*Conducting Counterinsurgency in Ethnically Fractured Environments: Strong Ethnic Identity Formation and its Consequences for the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan[[1]](#footnote-1)*

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*Introduction*

Theories on the best practices of counterinsurgency have been on the ascendant in recent years. After the term was finally allowed to emerge from the Vietnam-era vault in which it had been locked, a renewed interest in counterinsurgency theory has emerged amongst practitioners and scholars alike. The 2007 publication of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency field manual was the first major doctrinal work on irregular warfare from the military in several decades. Inside this work, the now popular (and somewhat clichéd) ideas of “winning hearts and minds” and “protecting the population” have been enshrined. It is widely believed that the ideas put forth in this work and the institutional shift that followed from the movement that produced it helped turn the tides of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The war in Iraq has ended for U.S. forces- for the time being, Iraq has been able to hold itself together and repress whatever elements of the insurgency that are left there. The war in Afghanistan, however, rages on. There are a multitude of factors that differentiate the Afghan war from Iraq. The terrain, the levels of urbanization, and many others are important factors that affect how the war is fought. One of these factors, ethnicity- or, in the case of Afghanistan, high levels of ethnic fracturing- has been of posing particular problems to the counterinsurgency campaign.

The main argument here is that the presence/formation of strong ethnic identities in an insurgency inherently makes the insurgency more difficult to fight. To illustrate this, the case of Afghanistan is examined. In this highly ethnically fractured environment, strong ethnic identities have formed, making the job of counterinsurgent forces much more difficult when compared to counterinsurgency operations in an ethnically homogenous area. Without official doctrine on how to handle these difficulties inherent to an ethnically-fractured insurgencies, counterinsurgency becomes even more difficult. The following paper will examine some of the new issues that strong ethnic identity formation can add to an insurgency, as well as examine the efficacy of some tactics that counterinsurgent forces have used to counter strong ethnic identity formation in Afghanistan.

*Afghanistan’s Ethnic Make-up*

No discussion of Afghanistan’s ethnic make-up can begin without first defining what is meant by the term “ethnicity.” Strauch defines ethnicity as “distinctions of ‘we’ from ‘they’ that may generally be considered to be irreducible givens… but it is context that determines whether and to what extent those distinctions are socially or psychologically significant.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Ethnicities can be determined in a variety of ways, such as along religious lines (such as Iraq’s *Sunni* and *Shi’a* religious groups)[[3]](#footnote-3), along linguistic lines[[4]](#footnote-4), or racial lines. Varshney adds that Indian scholars have for many years distinguished between “communal” and “ethnic” groups. “Communal” groups are reserved for religious groupings, whereas “ethnic” is used for racial and linguistic groups.[[5]](#footnote-5) Horowitz argues that ethnicity is largely defined by the groups themselves, whether it be along linguistic, racial, religious, or other lines.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Ethnic Power Relations project (written by Wimmer, Cederman, and Min), ethnicity is defined as

… a subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and shared culture. Different markers may be used to indicate such shared ancestry and culture: common language, similar phenotypical features, adherence to the same faith, and so on. Our definition of ethnicity thus includes ethnolinguistic, ethnosomatic (or “racial”), and ethnoreligious groups, but not tribes and clans that conceive of ancestry in genealogical terms, nor regions that do not define commonality on the basis of shared ancestry.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The definition put forward by Wimmer, Cederman, and Min (of the Ethnic Power Relations project) identifies the Baloch, Brahui, Hazaras, Nuristanis, Pashai, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks as politically important in Afghanistan as of 2005 (the most recent data available). The ethnic composition of Afghanistan (from largest to smallest) is as follows: Pashtun: 41%, Tajik: 25%, Hazaras: 11%, Uzbeks: 8%, Baloch: 2%, Turkmen: 1.5%, Nuristani: .7%, Pashai: .5%, and Brahui: .1%.

*Ethnicizing an Insurgency*

The picture of the insurgency in Afghanistan has changed over the last few years. The insurgency post-2001 had been generally confined to the Pashtun-dominated south and east of Afghanistan. In early 2009, however, the insurgents were able to push into areas, especially in northern Afghanistan, that were regarded previously as immune to Taliban influence.[[8]](#footnote-8) This renewed Taliban insurgency, referred to at times as the “neo-Taliban,” presents the Coalition with a new brand of enemy to fight. The neo-Taliban is comprised of several separate groups with differing ideologies. Some of them are more Pashtun-nationalist in their ideology, while others are more closely aligned to an al-Qaeda brand of jihadi Islamic fundamentalism. The one thing that does band these groups together is trying to overthrow the new post-Taliban regime.[[9]](#footnote-9) This group has even begun recruiting from groups beyond its traditional Pashtun base utilizing an ideological message to draw from ethnic groups that have traditionally resisted Taliban rule, including Tajiks, Turkmen, and Uzbeks in the country’s north.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Alongside the neo-Taliban insurgency, there is also a great deal of inter-ethnic conflict amongst Afghan’s different groups, particularly between Pashtuns and Hazaras[[11]](#footnote-11); Tajiks are common targets as well. Amongst this ever more complex ethnic picture, it seems that Coalition forces are having trouble quelling inter-ethnic violence, as well as preventing inclusion of more ethnic groups in the insurgency. The inter-ethnic picture within Afghanistan began to complicate with the *mujahidin* rebellion against the Soviets. Conflict has plagued the country since, and ethnic identities have become increasingly important as time has progressed.[[12]](#footnote-12)As Cheterian explains, when power structures are removed, ethnic identities can prove to be powerful mobilizing factors.[[13]](#footnote-13) Ethnicity is a strong mobilizing factor for Afghans in the face of constant conflict and in the absence of a strong state presence.

*Countering an Ethnic Insurgency*

An investigation into the background of ethnic civil war and insurgency is necessary before moving forward. Reynal-Querol investigates some of the broader causes of ethnic civil war and finds that one of the most important precursors for ethnic civil war is “religious polarization.” She finds that this polarization is more likely to cause an outbreak in civil violence than are linguistic differences (this makes the argument that religion could be a stronger former of “ethnic identity” than language).[[14]](#footnote-14) Jenne finds that “ethnic reintegration” is a difficult process in post-conflict societies. If one ethnic group is able to take control of communal resources and other ethnic minorities are not assisted, then chances for a successful reintegration become slim**.**[[15]](#footnote-15) Mason, et al. find that violence is more likely to recur in the aftermath of an ethnic civil war than a non-ethnic civil war.[[16]](#footnote-16) Jakobsen and Soysa conclude that in instances of civil war outbreak, ethnic identity allows groups mobilize easier, but groups are more motivated by opportunity than perceived grievances against them.[[17]](#footnote-17) Metternich finds that ethnic leaders who belong to small minorities have higher incentives to rebel when outside forces intervene in ethnic civil wars. He finds that when there are strong ethnic leaders fighting against an external democratizing power, the conflict is likely to last longer.[[18]](#footnote-18) Wimmer asserts that states that lack a dominant social group run the risk of devolving into conflict. This conflict can turn into an “ethno-nationalist” civil war, and much of the existing social and political structure will be destroyed in the ensuing conflict.[[19]](#footnote-19) Lyall shows in his article that members of the same ethnicity prove to be far more effective in conducting counterinsurgency operations than an outside, alien force is.[[20]](#footnote-20) Kalyvas argues that not only is it possible to convince ethnic rebels to defect from rebel organizations, but it may be easier to convince defections if governmental forces offer sufficient incentive to defect.[[21]](#footnote-21)

The sources highlighted in this brief overview draw attention to some of the specific problems that face Coalition forces in performing counterinsurgency operations in ethnically fractured environments. It also points out areas where Coalition forces may not have responded well to the particular environment of Afghanistan, and in doing so have allowed the insurgency in Afghanistan to continue to flourish. From these sources, a set of parameters can be distilled to measure counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. Drawing from these sources, we can see whether counterinsurgency operations have been designed to combat religious polarization in Afghanistan (religion, according to the Ethnic Power Relations project cited before, can serve as an architect of ethnicity), whether counterinsurgency operations have been successful at reintegrating insurgent ethnic groups into the country’s political and social structure (militias, refugees, and insurgents), whether Coalition forces have been successful in using “coethnics” as a counterinsurgents, rather than deploying alien ethnic forces into insurgent areas, and whether Coalition counterinsurgency operations are working to encourage rebellious ethnic groups to defect from the insurgency.

Both doctrine in theory and practice will be analyzed in this paper. The “theory” will be taken largely from the U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. It should also be note that the theory put forward from this source is somewhat general in nature (as the manual itself states: “This manual takes a general approach to counterinsurgency operations. The Army and Marine Corps realize that every insurgency is contextual and presents its own set of challenges.”[[22]](#footnote-22)) The next sections will examine the evidence in an attempt to discern whether Coalition forces have been attempting to put into practice the theory of the Counterinsurgency Field Manual, and to what effect these tactics have had on the ground.

-*Religious Identity and Counterinsurgency Operations*

The original Taliban movement was comprised mainly of Pashtuns, and a large portion of their governing principles had been derived from *pashtunwali* (the Pashtun rules of behavior). This movement continued an ongoing Pashtun dominance of the country of Afghanistan, excluding members of most other ethnic groups from power.[[23]](#footnote-23) With the rise of the neo-Taliban, however, the Afghan insurgency has been gaining followers across ethnic lines. Whereas 10 years ago, a Tajik, for example, could hardly be found within Taliban ranks, now, ethnic minorities are being appointed as military commanders and Taliban provincial governors.[[24]](#footnote-24) What has led the Taliban to reach out beyond their traditional Pashtun base for recruitment, and why have ethnic minorities in Afghanistan begun to join a movement that was once very antagonistic towards them? One of the important steps that has led to this is the influx of Islamic clergy from Pakistan who are sympathetic to the Taliban’s aims. These imams and mullahs, as well as other Islamic religious figures, have increasingly used radicalized religious rhetoric (especially preaching concerning *jihad*).[[25]](#footnote-25) Whether or not the Taliban religious appeals are true, this use of religious rhetoric has served as a method for the Taliban to stretch beyond their traditional Pashtun-base. These appeals have even appealed to Pashtuns who had not previously been active in the insurgency. This usage of religious rhetoric has allowed the neo-Taliban insurgency to break down old ethnic boundaries and make once-stable areas of Afghanistan new fronts in the counterinsurgency effort. As stated in the literature review, religion can help form and shape ethnic identities. The use of religion here allows the Taliban to foment a sort of “us vs. them” identity- pitting pious Muslims against unbelieving outsiders.

The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual provides some guidance on how the functions of religion in an insurgency. The manual states that “religious groups may be subsets of larger ethnic groups.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The manual also argues that religious organizations (among other types of organizations) can “control, direct, restrain, or regulate the local populace.”[[27]](#footnote-27) It also states that “[i]deology and religion are means of persuasion, especially for the elites and leadership.”[[28]](#footnote-28) It also states that:

Exploited or repressed social groups—be they entire classes, ethnic or religious groups, or small elites—may support larger causes in reaction to their own narrower grievances. Economic inequities can nurture revolutionary unrest. So can real or perceived racial or ethnic persecution. For example, Islamic extremists use perceived threats to their religion by outsiders to mobilize support for their insurgency and justify terrorist tactics.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The preceding excerpts from the counterinsurgency manual show that the crafters of the new counterinsurgency strategy understood both the importance of religion and the role that religion can play in mobilizing an insurgency. The manual does not give much guidance, however, as to how counterinsurgents should either use local religious beliefs to the benefit of counterinsurgent forces or how to counter the ways insurgent forces use religion to reinforce their own identities. The most the manual has to state is in section 3-48:

Commanders should give the belief system of insurgents and other groups in the [area of operations] careful attention. An insurgency may frame its objectives in terms of a belief system or may use a belief system to mobilize and recruit followers. Differences between the insurgents’ and civilian groups’ belief systems provide opportunities for counterinsurgents to separate the insurgents from the population. If local individuals are members of more than one group, there [*sic*] maybe contradictions in their belief systems that can be exploited.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The manual also states that “U.S. forces must make clear that they do not intend to undermine or change the local religion or traditions. However, Soldiers and Marines have a mission to reduce the effects of dysfunctional social practices that affect the ability to conduct effective security operations.”[[31]](#footnote-31) The manual states the importance of understanding cultural factors as they relate to operational factors and how local populations will view and react to insurgent and counterinsurgent forces several times.[[32]](#footnote-32) These sections do not deal with tactical approaches to countering insurgent forces that recruit using religion.

Coalition forces have tried to take steps to counter this cross-ethnic recruitment effort by the neo-Taliban. There have been significant amounts of funding directed towards at-risk Tajik and Uzbek communities in northern Afghanistan, which seems to be having some positive effects.[[33]](#footnote-33) Coalition forces have also deployed troops (both ISAF [International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan] forces and ANA troops) to areas that show evidence of new Taliban recruitment. These troop deployments, however, have not stopped recruits from these areas joining the Taliban ranks.[[34]](#footnote-34) On the ground, there does appear to be some small scale information operations (IO) directed at countering the neo-Taliban religious rhetoric. In October 2009, the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade began to implement a program that sought to engage local (moderate) religious figures to counter the religious polemics of the Taliban.[[35]](#footnote-35) This, however, was the only direct evidence found of an attempt by Coalition forces to counter the religious rhetoric of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and this was found in the south of Afghanistan, not in the at-risk ethnic communities in the north.

The neo-Taliban has been able to recruit among northern Afghans using religious rhetoric because “security, governance, and development” efforts have been neglected there.[[36]](#footnote-36) Coalition forces seem to have paid relatively little attention to countering the religious rhetoric employed by the Taliban. Coalition forces stand to gain on several fronts by employing a counter-rhetoric to the Taliban. Among the benefits would be increased legitimacy from the Afghan people, shutting down Taliban recruitment avenues, and discrediting the Taliban movement in the eyes of the Afghan populace. The Counterinsurgency Field Manual demonstrates that the theoretical underpinnings for religious information operations exist, even though there was little guidance within about how exactly to conduct these operations. On the ground, it does not appear that Coalition forces are seriously interested in countering the Taliban’s religious rhetoric. Unfortunately for counterinsurgency operations, it appears that Coalition forces are far from developing an effective program of countering the Taliban in this area.

*-Reintegration of Ethnic Groups into Afghan Society*

Another important step that must be taken by counterinsurgency forces in Afghanistan is the reintegration of militias, insurgents, and refugees back into the national culture of Afghanistan. The Counterinsurgency Field Manual considers this task in several ways. In section 6-54, the manual states that:

As a conflict ends, some security forces may need to be disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated into civil society. To avoid producing a pool of recruits for the insurgency, the host nation should establish programs to keep large numbers of demobilized security force members from becoming immediately unemployed. Civil service departments should provide a hiring preference to people completing an honorable term of service. Government-financed education programs for demobilized members are another possibility.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Sections 8-40 and 8-41 of the manual cover the importance of providing transportation, security, and other basic logistical issues to protect “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) from insurgent violence and to keep insurgent groups from recruiting from refugees.[[38]](#footnote-38) While sparsely covered in the manual, the authors show that counterinsurgency strategy should include at least some efforts to reintegrate militias and provide security for refugee security.

On the ground, ISAF and Coalition forces appear to have given the task of demobilizing militias and reintegrating insurgents, militias, and refugees back into Afghan society serious effort. ISAF and the Afghan government sponsors the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, which “aims to bring former fighters who renounce violence, break ties with terrorists, and agree to abide by the Afghan Constitution peacefully back into their communities.” The program claims to have, as of June 2011, 1700 fighters have joined the APRP, and it was working to bring 2000 more fighters into the fold. All said, the program has received $141 million for operations.[[39]](#footnote-39) Prior to the ARAP, Coalition forces had sponsored several other programs aimed at demobilizing militias and reintegrating insurgents. These included the Disarmament, Disbandment, and Reintegration program (aimed at reintegrating Afghan soldiers back into civilian society) and the Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (aimed at reintegrating all other armed groups who did not surrender to the Afghan Government). These programs were largely unsuccessful, however.[[40]](#footnote-40)

These efforts, while well-intentioned, have largely failed to produce major-reintegration success. If the ARAP figures are accurate, the program has only successfully reintegrated 7% of the neo-Taliban fighters in Afghanistan (2000 fighters out of a total 30,000 fighters[[41]](#footnote-41)). A diplomatic dispatch from Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry, leaked by the organization Wikileaks, expressed many concerns about the efficacy of these reintegration projects.[[42]](#footnote-42) These reintegration programs offer little security or protection to insurgents looking to reintegrate, and the push for reintegration seems to be moving forward before the program has been worked fully into the Afghan political schema. [[43]](#footnote-43) No data could be found on Coalition or ISAF projects to help IDPs and refugees. Many other non-governmental and civilian agencies exist to help with these groups, but no data could be found on civil-military collaboration for IDPs, or military security assistance to civilian agencies. In sum, while Coalition and ISAF forces seem to understand the importance of reintegration to overall counterinsurgency strategy, there seems to be little prerequisite know-how to perform this task successfully.

-*The Use of “Coethnics” as Counterinsurgents*

Another strategy that some authors have suggested can help ease ethnic tensions in counterinsurgency is the use of “coethnics” (members of the same ethnicity) as security forces. Cassidy states that the use of coethnic forces allows counterinsurgent forces larger forces available to conduct operations, greater knowledge of local operational conditions, and greater “actionable intelligence” regarding insurgent groups and their infrastructures.[[44]](#footnote-44) Utilizing coethnics to act as counterinsurgent forces could also help in areas like Afghanistan by limiting the feeling of alienation in the local population when troops of a “foreign” ethnicity are deployed to their area.

The Counterinsurgency Field Manual devotes little space to this subject. It is noted in section 5-70 that one of the beneficial steps a commander can take when in a new area of operations (AO) is to train an “indigenous local security force.”[[45]](#footnote-45) As far as completing this task, the manual mentions that U.S. forces should be working with local forces closely by “mid-tour” to build their capabilities.[[46]](#footnote-46) These pieces seem to be the only theory that exists in the field manual. With the obvious benefits this could yield for counterinsurgency efforts, it seems odd that there is little on this topic in the manual.

It is not a new situation: recruiting Pashtuns from areas traditionally controlled by the Taliban into the country’s military, who could be utilized as formal counterinsurgent forces, has been exceedingly difficult.[[47]](#footnote-47) Part of this inability to recruit lies in the fact that many areas in Afghanistan do not believe that Afghan national security institutions (the ANA, the ANP, etc.) can adequately defend them.[[48]](#footnote-48) This has led to several instances of local militias organizing and striking back at the Taliban.[[49]](#footnote-49) Attempting to capitalize on this situation, the United States has implemented two programs to formalize these militias: the Local Defense Initiative (LDI) and the Afghan Local Police (ALP).[[50]](#footnote-50)

The Local Defense Initiative was initiated in mid-2009, and was largely developed by U.S. Special Forces. This program encourages the formation of local security forces to deny insurgent forces access to Afghan communities and infrastructure. The government of Afghanistan directly compensates the members of LDI militias. These militias, however, were formed specifically to act as defenders (they do not actively participate in kinetic counterinsurgency operations). LDI militias are also responsible for arming themselves, and this program was only active in a few provinces in Afghanistan as of this writing.[[51]](#footnote-51) The Afghan Local Police program is a more recent inception, and some of the details on the program are a little nebulous. The program currently offers three weeks of training to volunteers[[52]](#footnote-52), as well as their own uniforms and they will serve locally. The funds for this program will initially be drawn from U.S. coffers[[53]](#footnote-53), but pay for the local police will be less than that of the ANP and the ANA. The most current data on this program puts the strength of the ALP at 10,000 deployed in 55 districts.[[54]](#footnote-54) Officials in Britain have stated that ALP forces have contributed to the lowering of violence in Helmand province, a province in the Taliban heartland, with a large population of Pashtuns.[[55]](#footnote-55) In recent months, the ALP has had to deal with several instances where ALP officers either instigated attacks or allowed attacks to take place against their own units.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Have these local militia programs been effective in using local, coethnic forces as counterinsurgents? Unfortunately for ISAF, the immediate results are not promising. To begin with, these local police forces have been accused of corruption and human rights abuses. There have been several accusations against these local police forces leveling illegal taxes on the population they are supposed to be protecting.[[57]](#footnote-57) There have also been accusations by German military officials who are concerned that ALP forces will defect to the Taliban or desert once U.S. forces leave.[[58]](#footnote-58) These accusations and worries about corruption in the ALP are not unfounded or surprising. Corruption amongst Afghan National Police forces has been rife in the past (with one study estimating as much as 80% of ANP forces profit from the drug trade)[[59]](#footnote-59), and, as stated before, ALP forces are paid less by the government than ANP forces. The ALP forces have also lead to some significant human rights abuses. The Human Rights Watch issued a report in September 2011 citing 46 instances of human rights abuses. NATO found in their own investigation of these alleged abuses, seven were “credible” and 15 were “partially credible.”[[60]](#footnote-60) After issuing the report, Human Rights Watch followed up with even more damning accusations. Among these were reports of armed conflict between ALP and ANP forces and more cases of extortion and brutality. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees cited ALP “abuses” as the reason for a 51 percent increase in displaced Afghans in 2011. ALP units (which generally consist of one ethnicity) have actually aggravated ethnic tensions further in some areas[[61]](#footnote-61), which works counter to the purpose of the ALP’s existence.

The use of coethnic forces in counterinsurgency was not greatly covered in the U.S. Counterinsurgency Field Manual. The manual devoted little space on the necessity for the use of “indigenous” (roughly corresponding to “coethnics” in the case of Afghanistan) security forces in counterinsurgency, and even less how one should go about building such a force. While it appears that, in practice, the United States and Coalition forces have come to recognize the importance of using such forces, it may have come too late. These forces, which the U.S. intends to lean on more heavily as troops are withdrawn, are poorly structured, trained, and paid. While they may be effective in some instances, in many places they have been just as bad as the insurgents ISAF is hoping to oust. And, to make matters worse, these local security forces, which could be used more effectively to soothe ethnic tensions, have served to worsen them in some areas. In short, this important tool of ethnic counterinsurgency needs serious overhaul before U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan, lest these forces become as bad as the militias of Afghanistan’s recent past.

-*Ethnic Defection Efforts by Local Counterinsurgency Forces*

Another step that can be taken by local counterinsurgency forces to lessen the efficacy of an ethnic insurgency that was identified in the literature was encouraging insurgents to defect to the side of the government. Counterinsurgent forces may be able to convince ethnic insurgents to fight against their former comrades. This does not necessarily mean that the ethnic insurgents are discarding their ethnic identity; they may add a qualifier that allows them to rebel against their coethnics.[[62]](#footnote-62) Kalyvas points out a number of reasons that ethnic insurgents may choose to defect to the other side. One effective tactic is for government forces to emphasize the “material benefits” of joining with their side (though it helps immensely if the population can legitimately view the government as the “stronger side”). Tribal/clan ties, coercion, actual material benefits, and revenge also were also strong motivating factors for encouraging coethnic defection.[[63]](#footnote-63) Staniland also finds that specific policies enacted by governments, specifically by encouraging local insurgents to join local defense establishments and paying/blackmailing insurgent leaders to switch sides.[[64]](#footnote-64)

The counterinsurgency manual recognizes the importance of defectors in insurgencies. Section 3-137 of the field manual states that:

Detainees and insurgent defectors are important HUMINT [human intelligence] sources. The information they provide about the internal workings of an insurgency may be better than any other HUMINT source can provide. In addition, defectors can provide otherwise unobtainable insights into an insurgent organization’s perceptions, motivations, goals, morale, organization, and tactics.[[65]](#footnote-65)

The manual also states the importance of defection late in campaigns:

Achieving success means that, particularly late in the campaign, it may be necessary to negotiate with the enemy. Local people supporting the COIN operation know the enemy’s leaders. They even may have grown up together. Valid negotiating partners sometimes emerge as the campaign progresses. Again, use close interagency relationships to exploit opportunities to co-opt segments of the enemy. This helps wind down the insurgency without alienating potential local allies who have relatives or friends among insurgents. As an insurgency ends, a defection is better than a surrender, a surrender better than a capture, and a capture better than a kill.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Even though the manual states the importance of encouraging defections, there is no practical guidance found in the manual as to how to do this.

One of the steps that have been taken by counterinsurgent forces to step up coethnic defection has been engaging in population-centric counterinsurgency practices. After the Afghan troop surge, roughly 1000 Taliban fighters defected to the side of the government of Afghanistan, many of them joining local defense forces.[[67]](#footnote-67) With the extra troops engaged in local population security, this has allowed for ISAF forces to demonstrate that they are indeed the stronger side in this conflict. By protecting the population, some insurgents can see that not only can they profit from some of the benefits that the local population gets by defecting to the other side. The additional boots on the ground can increase the difficulty of fighting Coalition forces, swaying their opinion of the opposition and eventually convincing them that the winning side will be the Coalition.

There seems to be little other programs enacted by counterinsurgent forces to convince insurgents to switch sides. At higher levels, there are some initiatives to convince defections amongst insurgents. Kilcullen points out how some Afghan governors have convinced populations that it is more in their interest to join the government (mainly through providing material benefits).[[68]](#footnote-68) The Afghan government has attempted to enact larger programs to provide material benefits for defectors. The newest program is supposed to provide a safe house, a $100-$500 monthly stipend, and job training. However, these programs have not been able to provide the benefits to all of its currently enrolled 1700 defectors, and the promised benefits are not necessarily substantial enough to sway hard-core insurgents away from insurgency.[[69]](#footnote-69)

It is unfortunate that the ISAF and other local coalition forces have not been encouraged more to attempt to persuade insurgents to defect (the research performed for this project could not find any information indicating that local forces had been encouraged to attempt to deal with local leaders and insurgent groups to persuade insurgents to defect). Efforts made by local forces in Iraq (though presented often anecdotally) appeared to have persuaded at-risk groups and insurgents to switch to the side of the government.[[70]](#footnote-70) Counterinsurgent forces can offer substantial material benefits to at-risk groups (chiefly, security), and use this to persuade some insurgents to defect. The local counterinsurgent forces are also uniquely poised to exploit some of the factors that Kalyvas and Staniland pointed out earlier. Local counterinsurgent forces could specifically exploit the desires for revenge and using blackmail/leverage on local insurgent leaders to defect (due to local counterinsurgent forces expert knowledge of local conditions).

-*Conclusion*

This analysis has centered on the efforts of local counterinsurgent forces to utilize tactics to counter the difficulties posed by the multitude of ethnicities in Afghanistan. The research conducted here has shown that, unfortunately, counterinsurgent forces have either neglected these techniques or performed them poorly. ISAF counterinsurgent forces have neglected the importance of utilizing local religious leaders to combat the ideology espoused by local leaders. Leadership has not put enough emphasis on empowering local counterinsurgency forces to encourage local insurgent forces to defect. Local counterinsurgent forces have not been particularly active in attempting to reintegrate refugees, militias, and insurgents back into their local social structures. Using coethnic forces as local counterinsurgency forces thus far in Afghanistan has not been very successful, and in some places has actually made the conflict worse.

While successful implementation of would not guarantee victory in a counterinsurgency campaign, it would certainly have proven a boon. These failures, however, seem to indicate that U.S. forces fundamentally misunderstand how to operate in a theatre with a high degree of ethnic fractionalization. The presence of strong ethnic identities creates a set of unique problems that counterinsurgent forces must be aware of. Failure to account for these difficulties will not only hinder the counterinsurgency campaign overall, but can also very likely help fuel an insurgency.

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