effort – measured in time, manpower, and money.”²² North American leaders must communicate to their electorates that after three years we are still in the early stages of a protracted commitment to Afghanistan. We have achieved initial success, but we must be prepared to stay the course for a decade or more, or we will forfeit our investment and watch Afghanistan again become a hostage of instability and international terrorism.

This article began with the prescient words of General Krulak on the Three Block War. One of the reasons that he brought attention to the Three Block War was to alert the US Marine Corps hierarchy that the military had to change its ways to adapt to the changing character of war in the twenty-first century. As Krulak and his many admirers noted, we live in the era of the “strategic corporal,” where young NCOs who must understand the big picture as well as he or she understands battle drill. We have seen time and again in Iraq and Afghanistan that today’s NCO or junior officer may well be writing the headlines in tomorrow morning’s newspaper.

Superb leaders will require superb training and education, but military culture in the West, especially in the United States, must also change. Our best officers and planners should focus not on victory in a single, climactic campaign, but on victory in protracted wars that will require creative combat, peacekeeping, and reconstruction policies. Military planners for the Three Block war will need to understand development, local politics, and speak fluent joint, interagency, and NGO.

As for the rest of the US government, it can expect the Armed Forces to do better, but not to do everything in its two, on-going Three Block wars. The Department of State and the USAID must become more operational and assign its personnel to areas where being in harm's way is the norm and not the exception. This is being done in Afghanistan, but has never been a norm in Iraq. There, many senior commanders were left on their own to run Block 2 and 3 activities. The recent institution of a Department of State Office for Stabilization and Reconstruction is a clear step in bringing greater interagency expertise to Blocks 2 and 3.

Equally important, a great effort will have to be made to imbue today's junior officers and NCOs with practical knowledge of local language, culture, and customs. The US Marines long ago insisted that "every Marine is a rifleman." Today, every NCO and junior officer must also, to some degree, be a foreign area specialist. MG Robert Scales, a combat veteran and a former commandant of the Army War College, has called on future leaders to practice "culture-centric warfare." He noted that:

War is a thinking man's game. A military too acculturated to solving problems with technology alone should begin now to recognize that wars must be fought with intellect. Reflective senior officers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have concluded that great advantage can be achieved by outthinking rather than out-equipping the enemy. They are telling us that wars are won as much by creating alliances, leveraging non-military advantages, reading intentions, building trust, converting opinions, and managing perceptions – all tasks that demand an exceptional ability to understand people, their culture, and their motivation.²³

If we heed General Scales's advice, we will be better prepared for the Three Block Wars to come.

Endnotes

1. General Charles C. Krulak's National Press Club speech can be found in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 15 December 1997, pp. 139-41.
2. Zalmay Khalilzad, "A 5000-Year First," *Wall Street Journal*, 7 October 2004, p. 18.
3. Throughout this article I have taken advantage of my experience from 2001-04 as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations. In that position, I had the privilege of overseeing the Pentagon's role in the security and economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. Seven trips to Afghanistan helped improve my understanding of issues there. The on-the-job assistance of Laura Cooper, Michael McNerney (now at the Marshall Centre), and David des Roches of the policy office in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, as well as their help in preparing this article is very much appreciated.
4. My view of modern war owes much to discussions with my National War College colleagues and to Clausewitz's theory, especially as laid down in Book 1, Chapter 1, and Book 8 of his classic text. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, translated and edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 75-89, 577-617.
5. Even without CNN et al., misbehavior and scandal in past conflicts did cause problems for the military. For one example, see Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. 120-25, for the story of how US war crimes in the Philippines embarrassed the Armed Forces and helped to bring an end to early twentieth-century military operations there. Past problems aside, however, the media's impact today on operations in the all media, all-the-time environment has no precedent.
6. Jack Nicholson starred in *A Few Good Men* (Columbia Pictures and Castle Rock Entertainment, 1992). His character was a tough, well-connected, Marine colonel who, for the sake of discipline, ordered two enlisted men to administer an illegal punishment to an apparent slacker, who died in the process. In Nicholson's concluding oration, he admits guilt, but tells the undisciplined Navy defense counsel, Tom Cruise, that he (and the lax society that Cruise typifies so well) "can't handle the truth" about the ugliness that must sometimes be done to protect democracy and civil society. In the end, the colonel's actions were indefensible and criminal. He does, however, raise an important issue that echoes loudly in the daily media coverage of battles in Iraq and Afghanistan.
7. For a more complete description of this "golden age," see Joseph J. Collins, *The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: A Study in the Use of Force in Soviet Foreign Policy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1986), pp. 17-45.
8. The Human Development index measures development, literacy, and health across the globe. See <http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/indices/> for an introduction to this index and a pathway to the 1996 report. Afghanistan has not been rated since 1996.
9. Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002) provides the best view of wartime decision-making. One of the best guides to war at the tactical and operational level is Stephen Biddle, "Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (March/April 2003), pp. 36-41.
10. For a view of Afghanistan that is as pessimistic ("Opportunities have been lost, goodwill squandered, and lessons of history ignored.") as mine is optimistic, see Kathy Gannon, "Afghanistan Unbound," *Foreign Affairs* 83 (May/June 2004), pp. 35-46.
11. The author was one of the leaders in developing the PRT concept and moving it through the interagency process in Washington, DC. The unclassified data presented here on the PRTs was provided by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 9 October 2004.
12. For a discussion of force-to-population ratios, see James Dobbins, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2003), pp. 135-40.

13. The degree of lawlessness that many Afghans face from brigands and renegade militias is not captured well in US internal security estimates which are focussed on counter-terrorism and have no reliable supply of civil crime data. For one study of this serious problem, see "'Killing You is a Very Easy Thing for Us:' Human Rights Abuses in Southeast Afghanistan," *Human Rights Watch* 15 (July 2003).
14. Unless otherwise noted, data used for the discussion of Block 3 comes from an unclassified, unpublished US government publication, entitled *The New Afghanistan*, prepared by Rob Chamberlain of the US government's Afghanistan Inter-Agency Operations Group, dated September 2004.
15. This fact comes from the unpublished statement of Hon. Andrew Natsios, Administrator, US Agency for International Development, prepared for testimony before the House International Relations Committee, 29 September 2004, p. 3.
16. Natsios statement, pp. 7-8.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
18. Khalilzad, "A 5000-Year First," p. 18.
19. *Ibid.*
20. For a contrary view, again see Gannon, "Afghanistan Unbound," pp. 35-46.
21. Mark John and Will Dunham, "France, Germany Reject U.S. Plan for Afghanistan," Reuters, 10-13-04 (1423 hours).
22. James Dobbins, et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building*, p. 165.
23. Robert Scales, "Culture-Centric Warfare," *Proceedings*, September 2004.