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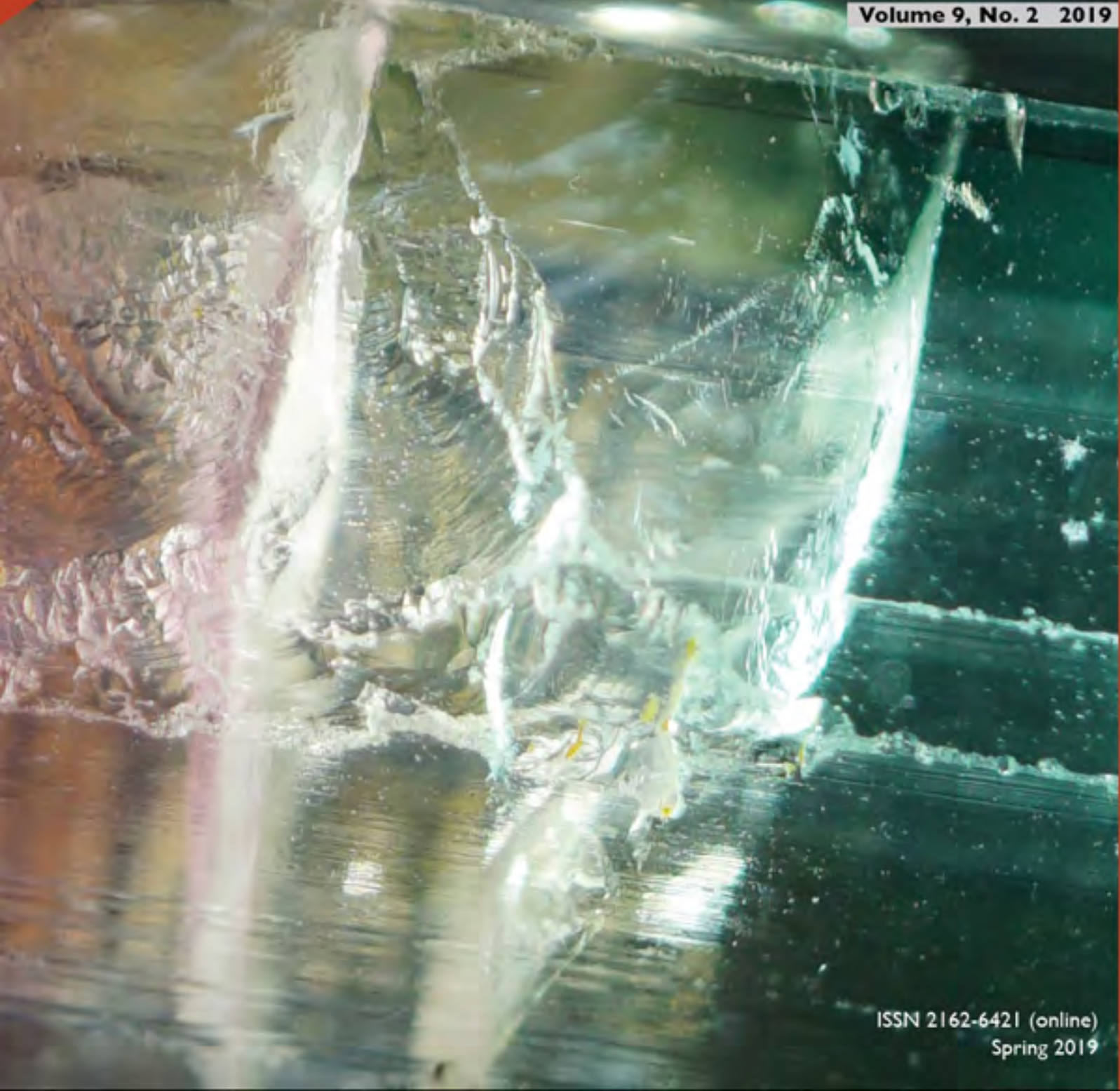
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# CTX

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# CTX

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## Letter from the Editor

*Jus ad bellum*—“right to war,” also known as Just War theory. *Jus in bello*—“right conduct in war,” the foundation of international humanitarian law. These are the legal principles that have guided international warfare since the Covenant of the League of Nations was written 100 years ago, at the end of “the war to end all wars” in 1919. They were further codified in 1945, when the United Nations Charter was adopted following the next, even more horrific, world war. After Europe was laid waste—twice within two generations—and after the most hideous weapons humans had designed had killed tens of millions throughout the world, the victors thought it was important to put some rules in place to limit the ways that they might kill one another’s soldiers and populations in the future.

Well-intentioned men wrote highly legalistic language that specified the circumstances under which a state could legitimately start a war, and they wrote thoughtful rules to govern how states and their soldiers must behave during a war. However, with each successive international conflict after adoption of these principles—Korea, Vietnam, the Soviet–Afghan War, Bosnia and Kosovo, the First Iraq War, the US invasion of Afghanistan, the Second Iraq War—warfare has veered further and further away from the state-on-state conflict these early twentieth-century leaders were familiar with. Consequently, today, when a powerful permanent member of the UN Security Council invades or otherwise suborns a much smaller, weaker state, who calls that aggressor to account? When transnational terrorists and insurgents are the enemy, who steps up to ensure that the Geneva Conventions are observed? Who intervenes when a government decimates its own population?

Unfortunately, these events seem to typify the world in which we now live, one that has been created in no small part by the great nations that wrote the rules of war a century ago. Even the geopolitical landscape is starting to look like a 1930s do-over. Is that what we want to devolve back to? If not, we might take a page from that 100-year old aspiration and think hard about what the world we want to live in looks like. Then we can begin to envision the political, cultural, and economic changes that will take us there.

In keeping with the theme of trying to not fall into the same old traps, the first article in this issue creatively reimagines Rudyard Kipling’s famous adventure story, “The Man Who Would be King.” Lieutenant Commander Reed Kitchen has taken Kipling’s novella, written in 1888, and reshaped it into a 21st century primer for how to conduct Village Stability Operations. As in the great 1975



movie of the same name, Kitchen borrows Kipling's distinctive voice to tell his tale. But in contrast to the movie, he updates elements of the story to illustrate military principles and best practices for SOF operators before they deploy.

Major Bobby Tuttle and Colonel Edwin Amadar concern themselves with a more recent past: the rise of ISIS in the Philippines and the Battle of Marawi. In their article, they detail ISIS's unprecedented success in uniting disparate Muslim separatist groups in the southern Philippine province of Mindanao and training them to take on the Philippine Army in brutal urban warfare. The Battle of Marawi took place around the same time as the Battle of Mosul, with similar results: the near-complete destruction of a major city in order to wrest it from the jihadists.

In "Déjà Vu: The Shared History of SOF—Switzerland as a Case Study," Lieutenant Colonel Matthias Fiala also takes a look back, this time to the development of European and US SOF units. He does so to identify common threads in their creation and evolution over time, and then uses his findings to see how well they fit the unique Swiss case. Switzerland is an historically neutral country that survived the two world wars relatively unscathed, but now, like so many of its European neighbors, faces the rise of international terrorist organizations.

Major Jonas spent 2015 in Iraq as a staff officer in the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Iraq, where he guided instructors from nine coalition countries and the United States in a program to build the Iraqi Special Operations Forces. "Keeping All the Frogs in the Boil" recounts his experiences as he learned to understand and manage a highly disparate group of independent, motivated, and creative professionals.

For this issue's CTAP interview, Dr. Craig Whiteside spoke with Oxford historian Dr. Todd Greentree about the causes, results, and legacies of Afghanistan's seemingly endless neo-colonialist wars. (Hint: there are clear reasons why LCDR Kitchen was able to take a story written 130 years ago and turn it into a contemporary fable of SOF operations in Afghanistan.)

In the Ethics and Insights column, George Lober riffs on an essential theme in the film, "Bohemian Rhapsody." He uses this movie to consider the most basic questions about our personal choices: Are personal ethics anything more than a sanctimonious excuse for material failure? Should we expect to be rewarded for doing the right thing? Does Life owe us happiness?

Our book review comes from Lieutenant Colonel Ole Stephan, who discusses *Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Special Forces*, by military historian Lawrence Paterson. The story of this elite force in World War II offers another perspective on how particular SOF forces develop, and demonstrates the similarities between such units even when they serve very different regimes.

Finally, as special forces take up more and more of the burden of warfighting and peace making around the world, it's worth reflecting back on Geneva, Switzerland, where the modern rules of war were codified more than seven decades ago. Can the Swiss Grenadiers remain neutral in a fight that ignores national boundaries and has no perceivable end? Is it necessary to reformulate *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* for today's conflicts, in which the enemy repudiates rules and takes pride in its brutality? Should we continue to observe the rules of war because it is the right thing to do?

Finally, as always, we present some of the latest publications from the Joint Special Operations University in our Publications Announcements.

We welcome your letters and comments at [CTXeditor@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXeditor@GlobalECCO.org). Keep up on global CT news and comment on articles by "liking" GlobalECCO on Facebook. If you are interested in submitting an article, comment, book or film review, or other contribution for possible publication, send it to [CTXSubmit@GlobalECCO.org](mailto:CTXSubmit@GlobalECCO.org)

Thanks for reading.

**Elizabeth Skinner**  
**Managing Editor, CTX**

# Inside This Issue

Letter from the Editor **ELIZABETH SKINNER**



**5**

The Man Who Would be King  
LCDR REED A. KITCHEN, US NAVY



**31**

The Rise of ISIS in the Philippines and the Battle of Marawi  
COL EDWIN AMADAR, PHILIPPINE MARINE CORPS,  
AND MAJ BOBBY TUTTLE, US ARMY SPECIAL FORCES



**39**

Déjà Vu: The Shared History of SOF—Switzerland as a Case Study  
LTC MATTHIAS FIALA, SWISS SPECIAL FORCES



**49**

Keeping All the Frogs in the Boil  
MAJ JONAS, NETHERLANDS MARITIME SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES



**57**

THE CTAP INTERVIEW  
Todd Greentree, Oxford University  
INTERVIEWED BY CRAIG WHITESIDE, US NAVAL WAR COLLEGE AT THE  
US NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL



**61**

ETHICS AND INSIGHTS  
Ethics for Ethics' Sake  
GEORGE LOBER



**64**

THE WRITTEN WORD  
Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Elite Special Forces  
by Lawrence Paterson  
REVIEWED BY LTC OLE STEPHAN, GERMAN ARMY



**66**

PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENTS

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Colonel Edwin Amadar** is deputy commander of the Philippine Marines (Infantry), 3rd Marine Brigade. He spent more than half of his 28 years of military service stationed in the province of Mindanao. He earned his BS degree at the Philippine Military Academy in 1991 and graduated from the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Monterey, California, with an MS degree in Defense Analysis in June 2018.

**Lieutenant Colonel (GS) Matthias Fiala** serves in the Swiss Special Forces. Since being commissioned into the Grenadier Corps, he has held a number of command positions; he was promoted and took command of a Swiss Grenadier battalion in 2019. LTC (GS) Fiala graduated from NPS with an MS in Defense Analysis (Irregular Warfare).

**Dr. Todd Greentree** is a research associate with the Changing Character of War Centre at Oxford University and teaches international relations at the University of New Mexico. As a US Foreign Service officer, he served during five wars, including Afghanistan, where he was political advisor to two brigade task forces and director of the Regional Initiatives Group at Regional Command (South). Dr. Greentree received his PhD in history from Oxford University. His upcoming book, titled *The Blood of Others*, focuses on lessons from the proxy wars in Angola, Central America, and Afghanistan.

**Major Jonas** joined the Dutch Marines Battalions in 1999. After completing officer training, he saw several deployments in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan between 2003 and 2006. He commanded the training wing of the Future Militia Antilles at Curacao, and followed with a tour as 2IC of the international MARSOF squadron from 2011 to 2012. Since 2016, he has commanded the international squadron of MARSOF and leads a Combined Joint Special Maritime Operations Task Force. He holds a BS degree in economics and is currently studying at NPS.

**Lieutenant Commander Reed A. Kitchen** serves in the US Navy. He earned his MS degree in Defense Analysis from NPS.

**George Lober** retired as a senior lecturer from the Defense Analysis Department at NPS in 2016. Prior to his retirement, he initiated and instructed a course in Critical Thinking and Ethical Decision Making.

**Lieutenant Colonel Ole Stephan** is an active duty general staff officer in the German Armed Forces. He holds an MA in pedagogy and an MA in military leadership and international relations from the University of the German Federal Armed Forces, Hamburg. LTC Stephan has seen multiple international deployments and is currently studying for an MS degree in Defense Analysis at NPS.

**Major Bobby Tuttle** is a Special Forces officer with operational experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the southern Philippines. He earned his BS in business administration from Texas A&M University in 2007, and his MS in Defense Analysis from NPS in 2018. MAJ Tuttle is currently the Effects Coordinator for 1st Special Forces Group, and will assume command of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group in mid-2019.

**Dr. Craig Whiteside** is a professor of theater security decision making at the US Naval War College at NPS. He earned a PhD in political science from Washington State University, where he also taught American government and national security affairs. His dissertation investigated the political worldview of the Islamic State of Iraq (2003–2013). Dr. Whiteside was formerly an infantry officer in the US Army and is an Iraq war veteran. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy and the US Army Command and General Staff College.

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# The Man Who Would be King

LCDR Reed A. Kitchen, US Navy

**I**N 1888, WHILE LIVING IN ALLAHABAD IN BRITISH INDIA, RUDYARD Kipling published a novella titled “The Man Who Would be King.”<sup>1</sup> The story, which was turned into a movie starring Sean Connery and Michael Caine, follows two former soldiers on their quest to become the rulers of Kafiristan (the province of Nuristan in modern-day Afghanistan). Their escapades raise issues that are still relevant to those charged with advising foreign militaries, and the film is one of two (the other is John Milius’s *Farewell to the King*) that are used as teaching tools in the US Naval Postgraduate School’s Military Advisor course.<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, my SEAL platoon received a last-minute change in deployment orders, from a direct action-focused mission in Iraq to a grassroots counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan, in a program known at the time as Village Stability Operations. Watching a film such as *The Man Who Would be King* would have been an easy, not to mention entertaining, way to introduce a complex subject like counterinsurgency theory to a group of special operators who were otherwise unfamiliar with the subject.

Indeed, we could have turned to Hollywood for the lessons we needed. In addition to the two movies shown in the Military Advisor course, there are a number of other popular movies that illustrate counterinsurgency theory and military advisor best practices. For example, *Lawrence of Arabia*, although of questionable historical accuracy, provides a view of the exploits of one of history’s most famous insurgents. In the “Twenty-Eight Articles” section of his book *Counterinsurgency*, David Kilcullen specifically mentions the movies *Black Hawk Down* and *The Battle of Algiers* as must-see pre-deployment movies for soldiers.<sup>3</sup> Historian Todd Greentree recommends *Chinatown*, *The Godfather Part II*, and *Groundhog Day* to anyone trying to understand America’s current situation in Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> When considering the perils of “going native,” the films *Dances with Wolves*, *The Last Samurai*, and *Apocalypse Now* come to mind. The list of useful films goes on and on.

All of these movies offer lessons in various aspects of counterinsurgency theory and military advisor best practices and could be pieced together by a knowledgeable instructor for a pre-deployment study course. As with so many good ideas, however, this rarely happens. Moreover, none of these films has been tailor-made for the purpose of imparting specific, well-researched lessons to busy, easily distracted viewers.

Can counterinsurgency theory and hard-won lessons learned from the recent battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan be captured and conveyed in a narrative format that will appeal to a wide spectrum of military personnel, from the most junior enlisted to the most senior officers? This article attempts to answer that question by reimagining Kipling’s “The Man Who Would Be King” and setting it in the near future, testing the premise that a fictional adventure story can effectively impart counterinsurgency theory and military advising best practices to those busy and easily distracted service members.

A film such as *The Man Who Would be King* would have provided an entertaining way to introduce counterinsurgency theory to special operators.



To retain the essence of the original, I used portions of Kipling’s writing, either directly as he wrote them or paraphrased to bring them into the twenty-first century. Character names and the villages of Er-Heb, Bashkai, and Shu are also from Kipling’s original.<sup>5</sup>

### Cast of Characters

DANIEL DRAVOT, a tall, slender American with a big red beard. Danny is an adventurer in search of a gemstone mine in Afghanistan; he opens a small medical clinic in Er-Heb village.

PEACHEY CARNEHAN, Daniel’s companion. Peachey is a large American with bushy dark eyebrows who advises the tribal protection force.

BILLY FISH, Peachey’s native counterpart and interpreter from Bashkai village. “Billy Fish” is a nickname given to him by a Special Forces A-Team.

PIKKY KERGAN, an elder from Shu village. “Pikky Kergan” is a nickname give to him by Peachey.

OOTAH, the Taliban puppet administrator from Shu village who controls the gemstone mine through force.

RK, the narrator and Lahore, Pakistan, correspondent for a regional newspaper called the *Northern Star*.

The main part of the story takes place in three villages: Er-Heb, Bashkai, and Shu, in an isolated valley of Nuristan, which is a remote province in northeastern Afghanistan along the border with Pakistan.

### Glossary

Arbakai: Tribal protection force.

Atrozan: Nuristani ruling class.

Bari: Nuristani craftsman class.

Du-wrai: Temporary tribal government organization convened for special circumstances and dispute resolution.

Dustuk: The most influential village elder.

Mala-wrai: Standing village governmental body that supervises agricultural affairs.

Mirab: Local agricultural irrigation arbitrator.

Still photo from the film *The Man Who Would be King*, starring Michael Caine (center) and Sean Connery (right).





## The Man Who Would Be King

The beginning of everything was in an airplane from San Francisco to Lahore. My employer was feeling the pinch from the congressional budget, which meant I was travelling coach, not first class, which is awful on a flight that far to that part of the world. The seat cushions were worn thin and the food was predictably mediocre, so I bolstered myself with complimentary pillows and blankets, pulled out a pepperoni calzone I'd bought on the concourse, and scrolled through the in-flight movie selection.

My row in coach happened to be empty till I reached Dubai, when a big, black-browed gentleman in shirt-sleeves sat next to me. We began some idle chitchat and he told me about his service in Afghanistan, and I discovered that he had an educated taste for whiskey. Since he hadn't been back to the region in almost ten years, I filled him in on local sentiment from my view as a journalist with the *Northern Star*, a regional newspaper. When I asked, he gave his name as Peachey.

"If Afghanistan was filled with men like you and me, armed with some local knowledge and the will to get things done, Uncle Sam wouldn't be \$700 billion in debt but \$900 billion richer!" he said, and as I looked at his decidedly determined chin, I was inclined to agree with him.<sup>6</sup>

As we talked, I noticed a Miraculous Medal around his neck.<sup>7</sup> We reminisced a little about Sacred Heart Cathedral and other Catholic heritage sites in Pakistan. When we landed in Lahore, he asked to use my cell phone to call a friend and confirm his ride from the airport. "I don't have a Pakistani cell phone, yet, and would like to save myself the roaming charges," he said. I cautiously agreed, taking some small satisfaction in helping a fellow American and a fellow Catholic.

After I had handed him my phone, I overheard him say, "Hey, Danny, I just landed.... Already? ...Okay, yeah, let's go south right away, then. See you in a bit." He ended the call and returned my phone.

As we walked from the plane to baggage claim, he asked, "You know, there aren't too many Americans likely to know as much as you about the region, and you seem to have a good pulse on what is going on across the border. Could my friend and I swing by to pick your brain?" Reluctantly, but because I was also distracted by a torrent of voice mails and text messages streaming into my phone, I accepted. I told him that I had some business in Allahabad but would be back in my office in Lahore in ten days.

By then, our bags had arrived and we walked out to the arrivals walkway. As I hailed a taxi, a faded blue sedan with dented bumpers pulled up.<sup>8</sup> A tall, slender man with a big red beard stepped out to grab Peachey's bags—this must be Danny, who wore on his right hand an antique ruby ring, which seemed out of place on such a rough-looking man.<sup>9</sup> Peachey leaned in and whispered something in Danny's ear and I could hear Danny

"If Afghanistan was filled with men like you and me, armed with some local knowledge and the will to get things done, Uncle Sam wouldn't be \$700 billion in debt!"

say, "Does he expect me to give him anything? 'Cause I won't." Peachey looked at me and smiled, got in the car, and they drove away.

During the taxi ride into town, I reckoned that two individuals like the ones I had just met could not do any good if they aimlessly gallivanted around Pakistan or, worse, the recently independent Pashtunistan. So I sent a text message to a friend at the US Embassy in Islamabad, describing them as accurately as I could. I figured it would be better for everyone if someone besides Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence kept an eye on them.

When I checked in with the office the following morning, it appeared that the bare minimum had been done by our new satellite editor so, before departing for Allahabad, I caught up on some work.

I report from the Lahore office of the *Northern Star*, where I cover events in Pakistan and distribute the paper to my company's employees. After Operations Enduring Freedom and Freedom's Sentinel, the United States had facilitated the partition of Pashtunistan from Afghanistan and Pakistan. An American viceroy now led all US and coalition personnel—including Indian security forces—and could independently budget, contract, and develop policy. The viceroy, officially styled by Washington as the US Trustee to Afghanistan, reported directly to the US president.<sup>10</sup> Besides a small special operations strike force, the Afghan advisory mission belonged to my employer—officially named the East Afghanistan Company—which managed the contracted advisors and their logistics and aviation support. These contracted soldiers lived with their Afghan counterparts on two-year deployments, and my job with the *Northern Star* was to keep them, in part, informed and entertained.<sup>11</sup>

Once I had returned to Lahore from Allahabad, I set to work on the weekly issue. Our custom was to post the issue on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning. The Indians and Pakistanis, in continuous conflict of one sort or another over the disputed territory of Kashmir, were at it again following a US announcement that recognized the Indian claim. That night, I was waiting alone for an update from my man on the ground and stepped outside for a cigarette. Even as a blast of hot wind from the west hit me, the hoot of the nightjars and the smell that precedes the rain almost made me forget the miserable heat for a second.

No sooner had I settled back into my office chair than I was startled to my senses by two men in white clothes who burst through the door. The first one said, "It's him!" The second said, "It sure is!" And they both laughed as they mopped their foreheads. When they stepped into the light of my desk lamp, I recognized the eyebrows of the one and the beard of the other as belonging to the two men from the airport.

"We saw your light from across the road and I said to my friend here, 'The office is open. Let's go inside and speak to the guy who tried to throw us out of the country,'" said the one with the dark eyebrows.

How did they know I had reported on them? "What do you want?" I asked.

No sooner had I settled back into my office chair than I was startled to my senses by two men in white clothes who burst through the door.

"Half an hour of your time," said the red-bearded man with the ruby ring. "We'd like some drink—the Contract doesn't begin yet, Peachey—but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favor, because we found out you tried to screw us." I walked behind my desk. The red-haired man rubbed his hands while admiring the maps on the walls. "That's what I like to see," he said. "This was the right man to come to. Now, sir, let me introduce to you Petty Officer Peachey Carnehan, that's him, and Petty Officer Daniel Dravot, that's me, and the less said about our current professions the better, but he was a sniper and I was a medic while we were in uniform. Peachey is sober, and so am I. Pass me two cigars and watch us light up, to make sure. It will save you cutting into my talk." I watched the test. By the steadiness of their hands I could see that the men were absolutely sober, so I gave them each a glass of lukewarm whiskey.

"That's more like it," said Peachey of the eyebrows, wiping the drink from his mustache. "Let me talk now, Danny. We made a go of it after we left the Navy and decided that the United States wasn't big enough for us."

They certainly were too big for the office. Danny's beard seemed to fill half the room and Peachey's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Peachey continued, "The United States squandered an opportunity to profit from Afghanistan's mines but the Taliban won't—we heard they are partially funding their new country through gemstones mined in the eastern provinces of Nuristan and Badakhshan. We know southern Afghanistan like the back of our hand from six deployments between the two of us. But we've never been to those parts. So we came here to do our research, just like I asked at the airport. We figure there has to be some opportunity for us to profit as well. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are afraid of except drink, and we will sign a contract on that."

"Yes, of course," I said. "Look, you've been out in the sun, and it's a very warm night. Why don't you sleep on it and come back tomorrow?" I motioned toward the door, resolving to myself that the next time they arrived I would have the proper authorities present.

"We're neither drunk nor sunstruck," said Danny. "We have slept on it for six months and all we know is that no Americans have gone there (he gestured toward a spot on one of the maps on the wall) since the war ended. And the Nuristanis fight. In any place where they like to fight, a man who knows how to train troops can always be a Big Man. Oh, and we heard the women are beautiful," he added with a grin.

"But that is provided against in the Contract," said Peachey. "Neither women nor liquor, Daniel."

"You'll be killed before you're five miles across the Pashtunistan border," I interrupted. "That place is one mass of mountains, glaciers, and peaks. The Taliban are brutal, and even if you found a gemstone mine, you couldn't do anything with it."

In any place where they like to fight, a man who knows how to train troops can always be a Big Man.



"That's what we wanted to hear!" said Peachey. "Whenever someone calls you crazy, you know you're onto something." He turned to the bookcases. "A few maps to plan our route—I'm a bit nostalgic for the paper kind and we can't assume we'll have reliable access to electricity. We need to know something about the people, too, so how about some travelogues and ethnographies? It looks like you have some of those."

"Are you serious?" I said.

"A little," said Danny, sweetly. "Your biggest maps and any books you've got, please."

At this point, my curiosity as a reporter overcame my concerns, so I fetched a large map of Afghanistan and Pakistan, two smaller maps—one of Nuristan and one marking all of the known gemstone mines—and all the books written about Nuristan since George Robertson published *The Kafirs of the Hindu-Kush*.<sup>12</sup> A thin and somewhat obscure stock, to be sure. The men dove into them.

"See here!" said Danny, his thumb on the map. "We will drive past Peshawar through the Khyber Pass and turn north at Jalalabad. Then we get among the hills—fourteen thousand feet—fifteen thousand—it will be cold there, but it doesn't look very far on the map." I handed him *Men of Influence in Nuristan* by Schuyler Jones; Peachey already looked engrossed in *The Kafirs of the Hindu Kush*.<sup>13</sup>

"The Nuristanis seem different from the Pashtuns," said Danny. He began reading aloud. "Members of the regional caste of landed elites are called atrozans and craftsmen are called bari. The villages handle most of their routine affairs through an agricultural council called the mala-wrai and they convene temporary councils called du-wrai for special circumstances and dispute resolution."<sup>14</sup>

"But all the information about Nuristan is outdated," I protested. "Sure, the Americans occupied it for twenty years, but no one knows anything about it, really. Here's *A Passage to Nuristan*. Read what Nicholas Barrington and the other authors say."<sup>15</sup>

I smoked and finished writing my column while the men paged through Barrington's book and *Natural Resources in Afghanistan*.<sup>16</sup> And they kept looking at the maps.





Then, as I was beginning to shut down my computer, Danny said, surprisingly politely, "It's about four o'clock now. We'll go so you can sleep. Could we borrow these books? We will come by next week to return them and say goodbye."

"You are two fools," I answered. "Sure, borrow them for as long as you like. You'll be turned back at the border anyway. Why don't you let me arrange an interview with the Company's Human Resources manager here next week? You two seem like perfect candidates to be Afghan army advisors."

"Next week we will be hard at work for ourselves, thank you," said Danny. "We'll be back in Pakistan by winter and will swing by to show you our loot."

"Besides, would two lunatics make a contract like this?" said Peachey, with subdued pride, showing me a letter typed on a creased sheet of paper.

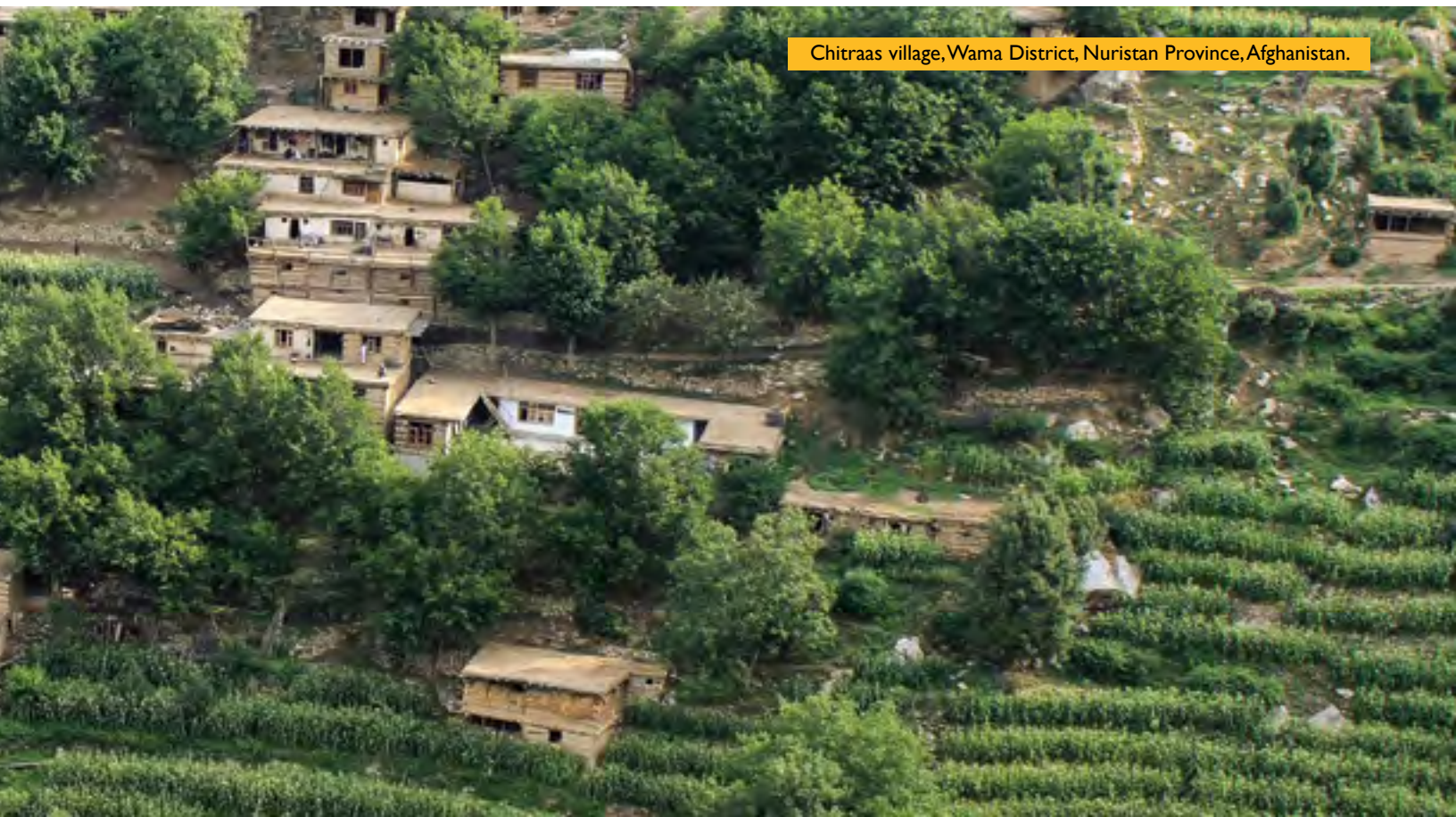
This Contract between me and you persuing witnesseth in the name of God–Amen and so forth.

1. That me and you will settle this matter together; i.e., to profit from a gemstone mine in Afghanistan.
2. That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any liquor, nor any woman black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.
3. That we conduct ourselves with dignity and discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day,

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan  
Daniel Dravot

"There was no need for the last article," said Peachey, blushing modestly. "But it's got a ring to it."



Chitraas village, Wama District, Nuristan Province, Afghanistan.

Then the two ceremoniously downed their drinks and signed the Contract.

"Now you witness it, and it's legal," said Danny. So I made my initials—RK—under their signatures and scanned a copy, as a memento.

"This is an idiotic adventure," I said curtly. "I'll walk you to the door."

I saw them off, still poring over the books and maps by the light of a pair of headlamps they'd pulled from their packs as they walked out into the night. "See you next week," were their parting words.

The next week, I was closing the office when I overheard an argument between three local men who stood across the street, all wearing flat, round Chitrali caps rolled on the bottom in the typical style. One stormed away and I walked closer to gain a better view. Then, to my surprise, one of the remaining two men addressed me in English. It was only by the unmistakable ruby ring on his finger that I realized who it was.

"Well, we are doing it on our own, then!" said Danny. "Peachey can't talk their patter so I'll be our tour guide. We'll be in Peshawar by the end of the day. Put your hand under the bags in the trunk there and tell me what you feel." He pointed to the old blue sedan standing nearby, so I walked around to the back of the car and worked my arm into the mess of gear until I touched two boxes. Inside one of the boxes, I felt the blades of something that was like a tiny airplane. A drone. And another and another. "Twelve of 'em," said Danny placidly.

"Heaven help you if you are caught with those things!" I whispered. "Guns are a dime a dozen, but a drone! A drone is worth its weight in gold among the Pashtuns."

"Every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal is invested in the trunk of this car. We won't get caught—we're just a couple of locals," he said with a wink. "Before I forget, here are your books." Overcome with astonishment by their determination, and with a perfunctory, not quite heartfelt nod to protocol, I asked them if they needed anything else.

"Not yet, but we will soon. Goodbye," said Danny, giving me his hand cautiously. "Today is the last time we'll shake hands with an American for a while. Shake hands with him, Peachey."

Peachey leaned across the hood and shook hands. I gave him the rosary from my pocket. "For good luck," I said.

Two days later, a local correspondent in Pashtunistan, who was updating me on the latest news from Peshawar, wound up his email with: "I overheard two men at the American Club boasting about their plans to find a gemstone mine in Afghanistan. It is clear they don't know the first thing about what they are getting themselves into." The two, I thought to myself, are beyond the border, then. I would have prayed for them, but that night another military coup was brewing in Pakistan and the democratically elected government demanded an obituary.

Inside one of the boxes, I felt the blades of something that was like a tiny airplane. A drone. And another and another. "Twelve of 'em," said Danny placidly.



The wheel of the world continued to turn and, three years later, I was still a reporter at the *Northern Star*. I worked out of the same dilapidated one-story building on the outskirts of the city—an artifact of British India—and, aside from the fact that the peepal trees in the courtyard garden were a few feet taller, nothing much had changed. On one particularly hot night, I sat in my dimly lit office waiting for the last bit of news to arrive from my man in Kashmir and cursing the broken air conditioner.

As I stood by an open window hoping to catch the slight breeze, a sense of something disturbingly familiar came over me. The blast of the hot wind from the west, the hoot of the nightjars, and the smell that precedes the rain tried to conjure up a memory, but it was three o'clock in the morning, and my mind was foggy.

Then, the figure of a man—I guess you could call it a man—stood in the open front door of my small office building. He was bent forward, his head sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. He addressed me by name—this rag-wrapped cripple. “Can you give me a drink?” he whimpered. “For the Lord’s sake, give me a drink!” I went back to my desk, the man following with groans of pain, and poured a glass of whiskey.

“Don’t you know me?” he gasped, dropping into a chair. Then he turned his bearded face, framed by matted grey hair, to the light. I looked at him intently. Once before, I had seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-broad black band, but for the life of me I could not recall where.

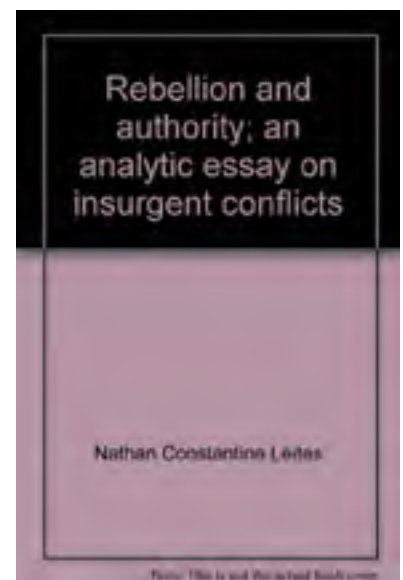
“I don’t know you,” I said, handing him the whiskey. “What can I do for you?” He took a gulp and, in spite of the suffocating heat, shivered.

“I’m back,” he said, and gingerly rested his glass on my desk. “We went through the mountains—those damned mountains!—to get rich. It was all settled right here in this office—remember? Danny and I signed the Contract and you witnessed it. You sat there behind your desk and I stood here and Danny here. Remember? Look at me!”

Realizing who sat before me, a lump formed in my stomach as my mind tried to imagine what series of events would have left him in such a wretched state. “Carnehan! Of course!” I said, sitting back in the chair.<sup>17</sup>

“Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan—the same and not the same—who met you on a flight to Lahore three summers and a thousand years ago,” he said.<sup>18</sup> “We were like kings in that valley, me and Dravot. Poor Danny—oh, poor, poor Danny. That bastard would never take advice, even though I begged him!”

Out of habit, I hastily reached into my drawer for my digital voice recorder and then, not wanting to spook the poor man, cautiously laid it on my lap and pressed the red button. I said, “Drink your whiskey and tell me everything you can remember from beginning to end. Take your time. You crossed into Pashtunistan in your car, both dressed as locals.<sup>19</sup> Do you remember that?”



"I ain't crazy—yet—but I will be soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will all go to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don't say anything." I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could, although I couldn't help but stare at the hand that still held the glass. It was twisted like a bird's claw from frostbite. "No, don't look there. Look at me," said Peachey, pulling his hand into his lap. "That comes afterwards, but for the Lord's sake don't distract me. We left for Peshawar in high spirits. We were going to be rich, and Danny was cracking jokes the entire way. We put up in a dingy little hotel... "

"And then crossed over the Khyber Pass to Jalalabad," I interrupted. "From there, you turned north to Kunar and into Nuristan."

"No, we didn't. What are you talking about? We turned north for Chitral when we overheard at the American Club that the passes were open straight into Nuristan. The Afghanistan-Pashtunistan border dispute was hot at that time and we couldn't risk being caught.<sup>20</sup> We loaded our gear onto two horses and headed up the Dewanah Baba—the Old Madman's Pass.<sup>21</sup> The two horses were overladen and stopped moving before we reached the top. Just as a storm was rolling in, two men with four fresh horses came along. Danny spoke to them in Dari and said, 'Sell me your horses.' The first man said, 'If you are rich enough to buy, you are rich enough to rob.' But before the man could draw his rifle, I shot him dead, and the second man ran away. We loaded the gear onto the four horses and continued through those bitter cold mountains on winding rocky trails no wider than the back of your hand."

"Take some more whiskey," I said slowly. "What did you and Danny do when you entered Nuristan?"

Peachey swallowed every last drop of the whiskey in his glass and continued. "We finally made it into the first valley and stopped for breakfast at a teahouse; we had been traveling all night and were terribly hungry.<sup>22</sup> The first thing we noticed were the women working in the fields, carrying wooden pitchforks and woven baskets like cones. On our deployments to Afghanistan, we rarely saw women in the villages, but here the women worked unveiled. They wore red and black dresses tied around the waist with a wide white sash, moccasins on their feet, and had their long hair in braids.<sup>23</sup> They were beautiful. We left that valley and continued over one high alpine mountain pass after another towards Badakhshan—we were hoping to find a lapis lazuli mine there.<sup>24</sup> Then we came out of a great forest of pine, walnut, holly, and ash into a big, level valley that stretched like a carpet of green. From our perch at the foot of the mountain, we could see all kinds of flowers alongside a meandering river and, when the wind blew down the valley, we could smell wild herbs.<sup>25</sup> Our horses were exhausted and so were we, so we sat on those two boxes of drones and played our favorite card game—cribbage—using the dirt for our board and loose ammunition for pegs."

Perhaps it was the whiskey but now Peachey was on a roll. The way he told the story transported me to that green valley and, for a moment, I could smell the crisp mountain air.

We went with them to their village, where we were served a simple meal. That was how we came to Er-Heb, just as though we had tumbled from the skies.

"Then we heard the report of automatic weapons echoing off the mountains like thunder and saw fifteen men in white turbans running down the valley, chasing five men dressed in black robes.<sup>26</sup> The five men looked white—as white as you or me. We scrambled to load the horses. Danny said, shouldering his rifle, 'This is the beginning of the business. We'll fight for the five men,' and with that he fired at the fifteen men, and dropped one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where he was sitting. We picked them off at all ranges—six in all—up and down the valley, until the last nine of the men in white turbans retreated. Then we walked down the hill towards the five men we had rescued. When we approached them, I was amazed—some even had blonde hair and blue eyes."

I interrupted, "Wait—tell me more about the battle."

"What about it? It was like any other—that's not important," Peachey continued. "So Danny greeted them in Dari and they said to him, 'We are grateful to you for saving us. We are from Er-Heb. Those men in white turbans are Taliban who seized our gemstone mine and we are fighting to take it back.' Danny asked what they mined and they described a translucent blue and green gemstone. I said to Danny, once he translated what they said, that it sounded like tourmaline. By then it was late, and they invited us to dinner. We went with them to their village, where we were served a simple meal of cheese, barley bread, and tea.<sup>27</sup> That was how we came to Er-Heb, just as though we had tumbled from the skies."

"Take some more whiskey and go on," I said. Expecting an all-nighter, I poured a second glass for myself.

"While we ate, we talked mostly about the valley, so Danny and I could confirm our route—that map you gave us didn't show this village—to the lapis lazuli mines in Badakhshan. The men explained that Er-Heb was located on the east side of the valley, perched on the southern face of a mountain near the pass we had crossed.<sup>28</sup> The Taliban we encountered had come from Shu, a village ten kilometers farther south but on the west side of the valley, also near a mountain pass. The Taliban living in Shu were Pashto-speaking Pashtuns from Kunar, and it seemed that their job was to defend the tourmaline mine from our hosts' attacks.

"The valley was about one kilometer wide. In between Er-Heb and Shu was a third village called Bashkai, sitting along the river in the valley floor. Each village had about 300 households, and the residents all spoke local Nuristani languages.<sup>29</sup> Our hosts looked like misplaced Nordic fishermen compared to the Pashtuns' darker complexions.<sup>30</sup> They said the tourmaline mine was located on the face of a mountain

Tourmaline





next to Shu. As Danny translated, I sketched a map of the valley in my notebook.<sup>31</sup> When everyone finished eating, one of the men, the mirab, offered to let us stay in an empty house that sat next to his.

“They didn’t just feed you and then kick you out of the valley?” I interrupted. “I thought people there hated non-Muslims.”

“No, not at all. Their tribal code dictated that they host us, especially after what we did. Don’t forget—we saved their lives. But also, we made it very clear that we were Christians. I did, at least.<sup>32</sup> When the elders began thumbing their prayer beads, I did the same with your rosary. Then the mirab saw my necklace during dinner and it led to a conversation about Mary’s place in Islam. Did you know she is the only woman mentioned in the Qur’an?<sup>33</sup> Come to find out, we had more in common than I thought. Anyway, the next morning, Danny and I decided there wasn’t any rush to leave. So, we agreed to stay and hear more from them about the tourmaline mine. Over cups upon cups of tea—too many to remember—we learned more about life in the valley, too.<sup>34</sup>

“Their economic system is based on agriculture and herding. The women tend the fields, growing millet, corn, barley, and wheat. The men can be gone for weeks and months at a time during the summer, to graze their goats, cattle, and sheep up in the high mountain pastures.<sup>35</sup> The village government is called the mala-wrai, and it oversees agricultural affairs, such as irrigation, harvest, and livestock grazing. They also impose and collect fines—goats and cattle for serious crimes, cheese and grain for minor ones. The most influential elder, called the dustuk, presides over the mala-wrai, and new members are chosen every year on the vernal equinox at an open-air meeting ground.<sup>36</sup>

“The men who weren’t busy tending to livestock carried butter over the passes to Chitral—the way we came—to trade for items they didn’t make in the valley; mostly the caps that all the men wore.<sup>37</sup> The passes, and even the main road sometimes, were closed from October to March because of the heavy snows, and the valley would be completely isolated. That meant the people had to be disciplined about storing and using their food and supplies. That’s one reason the mala-wrai was so important. And then, there was the tourmaline mine—the locals call it ‘The General.’<sup>38</sup>

“The General used to be controlled by a valley-wide council, the du-wrai, filled equally by members from Er-Heb, Bashkai, and Shu. The du-wrai oversaw rights to individual shafts and mediated disputes over conflicting claims. The tourmaline was mined in the traditional way, with sledgehammers, hand drills, and pick-and-shovel. Then the men carried the stones to Peshawar for sale—most of the gems go to China.<sup>39</sup> Since farming and herding don’t provide much more than basic subsistence, the tourmaline mine has been a major source of income for the villagers.

“But once Pashtunistan was separated from Afghanistan and Pakistan and given to the Taliban, some Taliban fighters came into the valley from Kunar, ran off the small guard force, and seized The General. These were mostly small clashes, like the one Danny and I stumbled onto, but the

Some Taliban fighters came into the valley from Kunar, ran off the small guard force, and seized the gemstone mine called The General.

villagers always lost. The Taliban backed a collaborator from Shu named Ootah, an elder who, some people think, helped the Taliban come into the valley and take over The General in the first place. Ootah pocketed half of the revenue from the gems for himself while the rest went to the Taliban representative posted at the mine.

"Because men from Er-Heb and Bashkai no longer had access to their tourmaline shafts, locals from Shu and some Pashtuns from Kunar with connections to the Taliban did all of the mining. Ootah guarded The General with men from Shu, while a larger Taliban force was positioned at the mouth of the valley, about fifty kilometers to the south. They controlled the main road and levied additional taxes. Besides the two mountain passes outside of Er-Heb and Shu, the main road was the only way in and out of the valley. The villagers of Er-Heb, Bashkai, and Shu were still allowed to rule themselves in their traditional way, but the profits from The General were gone.

"By our second afternoon in the mirab's spare house, Danny had started what became an impromptu clinic in the front room to treat small ailments and injuries. Roxanne, the mirab's daughter, apparently hoped to become a doctor, so she began assisting Danny by interpreting for the non-Dari speaking villagers and helping treat female patients.

"Over the next couple of weeks, between Danny's conversations with patients, my own probing treks around the valley with various men of Er-Heb, and countless cups of tea with elders, we gained a pretty good local knowledge.

"One day, during one of my treks with the mirab, we passed through Bashkai so he could invite their mala-wrai to Er-Heb to discuss a small matter regarding the summer pastures. Danny sometimes came along to interpret, but this time I was on my own with the mirab. As we approached the village, I heard a voice from between two buildings: 'Hey, buddy! Are you American?'"<sup>40</sup> I swung my head and saw a local man walking towards me. I answered, "Yes," and asked how he knew English. He responded that he had been an interpreter for a Special Forces A-Team in Wardak Province, and gave me an abbreviated version of his life story. He spoke fast, but what I picked up was that he was from the craftsman caste, or Bari, and that he was a member of Bashkai's mala-wrai. He would be present for the meeting of the two villages.



Phantom I quadcopter drone

"Two nights later, Danny and I attended the meeting between Er-Heb and Bashkai. We wore our uniforms since they were our cleanest clothes and we wanted to stand apart from the villagers. The elders arrived, wearing their traditional Chitrali caps, embroidered jackets over cotton shirts, brown trousers over black leggings, and moccasins; each also had a dagger tucked into his wide belt and carried a ceremonial axe."<sup>41</sup> Danny elbowed me and whispered that he wanted an axe like that for himself.

"After the matter regarding the summer pastures was settled, which didn't take long, the conversation turned to the tourmaline mine. One of the fighters Danny and I had met on our first day made a lengthy case for retaking The General from the Taliban by force. I whispered to Danny that this might be our chance and he agreed. He stood up and proclaimed to the group that we had special weapons in our kit and could assist their cause. Danny described the drones as small rockets that we could control from the ground, and said that we would use these 'kamikaze rockets' in their service. All we asked in return was four horse loads' worth of tourmaline when the job was done.

"Then the Bari man, who was tending the fire, spoke up and said that, due to his credentials with the SOF team, he would assist Danny and me. He said that we should start by securing Er-Heb to serve as a staging area

from which to operate.<sup>42</sup> Danny responded that I would be the Bari man's advisor and would support the villagers with the drones, kind of like what Ben Malcom did to support North Korean partisans in the Korean War.<sup>43</sup> Danny said that he would continue to run the clinic. Both mala-wrais enthusiastically agreed with this plan, and the Bari man said he would move into our house to make coordination easier.

"When the meeting ended, I walked with the Bari man—who went by the nickname Billy Fish, given to him by his A-Team—back to our house and asked him why he had volunteered to help. He said, 'During the war, I had an important job and did well as an interpreter. When I returned to Bashkai, I was only a Bari and no one cared what I had done. Leading this army with you will give me a chance to make a name for myself and pull my family into the Atrozan caste.'<sup>44</sup>

"The next morning, Billy Fish returned with a rucksack, his rifle, and a worn book tucked under his arm. I was surprised to see the book. He informed me that it was a gift from his last team leader in Wardak. While he meticulously arranged his gear, I read the title, *Rebellion and Authority*, and noted a Naval Postgraduate School library call number on the spine."<sup>45</sup>

I interrupted Peachey. "Tell me more about this book. Did Billy arrive with a plan?"

"Oh yeah, he had it all figured out. We stayed up late that night discussing his plan and, frankly, I was surprised. I'd always been taught how important winning 'hearts and minds' was. That was what was preached during my tours in Afghanistan. But Billy had a different idea, influenced by this book. So I started reading it that night, too. And from what I remember, the authors, Leites and Wolf, said that, since 'demand conditions,' or 'hearts and minds,' are less responsive than 'supply conditions,' like people and materiel, it would be more efficient to focus on the supply side, especially if progress lags behind promises."<sup>46</sup>

"Billy Fish figured that, in order to win, we didn't necessarily need the support, sympathy, or loyalty of the villagers.<sup>47</sup> In fact, Ootah and the Taliban enjoyed almost total control in Shu, even though they were supported by only a small portion of the population who were benefitting from their actions. For us to barge into a village and try to win 'hearts and minds' at gunpoint was going to be an uphill battle.

"So, instead of the usual 'clear, hold, and build' protocol that the counterinsurgency field manual promotes, our plan was to 'disrupt, isolate, clear, and control.'<sup>48</sup> Disruption operations would put Ootah and the Taliban on the defensive and keep them on the move. Then, we would isolate each village with observation posts manned by local police, like 'drying the river to catch the fish,' to borrow a phrase from Mao.<sup>49</sup> And then we'd be able to clear the village of Taliban and their supporters. Control would be established through a series of measures such as beat cop patrols and curfews.

"By the end of the week, Billy had gathered twenty men nominated by the elders—the original five plus another fifteen from the village—who

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would form our tribal protection force, or arbakai. Then we embarked on a two-week training program: one week of rifle marksmanship and one week of policing skills. Billy did all of the teaching. I was around, but tried to keep a low profile and really only interacted with the arbakai chief.<sup>50</sup>

"Wait a second," I interrupted again. "You mean to tell me you were going to do all of that—'disrupt, isolate, clear, and control'—with one unit? Just twenty arbakai?"

"Well, you go to war with the army you have, to quote Secretary Rumsfeld.<sup>51</sup> Sure, in a perfect world we would have had multiple units in addition to the arbakai: Commandos, a Frontier Guard, and an intelligence collection unit. But the villages were relatively small and didn't have a lot of guys to spare.<sup>52</sup> This was the simplest solution.

"Our first order of business was to build observation posts at the pass to the east of Er-Heb and along the valley road towards Bashkai. We convinced the mala-wrai to pay a small amount of cheese and grain to villagers who helped us with the construction, and we modeled the posts after their alpine summer huts.<sup>53</sup>

"Once the observation posts were manned and Er-Heb was effectively isolated, Billy and I then started to patrol with the arbakai through the village, especially at night. No Taliban were showing up, yet, but it was only a matter of time before they caught wind that the villages were up to something. Plus, they'd surely already heard about us—me and Danny.

"The arbakai operated in pairs, our basic unit of measure, and our general rule of thumb was to have about a third of them on patrol at any time, day or night, in separate parts of the village.<sup>54</sup> We especially wanted the arbakai who were on duty in the evening to stay out into the night—so-called blue-green patrolling—as a way to reassure the population through constant and unpredictable activity.<sup>55</sup>

"The last step to ensure control in Er-Heb was to establish a curfew. Like I said, we had the arbakai out at night and we were on the lookout for Taliban. The mala-wrai explained to the villagers that a curfew would keep the Taliban from visiting them at night. If no one from the village was moving around, no one could sneak into the village unnoticed. The mala-wrai told the villagers that they would be fined grain and cheese if they violated the curfew.<sup>56</sup> Of course, we weren't so hardcore that villagers could never go out or socialize at night—they just had to clear it with the mala-wrai."

"What about a census and issuing identification cards?" I asked, since those are common control measures, too. "Why didn't you use them?"

"Those might be fine control measures in some areas—I remember reading about them, too, in the field manual. But in our valley, those tactics weren't necessary since the villagers all knew each other. Every area is different and a curfew was sufficient for us. As it turned out, the curfew helped increase the legitimacy of the village government by showing that they could establish control."<sup>57</sup>

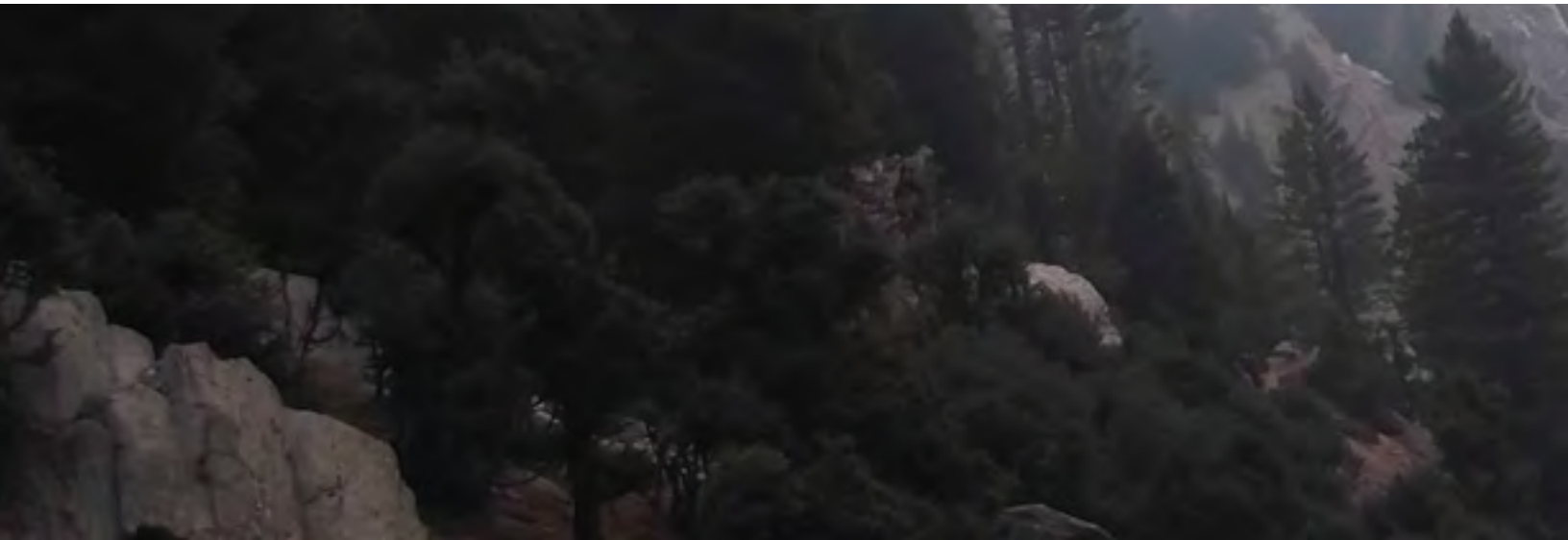
We especially wanted the arbakai who were on duty in the evening to stay out into the night—so-called blue-green patrolling—as a way to reassure the population.

As Peachey paused, I remember thinking how remarkable it was that they had been able to adapt bits and pieces of dense theory to their specific situation.

“After about two weeks, we figured that our staging area in Er-Heb was sufficiently developed and that the arbakai were able to operate on their own. I know that doesn’t seem like much time, but, coming from a place where almost every man owned a rifle, they were already good shots and they were very enthusiastic learners.<sup>58</sup> They really wanted to take back their tourmaline mine. So Billy went to the elders and asked them to call Bashkai’s mala-wrai to discuss expanding from Er-Heb to Bashkai.

“A few days later, Bashkai’s mala-wrai arrived and, once again, we found ourselves sitting around the fire in the open-air meeting place as the men grasped their ceremonial axes. A feast was prepared and Danny, Billy, and I ate from three-legged tables fashioned from iron, a sign of prestige. Billy was beside himself with satisfaction, eating from this iron table—him! A Bari!

“I didn’t care either way—I was just hungry and anxious to get to the point. While we were eating, we were offered local wine from a large silver chalice, which Danny and I of course declined according to the Contract.<sup>59</sup>



After dinner, the Er-Heb elders proclaimed their pride in their new arbakai and their desire to restore mining rights to the valley. The Bashkai elders listened, but were somewhat hesitant—they pointed out that they lived closer to Shu and Ootah’s goons and feared Taliban reprisals.

“Billy interjected that if the elders nominated twenty men, we would train them in Er-Heb and then move in force to Bashkai. Billy and I would stay with the arbakai to show our commitment until it was time to expand to Shu. Only after our reassurances and a few glasses of wine did the elders agree and offer to find an empty house for us to move into when we arrived.

“A week went by before our twenty recruits arrived from Bashkai. We began our training course, much like we had with the Er-Heb arbakai, but this time we added an extra week to teach observation post procedures and battle drills. That went well, and when we figured they were ready, we departed Er-Heb for Bashkai, leaving Danny in the clinic.

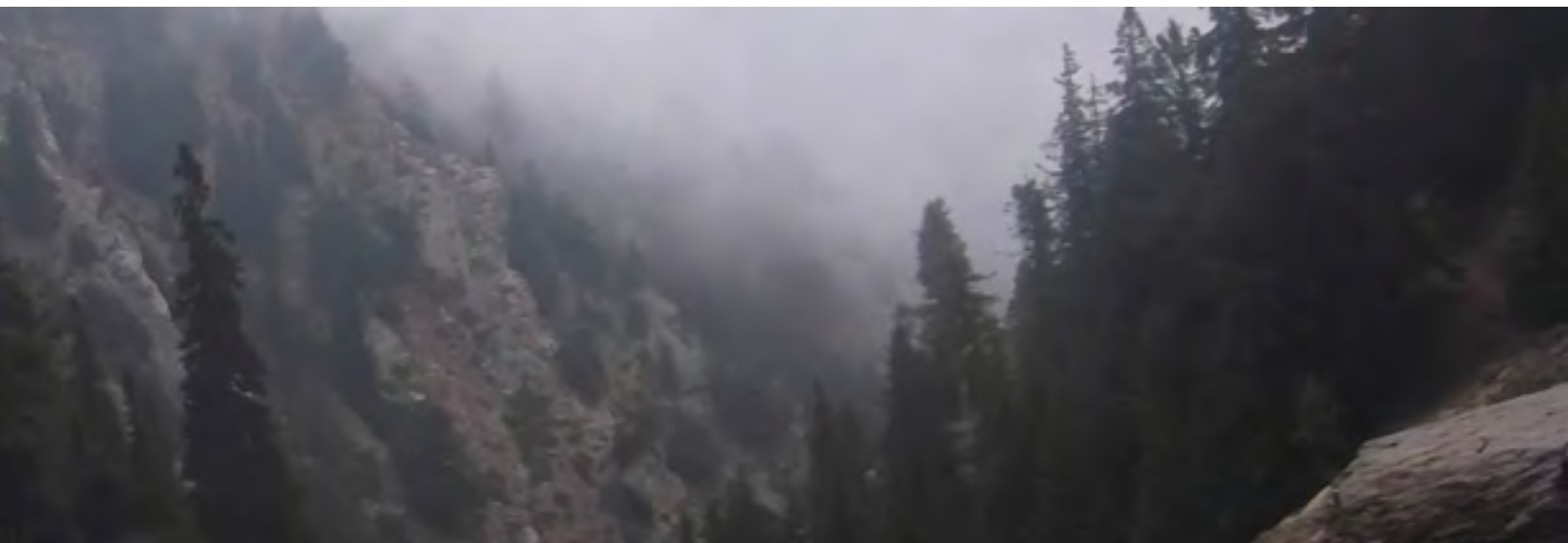
“We marched straight from Er-Heb and set a blocking position on the valley road to the south of Bashkai towards Shu. The Taliban didn’t try to stop us, which was surprising since this was when we were most vulnerable. Their uncanny restraint made me nervous, so I made sure I had the drones ready to fly.

“Just as before, we arranged, through the mala-wrai, to pay villagers in grain and cheese to help build an observation post at the blocking position, using the same template of an alpine hut.

"The day after construction was completed, a few of Ootah's men attacked. Billy and I had just sat down to lunch in the village when we heard gunfire to the south. By the time Billy gathered the other arbakai, it was clear from the pace of the fighting that the Taliban were hammering the observation post. I ran back to our house and launched a drone, striking several enemy fighters grouped behind a boulder alongside the river. This broke the enemy's fire long enough for our arbakai to maneuver, just like we taught them in their third week of training. Within twenty minutes, the arbakai had routed the enemy from their positions along the river and forced them to retreat back to Shu. We had our first victory.

"My slow response with the drone strike, though, made it clear that we needed a way to talk to the observation posts. So Billy arranged for some villagers who were traveling to Jalalabad that week to purchase some push-to-talk radios and plenty of batteries. When the radios arrived, we issued two per observation post so they could call Billy during an attack. We agreed that Billy would tell me if we needed to launch a drone.

"Our arbakai in Bashkai used the same patrol tactics that we used in Er-Heb, but this time the Taliban didn't stay away. A week after our victory at the observation post, a pair of arbakai on a blue-green patrol came across



some Taliban slinking through the village and scared them away. Over the next three weeks, the Taliban delivered a few night letters—mainly threats of reprisals if we expanded toward The General—but our unpredictable deterrent tactics prevented any major incursions. Around the same time, we instituted a curfew in Bashkai, with the same kinds of fines for violations that we levied in Er-Heb.

"After about a month, we were well established in Er-Heb and Bashkai. The arbakai were also operating well on their own. The villages were secure. One way we knew we were doing well is that the Taliban, fearing the worst, began to send fighters up from the mouth of the valley, and our observation posts repelled numerous attacks. The attacks came mostly in the evening, about thirty minutes before sunset. We could tell whenever the Taliban were trying to overrun an observation post by the volume of fire and their aggressive tactics. When an attack began, the arbakai would radio Billy, who, if necessary, would request a drone—I ended up conducting three strikes. The confidence of our arbakai increased with every attack they repelled.

"By now, Billy's and my house in Bashkai was a happening spot—villagers from Bashkai and Er-Heb would regularly show up unannounced to chat. We would, of course, make tea and hear them out—sometimes late into the night. I was reminded of the 'coffee klatches' that Edward Lansdale hosted for Philippine government officials during the Huk Rebellion in the early 1950s.<sup>60</sup> Once a week, we would invite the arbakai and elders from the mala-wrai to tea for informal discussions about whatever was on their minds—usually The General. It also turned out to be a great way for me to recommend slight adjustments to the arbakai's operations or

provide an objective opinion in a village dispute. The ‘tea klatch’ sessions also allowed Billy and me to expand our informal influence among the villages, especially regarding the reformation of the valley-wide council to manage the tourmaline mine.

“One of the better ideas from our tea-and-talk sessions was a slogan proposed by one of the Bashkai arbakai: ‘Our Valley, our Tourmaline, our Pride.’<sup>61</sup> The idea was to reinforce the understanding among the villagers that the arbakai were fighting for them: to remove the Taliban puppet Ootah, restore tourmaline mining rights to the entire valley, and ensure that nothing like this ever happened again. This sounds obvious but, in a valley where arbakai did not previously exist, it was important to keep emphasizing this message. So, we hired a local Bari craftsman to create small signs with the slogan neatly written on them and posted them around Bashkai and Er-Heb. We even were able to sneak a few into Shu, although those didn’t last long.

“Late one evening, not long after the Taliban’s attacks tailed off, Billy and I received a visit from two of the arbakai. They said an elder from Shu was waiting to speak with us in the open-air meeting place, along with some of the elders from Bashkai. We grabbed our jackets and followed them out. By this time, it was September and the air was cold, so I pulled my heavy down jacket close as we huddled near the fire. The elder from Shu, whom I called Pikky Kergan after a guy he resembled from my first platoon, was asking us to provide his village with arbakai and said he already had a house picked out for us. He told us that a few of his villagers still mined some of the smaller tourmaline shafts, but they were being taxed so heavily by Ootah that the profits were hardly worth the effort. He also said that more and more Pashtuns from Kunar affiliated with the Taliban were coming in to work the mine, and they were using dynamite, which was faster but damaged the tourmaline much more than traditional methods.

“Billy and I told Pikky that we would consider his request. Of course, we didn’t respond right away because we needed to test his commitment and see whether he’d come back to ask us again. When he did, we told him to send twenty men to Bashkai for training. We also told him to pass a veiled message to Ootah: ‘Abandon the tourmaline mine. Arbakai will soon arrive to take back control of the area and return the mine to the three villages.’<sup>62</sup> Pikky agreed to both terms and, sure enough, two days later twenty men arrived in Bashkai as promised. Of course, Ootah didn’t respond.

“While Billy trained the Shu arbakai, I embarked on a heavy disruption campaign of drone strikes. I could afford to use the drones more liberally now that we had trustworthy villagers and arbakai to do the main fighting. Any time we got word from our expanding local intelligence network of a Taliban checkpoint at the mouth of the valley, a massing of guards at The General, or a night patrol toward one of our observation posts, I would launch a drone to strike at them—as I recall, I used five in total during this period. By the time the Shu arbakai were ready, the Taliban and Ootah’s militia were on the defensive.

The ‘tea klatch’ sessions also allowed Billy and me to expand our informal influence among the villages.



"Before we left for Shu, I made one last trip to Er-Heb to see Danny and ask him to join us in the push to retake The General. I found out that Danny had been busy not only treating the villagers and the occasional wounded arbakai, but also helping the mirab adjudicate some local water disputes. The villagers loved him, and he himself wasn't in any rush to leave. Even so, he agreed to join us.

"Danny, wearing his body armor over local garb, accompanied me to Bashkai the next night, and we—the 20 men from Shu, Billy, Danny, and I—departed for Shu the following morning. Two pairs of arbakai pushed past Shu and established a blocking position along the road toward the south. Another two pairs turned straight up the pass to block any incursion from the west. With the remaining twelve men, Billy, Danny, and I crept up on the mountain that held The General and, at first light, began our assault. Danny led six of the arbakai towards the small administrative building at the base of the mountain while Billy and I accompanied the remainder to an elevated position near the shafts. Once we were set, Danny and his arbakai moved on the building and seized it. No one was inside.

"We had captured The General.

"While Billy and I were poking around the mine shafts, I heard gunfire erupt from the valley floor—word of our arrival had traveled quickly. As I rushed to the mouth of the mine shaft, I saw a rocket-propelled grenade slam into the side of the administrative building, kicking up a cloud of rocks and dust. Our arbakai opened fire and I quickly sent up a drone, which routed the attackers in short order.

"Leaving the arbakai on the high ground, I made my way down to the building. Danny came out to meet me, his beard covered in dust and his rifle slung across his chest. He was holding the rocket's tail fin like a scepter. Blood soaked his left sleeve and I noticed a small piece of metal sticking through a tear in his shirt. 'I'm okay,' he said. 'I'll go back to Er-Heb to take care of this. You need to get to Shu.'

"So, leaving two pairs of arbakai at the mine, Billy and I took the rest to Shu, where we asked Pikky to gather the mala-wrai. When everyone was present, we told them what had happened, and explained that they needed to pay the villagers in grain and cheese to build observation posts in the valley road and at the pass. This would prevent the Taliban from launching a counter-attack to retake the mine. Then, following the same plan we used at Er-Heb and Bashkai, we placed the Shu arbakai on a patrol rotation and instituted a curfew in the village.

"After a few weeks, things settled down considerably in Shu. It turned out that there had been really very few Taliban in Shu itself and they were not well liked. Two villagers who had quietly supported them were fined one goat each. Even though the arbakai searched every square inch of Shu, however, Ootah eluded us. His capture was the final victory we needed to ensure the valley's security.

"The Taliban, obviously upset about the loss of the tourmaline mine, attempted to enter the village on two consecutive nights in the week after we had secured it. But the men at our observation posts at the passes and on the valley floor, with the help of two well-placed drone strikes, turned them away. With the villages and the mine now firmly under the control of the arbakai, we began to attract defectors from Ootah's opportunistic lieutenants, who were coaxed with rewards of goats. They complained that they were tired of how hard life had become for them since we brought arbakai to the valley.<sup>63</sup> A good thing, because I was out of drones.

"With control established in the valley, Billy and I called the elders of the three villages together and suggested that they reconvene the valley-wide du-wrai council so that mining could continue in the spring. They agreed and said that, over the winter, each village would nominate members to sit on the council. Once they did that, the next step would be to divide the shafts and reinstitute trade via their traditional routes over the mountains to Peshawar.

"The last order of business was Ootah, who was still at large. The Shu villagers, now feeling safe from reprisals, reported to the arbakai that he was hiding out at an alpine hut south of The General. Shu's mala-wrai talked to

his relatives and summoned him back to the village. After about a week, he returned and was imprisoned for a short time while a specially convened du-wrai deliberated his punishment. Ultimately, a hefty fine of goats was levied on Ootah, and he and his sons were banned from sitting on the mala-wrai. His social prestige was effectively ruined.

"With all of the action in Shu, I hadn't seen Danny in weeks. So, once the matter with Ootah was decided, I made the trek to Er-Heb. When I arrived, I was a bit startled to see Danny wearing a white woolen coat with red and blue squares embroidered on the sleeve—a garment typically reserved for the high-status dustuks. He had turned the rocket tailfin into a scepter and was carrying it around like one of the elders' ceremonial axes.<sup>64</sup>

"I've been meaning to talk to you about something,' said Danny as soon as I arrived. He was weighing his scepter in his hand, not looking at me, so I knew something big was on his mind. 'Roxanne and I have been spending a lot of time together at the clinic. The winter's coming and I am going to ask her to be my wife.'

"For God's sake, leave the women alone!' I cried. 'We came here to get rich, not start a family. Remember the Contract: keep clear of women!'

"The Contract only lasted until we made a profit and we did that: The General is open so we can collect our payment,' Danny shot back.

"Exactly!' I said. 'Let's cash in for our gemstones and get back to Pakistan before the snow falls. If you're determined to break the Contract, at least let it be with alcohol. I'll see if Billy can run in some liquor from an abandoned Agency post. But no women.'

"Who's talking about 'a woman'?" said Danny. 'I said wife—a Nuristani wife to breed an Atrozan bloodline. I'm not going back to Pakistan, Peachey.' 'For the last time, drop it,' I said. 'What happened to "Plan your dive, dive your plan"?''

"I will marry Roxanne,' said Danny, and he stormed away through the pine trees looking like a big red devil, the sun reflecting off his Chitrali cap and beard.

"But marrying Roxanne was not as easy as Danny thought.

"That night, I joined him while he put the idea to the mala-wrai. They were not the least bit receptive and Danny damned them all around. Before we left the group, I furtively told them, using the few local words I knew, that I would be collecting my gemstones and heading back to Pakistan. The next day I returned to Shu by way of Bashkai, and informed both groups of elders of my plans. Billy, who had stayed in Shu, warned me that word of the incident with Danny had already spread through the valley.

"It would be better for all of us if you could make Danny drop all this nonsense about marriage,' Billy said. 'You are good men, but even a good man with good intentions can cause a lot of trouble if he doesn't understand what he is doing. I'll go with you to Er-Heb to sort this out.'

"Accompanied by two of the arbakai, I led a pair of horses from Shu to The General and we filled their packs with rough gemstones. The next morning, we left for Er-Heb. When we arrived at Danny's house, I could tell from the look in his eyes that he was drugged—probably opiates, still self-medicating after his injury. Billy explained to Danny that, besides the fact that Roxanne's father already had another suitor in mind, the other villages feared that Er-Heb would exert an undue influence over the du-wrai if an American married into the village. The last thing anyone wanted was a repeat of the events in Shu.

"But Danny wouldn't have any of it and pulled on his body armor and helmet. Then he grabbed his rifle and stormed out to go find Roxanne, whose father had prevented her from working at the clinic ever since the

incident before the mala-wrai. While he was gone, a large crowd of elders and arbakai gathered around his house, while Billy and I watched nervously from inside. A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north.

"About an hour after Danny left, Billy and I came outside and saw a number of arbakai to our left, just as Danny and Roxanne approached the growing crowd around the house. 'Call up all the elders and let's begin the ceremony,' Danny shouted.

"There was no need to call anyone. They were all there, leaning on their guns. Billy Fish sauntered around and stood between Danny and the arbakai. I ducked back inside the house to grab my body armor, helmet, and rifle.

"Then the dustuk walked up to Danny and, pointing a finger at his face, shouted something in their lingo. Danny responded by grasping Roxanne's hand and, when he did, a man from the crowd, who I presumed was her would-be husband, stepped out and began to raise his rifle. Before he could level his weapon, I shouldered my rifle and dropped him where he stood. Then all hell broke loose.

"Run!" said Billy Fish. "We'll break for the summer pastures if we can."

"I tried to give some sort of orders to the arbakai but it was no use, so I fired into the mass of them with my carbine and drilled three in a line. The valley filled with the crack of rifles and the screams of villagers.

"Hurry!" shouted Billy Fish. "Make a run for it up the valley! The whole place is against us." So we started up the valley with the arbakai firing on our heels and Danny crying out that he was betrayed. The three of us covered each other's movement until we reached the base of the summer pastures, and the arbakai stopped shooting.

"Drop your plates," said Billy Fish. "We must hurry past the observation post over the pass. We are done for if the runners get there before us." Danny refused and began swearing as I tried my best to calm him.

"I'm sorry, Danny," I said, "but there's no accounting for the locals. Maybe we'll make something out of this mess, but not until we escape from this valley."

"Let's go, then," said Danny, "but, I will come back here and sweep the valley so there isn't a living soul left!"

"As the sun set, we approached the alpine hut that served as the observation post and saw the arbakai we had trained waiting outside with their rifles. 'The runners have been quick,' said Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. 'They are waiting for us.'

Before he could level his weapon, I shouldered my rifle and dropped him where he stood.

“Three or four of the men began to fire from the alpine hut and a round hit Danny in the leg. That brought him to his senses. We crouched behind a rock and I wished for a drone. ‘We’re done,’ Danny said. ‘This is all my fault. Get back, Billy Fish—you’ve done what you could. Now cut for it. Peachey,’ he said, ‘shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won’t kill you. I’ll go and meet them alone. It’s me that did it.’

“‘Go?’ I said. ‘Go to hell, Danny! I’m here with you. Billy Fish, you clear out, and we will continue alone.’

“‘I fought alongside the Americans for years in Wardak and they were always good to me,’ said Billy Fish, quietly. ‘I will stay with you.’ So Danny and Billy Fish and I aimed our rifles at the hut. It was cold. I can still feel it now.”

By this time, the sun was up and the perspiration poured down my face and splashed on the desk as I leaned forward. Peachey was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of his hands, and said, “What happened after that?”

“Billy was hit first as the three of us maneuvered up the mountain pass,” he finally continued. “Danny and I went on but, as we approached the crest, Danny stopped.

“‘There’s no way we’re both going to make it,’ he said. ‘I’ll draw their fire. You go on. This was quite an adventure, Peachey.’ Before I could respond, he put this in my hand and took off back down the pass singing ‘America the Beautiful.’”

Then Peachey put an antique ruby ring on my desk—I shuddered when I recognized it.

Peachey rose to go and I attempted to stop him—he was not fit to walk alone. “Let me take the whiskey, and give me a little money,” he gasped. “I’ll go to the Embassy and ask to be put up until I recover. No, thank you, I can’t wait until you call a taxi for me. I’ve got urgent business—in the west—at Peshawar.”

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Embassy. That day at noon I went into the city and, on the way, saw a crooked man with his hat in his hand, begging on the roadside. There wasn’t another person in sight and he was out of earshot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from left to right:

When you’re wounded and left on Afghanistan’s plains,  
And the women come out to cut up what remains,  
Just roll to your rifle and blow out your brains,  
And go to your God like a soldier.<sup>65</sup>

It was Peachey, of course. I put the poor man in my car and drove him to the nearest missionary. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with

“‘There’s no way we’re both going to make it,’ Danny said. ‘I’ll draw their fire. You go on. This was quite an adventure, Peachey.’



me, whom he did not in the least recognize, and I left him there. Two days later, I stopped by and asked the Mother Superior how he was doing.

"He died early yesterday morning," said the Mother Superior. "Is it true that he was in Afghanistan?"

"Yes," I said. "Did he have anything on him when he died?"

"Just this," said the Mother Superior, dangling my rosary.

And there the matter rests.

## Conclusion

While the storyline remains true to Kipling's original work, the characters in this reimagined version act in a way consistent with aspects of current counterinsurgency theory and doctrine. For instance, while Field Manual 3-24 on counterinsurgency promotes a "clear, hold, and build" methodology, this article uses an alternative approach influenced by Leites and Wolf in *Rebellion and Authority*, a foundational text in the Naval Postgraduate School's Guerrilla Warfare seminar.<sup>66</sup> This approach is summarized in the story as "disrupt, isolate, clear, and control," and is focused on limiting supply to the insurgency. It stands in contrast to the conventional "hearts and minds" approach promoted in the counterinsurgency field manual, which seeks to increase popular support and address grievances.<sup>67</sup>

The difference between the "disrupt, isolate, clear, and control" approach and "winning hearts and minds" is clearly revealed in the movie *War Machine*, during an exchange between a young Marine and the International Security Assistance Force's commanding general at a small fire base in Helmand Province.<sup>68</sup>

GENERAL: Your mission is to protect the people, not kill them. We can't help them and kill them at the same time, it just ain't humanly possible. Do you understand me?

LANCE CORPORAL: No, not really, sir. No.

GENERAL: What part are you struggling to comprehend, son?

LANCE CORPORAL: I don't know, sir. It seems to me that we are all here with our guns and shit trying to convince these people that deep down we're actually really nice guys. And I don't know how to do that, sir, when every second one of them, or every third one of them, or every tenth one of them is trying to fucking kill me, sir! 'Cause I'm a Marine. 'Cause we're Marines. And now it seems like they're handing out medals for heroically not being a Marine, sir. I'm confused, is what I'm trying to say, sir.

GENERAL: Well, you're just gonna have to get yourself unconfused, son.<sup>69</sup>

One of my premises in recounting this scene is that the alternative, supply-focused approach adopted by Peachey and Billy Fish is also more understandable

While Field Manual 3-24 promotes a "clear, hold, and build" methodology, this article uses an alternative approach.

to the soldier, Marine, or special operator on the ground. Only by focusing on familiar military tasks with a clear purpose are ground troops with limited counterinsurgency schooling likely to be able to execute an effective campaign.

An interview with a Marine captain in the HBO documentary *The Battle for Marjah* further highlights the internal struggle experienced by men on the ground as they attempt to “win hearts and minds” at gunpoint in what should otherwise be a fight for control—control they could effectively achieve by preventing resources from reaching the insurgents.<sup>70</sup> As the captain puts it,

Clear the enemy out and let the people return. General McChrystal and every expert that talks about counterinsurgency...we pretty clearly understand now that the key to winning any fight like this is to control the population. Not control them but, I don't want to use “win hearts and minds” but that's basically it. To get the people on your side and let them understand that you're here for them.<sup>71</sup>

A second topic the article addresses is that of the outsider-as-advisor. Just as T.E. Lawrence was famously “the man with the gold” to the Arabs, and North Korean partisans relied on Ben Malcom for critical fire support as well as essential supplies, in a twenty-first century twist, Danny and Peachey bring lethal drones to the Nuristanis.<sup>72</sup> With these weapons, they give the villagers they befriend an edge over the Taliban, and enable “their” villages to reclaim a tourmaline mine. In most instances, advisors should provide some sort of comparative advantage to their partnered force.<sup>73</sup> This advantage can come in many forms, including ammunition, money, and intelligence. Sometimes, however, simply remaining an outsider and providing objective analysis suffices.

In most instances, advisors should provide some sort of comparative advantage to their partnered force. Sometimes, simply providing objective analysis suffices.

To remain a privileged outsider, however, means resisting the urge to “go native,” which is a third element highlighted in this article. For the purposes of this discussion, going native is not so much a function of dressing like the locals as it is of adopting the locals' cause and making it your own.<sup>74</sup> In the movie *Farewell to the King*, the colonel overseeing special operations in World War II-era Borneo warns his on-the-ground subordinate, “You've got to stay British.... You'll never be one of them.”<sup>75</sup> Maintaining focus on US objectives and not drifting toward advocating for local causes remains a key point of performance for American advisors today.

In Kipling's story, Danny and Peachey make an effort in advance to remain incorruptible outsiders when they sign their contract to swear off alcohol and women. When Danny breaks the contract, however, the results are disastrous. Despite his position as an admired medic and his desire to marry into the village, he can never be accepted as a local in the valley.<sup>76</sup> ♦

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**LCDR Reed A. Kitchen** serves in the United States Navy.

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## NOTES

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Still photo from *Farewell to the King*, starring Nick Nolte (center).





# The Rise of ISIS in the Philippines and the Battle of Marawi

Colonel Edwin Amadar,  
Philippine Marine Corps,  
and Major Bobby Tuttle,  
US Army Special Forces

SINCE THE 1990S, THE PHILIPPINES HAS FACED NUMEROUS THREATS from insurgent and terrorist organizations that have thrived in under-governed regions. Mindanao, the second largest island in the Philippines, has served as a safe haven for both indigenous and transnational terrorist groups, including al Qaeda (AQ), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), and, most recently, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in 2014, several indigenous jihadist groups in Mindanao pledged the *baya*, or oath of allegiance, to ISIS, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), Ansar Khilafah Philippines (AKP), Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Maute Group.<sup>2</sup> By 2016, ISIS leadership formally recognized these groups, designating them the “harbingers” of *Daulah Islamiyah Wilayatul Mashriq*, or the Islamic State in the Eastern Asia Region. Isnilon Hapilon, a former head of ASG, took on the leadership of these groups as the emir of a prospective *wilayah*, or Islamic governorate, in Southeast Asia.<sup>3</sup> The Philippine government and its allies refer to this new alliance as the Islamic State of the Philippines (IS-P).

In addition to this newly formed collaboration between historically divided groups in the region, ISIS provided funding and encouraged foreign fighters to come to Mindanao to help create an independent Islamic state within the Philippine archipelago. These fighters brought with them new tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that they had learned in Iraq and Syria.<sup>4</sup> Together, this new alliance and the resources provided by ISIS made IS-P a formidable insurgent force.

This article provides an analysis of how Mindanao’s Islamic groups became a sanctioned franchise of ISIS, what resources ISIS provided to this new alliance, and how IS-P compelled the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) to develop new TTPs to counter this threat. The article focuses specifically on the Siege of Marawi, a five-month battle that lasted from May to October, 2017, and required thousands of AFP personnel to defeat the ISIS-allied forces and regain the city.

Ultimately, the 2017 Battle of Marawi offers important lessons about how ISIS and the resources it provides can change the political and operational dynamics in areas where the population harbors preexisting grievances and Islamist insurgent groups are already active. Specifically, ISIS was able to form alliances between combat-experienced groups in the region that historically had been divided. This new coalition brought together resources from each of these groups and, combined with foreign fighters, outside financing, and social media platforms, created a powerful force that the AFP struggled to defeat. Although the AFP was successful in ending the insurgents’ occupation of Marawi, it was unable to fully eradicate IS-P, which persists in the region.

ISIS provided funding and encouraged foreign fighters to come to Mindanao to help create an independent Islamic state.

## A Brief History of Mindanao and its Insurgency

ISIS did not emerge in the Philippines overnight, nor was the 2017 Battle of Marawi the first incident of radical Islamist insurgency in the southern Philippines. The current conflict in Mindanao is deeply rooted in the historical development of the Philippines and the Muslim population's long struggle for self-determination, which began during the colonial period.<sup>5</sup>

ISIS exploited local grievances that extend back to 1565, when Spain colonized the Philippines and converted most Filipinos to the Catholic faith. Filipino Muslims in Mindanao, who did not convert to Christianity, fought the Spaniards in a defensive jihad to preserve the Islamic faith and to secure their freedom.<sup>6</sup> When Spain lost the Philippines to the United States in 1898, it left behind a divided Christian and Muslim population.

During the American occupation, before the Philippines gained its independence in 1946, certain policies of the Philippine's central government, which was run mostly by Christians, further alienated the Muslim population: for example, encouraging Christian migration to Mindanao and parceling indigenous lands to Christian settlers.<sup>7</sup> Only four of the 202 delegates to the 1934 Constitutional Convention, which would draft the country's new constitution, originated from Mindanao. Similarly, during a nationwide election for the 98-member National Assembly, only two candidates were indigenous Moros (the largest Muslim ethnic group). Nearly all government appointees at the time were Christians.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, the 1968 Jabidah Massacre, in which at least 23 Filipino Muslim army recruits were executed by their fellow soldiers, gave rise to a full-blown Muslim independence movement.<sup>9</sup>

This separatist movement sparked the founding of several insurgent groups, including the Moro National Liberation Front, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and later, the Maute Group, ASG, BIFF, and AKP. All of these groups have fought more or less continuously against the Philippine government and military since the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> The insurgents all share the goal of independence for Muslims in the southern Philippines; until recently, however, ethnic diversity and regional differences prevented them from working together.

Several of the Muslim separatist groups, including ASG, aligned themselves with al Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The growth of al Qaeda in the region prompted the US government to deploy forces in 2002 to support the Philippine government's counterinsurgent efforts in Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines (OEF-P). The US military also established Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines (JSOTF-P) as part of OEF-P, to support the AFP in combating the threat from al Qaeda. JSOTF-P's activities included providing operational support and assistance to AFP

operations against insurgent groups, helping to improve the capabilities of the Philippine forces, and assisting the AFP in executing information operations and civil–military operations.<sup>11</sup> The United States ended OEF-P in 2015 and subsequently withdrew the bulk of its material support from the Mindanao region.<sup>12</sup> The US withdrawal coincided with the declaration of the ISIS caliphate in Iraq and Syria, and with pledges of the baya to ISIS by various jihadi groups, including some groups in the Philippines.

Figure 1: Map of Mindanao<sup>13</sup>



## The Rise of ISIS in Mindanao

The rapid expansion of ISIS in Syria and its successful capture of major cities in Iraq, followed by leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi's declaration of the caliphate in June 2014, were important events for Islamist groups around the globe, including those in Mindanao. As early as 2014, Mindanao's Muslim extremists began pledging the baya to ISIS. Perhaps the most significant of these groups was ASG, led by Isnilon Hapilon. ASG's baya was followed by BIFF in August 2014, the Maute Group in 2015, and AKP in July 2016. Retired US Army Colonel Dave Maxwell, a former commander of JSOTF-P, suggests that these groups were drawn to ISIS's ideology as a way to "enhance their legitimacy and gain recruits, resources, and respect."<sup>14</sup> Specifically,

he notes that they were attracted to the social media recognition and global attention that ISIS garnered, in addition to its radical ideology. Following major defeats in Iraq and Syria in 2017, ISIS reciprocated this adulation as a means to "keep its ideology alive by spreading to other countries where it could capitalize on conditions of political resistance that weaken governments and provide safe havens for training, recruiting, and eventual resurrection of its quest for the Caliphate."<sup>15</sup>

Several other circumstances helped facilitate the rise of IS-P. In 2015, the Philippine Congress suspended deliberation of the Bangsamoro Basic Law, a peace accord forged between the administration of President Benigno Aquino III (2010–2016) and MILF.<sup>16</sup> This accord was the culmination of 18 years of negotiations to end an insurgent conflict that had claimed tens of thousands of lives and displaced millions of people.<sup>17</sup> The following year, in 2016, President Rodrigo Duterte was elected to office and made a violent campaign against illicit drugs the cornerstone of his domestic policy. This new war took official attention away from the protracted conflict with Muslim separatists in the southern Philippines, and allowed a motley coalition of ISIS supporters—former guerrillas, university students, scions of political families, and Christian converts to Islam—to grow into a fighting force with surprising staying power.<sup>18</sup>

### IS-P and the Battle of Marawi

In May 2017, IS-P launched its first major offensive and took control of Marawi, a predominantly Muslim city on Mindanao with a population of over 200,000.<sup>20</sup> The ensuing five-month battle by government forces to free Marawi from the insurgents became the longest and bloodiest Philippine military operation since World War II. It ultimately led to the deaths of IS-P leader Hapilon and his deputy, Omar Maute of the Maute Group; approximately 165 Filipino soldiers and policemen; 920 militants; and at least 47 civilians.<sup>21</sup> The fighting left almost the entire population displaced and the city in ruins.<sup>22</sup>

Figure 2: Muslim population per province.<sup>19</sup>



Mindanao's Muslim extremists were drawn to ISIS's ideology as a way to "enhance their legitimacy and gain recruits, resources, and respect."



IS-P's initial success in the Battle of Marawi was largely a result of the reconciliation that ISIS facilitated between the existing militant groups in the region, which allowed them to overcome their historical differences and work together. IS-P created an organizational structure that was similar to a military task force, in which the different units cooperated to perform a specific task while maintaining their independence from one another.

ISIS made it possible for the IS-P fighters to move out of their traditional jungle settings and fight an urban battle.

In addition to fostering collaboration between the groups within IS-P, ISIS also brought important resources to the Battle of Marawi, including foreign fighters. When the battle broke out in May 2017, ISIS media released a video encouraging supporters who could not reach Iraq or Syria to travel instead to the Philippines.<sup>23</sup> At the conclusion of the Marawi siege, the bodies of at least 13 foreign fighters—from Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Chechnya, Yemen, India, Morocco, and Turkey—confirmed that foreign support to the insurgency included actual participation in combat operations.<sup>24</sup> Prior to ISIS's sponsorship, ASG and BIFF had links with transnational groups such as al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah, a violent Southeast Asian Islamist group, but the support provided by these terrorist organizations was limited mostly to training and funding.<sup>25</sup> ISIS helped fund the Philippine groups and also assisted IS-P by providing accounts on social media platforms such as Facebook and Telegram, which IS-P used to circulate videos and send messages and other information.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps most important, ISIS taught new TTPs to IS-P, such as how to make good tactical use of the urban terrain—training that enabled IS-P fighters to hold the city against government forces for 154 days. For example, a January 2018 AFP report titled “Operational Assessment on the Participation of Marine Operating Forces in the Joint Operations for the Liberation of Marawi City” describes how IS-P deployed snipers in high-rise buildings throughout the city, where they could easily target AFP troops who were forced to navigate the city's narrow alleyways in single-file formations.<sup>27</sup> These snipers effectively paralyzed the AFP's progress. Although the military fielded a numerically superior force, numbers alone proved to be inadequate because the troops did not have sufficient space to fire and maneuver. IS-P fighters also used civilians as human shields, which further constrained the AFP's ability to destroy the enemy.<sup>28</sup> AFP troops were forced to conduct house-to-house and building-to-building clearing operations, which posed a significant danger because IS-P fighters had booby-trapped buildings and prepared other traps for AFP personnel.

ISIS made it possible for the IS-P fighters to move out of their traditional jungle settings and fight an urban battle. ISIS gave the guerrillas the capability to defend urban terrain, emplace sophisticated IEDs throughout the city, target the AFP with complex attacks that included small arms and RPGs, and employ highly effective snipers.

Figure 3 depicts the location of significant actions in the main battle area of Marawi City, combining all IS-P TTPs, including small arms, sniper, and RPG attacks. This figure demonstrates how the ASG and Maute Group positioned their fighters along several main roadways in the city and used a combination of attacks to slow the advance of the AFP.

The Battle of Marawi drew the AFP into urban warfare, a form of fighting that was new to it. Though the AFP had fought insurgent groups in the past, using primarily jungle tactics, the IS-P's





combination of greater resources, new TTPs, and foreign fighters who engaged in urban combat forced the AFP to develop new TTPs of its own to win the battle. More than 160 AFP personnel were lost in the time it took the military to make these adjustments.

## Lessons Learned from the Battle of Marawi

The rise of IS-P in Mindanao provides important lessons for countering the spread of ISIS and preventing it from forging alliances with local groups. The grievances of the population in Mindanao were not new, and ISIS was able to capitalize on these grievances for its own agenda. While the goal of ISIS to create a global caliphate is at odds with local ambitions for independent statehood, ISIS was able to draw on common themes to win support among Filipino Muslims: the threat posed by “Christian” governments, the demand that shari’a should be the law of the land, the importance of jihad for independence, and the need to cleanse “Muslim lands” of non-Muslims. These themes drew several existing insurgent groups in Mindanao to align under the banner of ISIS, work together, and gain new resources in their fight for independence. These resources included seasoned foreign fighters, new urban-warfare TTPs, funding from abroad, and sophisticated use of social media platforms. Furthermore, ISIS presented an opportunity for these groups to gain greater credibility among the local populations and thus further their goals.

ISIS, in return, established a foothold in Southeast Asia by accepting the Philippine groups’ oaths of allegiance. Insurgent groups in the Philippines were credible and useful affiliates for ISIS mainly because they were already fighting for independence from a “Christian” government and offered a range of tested capabilities. By pledging the baya, ASG, BIFF, Maute Group, and AKP were able to receive resources and support from ISIS that the AFP did not anticipate.

Insurgent groups in the Philippines were credible and useful affiliates for ISIS mainly because they were already fighting for independence from a “Christian” government.

Marawi City on 23 May 2017.  
It was Day 1 of the battle.



In the end, the Battle of Marawi may exemplify the proverbial statement, “We won the battle but lost the war.”

Furthermore, the BIFF fighters and the majority of ASG fighters in Basilan, a neighboring island, have remained strong despite their defeat in Marawi. With ISIS still in the background, these groups are capable of resurging in the absence of government intervention. They could exploit IS-P’s five-month stand in Marawi and the military’s destruction of the city as propaganda to draw potential supporters and fighters from a local recruiting pool that includes children and family members of slain militants and innocent civilians, along with aggrieved citizens who were displaced by the fighting.

The rise of ISIS in Mindanao is a concern not only for the Philippines but for the entire region, and new policies are required to address the threat. The influx of foreign fighters and resources to Mindanao highlighted the need for regional cooperation to combat any further spread of ISIS. Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, for example, realized the importance of a trilateral effort to secure their porous borders to prevent them from being exploited by foreign fighters who seek to move from country to country.<sup>29</sup> Other international stakeholders must become involved to prevent the transfer of funds from ISIS to regional affiliates. Just as the Philippine government initially failed to appreciate the threat posed by ISIS, the danger needs to be taken seriously by governments throughout Southeast Asia to avoid further infiltration and catastrophic losses like those experienced in Marawi.

Additionally, although the United States ended its JSOTF-P task force and concluded Operation Enduring Freedom–Philippines in 2015, the rise of IS-P compelled the United States to reinstate its support through Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines, which began in late 2017. This new Overseas Contingency Operation provides advice and assistance to the government of the Philippines to combat the threat posed by ISIS.

In the end, the Battle of Marawi may exemplify the proverbial statement, “We won the battle but lost the war.” The AFP was successful in ending the siege and has not yet lost the war against the insurgents, but it also failed to eradicate the groups responsible for the devastating battle. The expulsion of IS-P insurgents from Marawi City following the death of IS-P leaders Hapilon and Maute was a tactical victory, but the massive destruction that the military inflicted on the city could be a source for eventual strategic defeat. The city of Marawi is in ruins, which is likely to further stoke anti-government resentment among its Muslim population. Although the Philippine government is taking measures to rebuild the city, the process may not be fast enough or occur in a way that wins the support of the population. The complex situation in Mindanao still poses a threat that could allow the resurgence of IS-P elements. ◆

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Isnilon Hapilon's house after the fighting, Marawi, Philippines, on 28 October 2017.





# Déjà Vu: The Shared History of SOF— Switzerland as a Case Study

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**S**PECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES HAVE BECOME A MAINSTAY OF MILITARY operations in the twenty-first century, but the journey to reach this point has been neither quick nor painless. Most of the existing literature on SOF history, the theories and principles of its use, SOF's role in achieving national security objectives, and its strategic utility and disutility, was written from the perspective of major military powers like the United States.<sup>1</sup> Although Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, in particular, have expanded the analysis of SOF from a small state perspective in recent years, their historical investigations remain underdeveloped.<sup>2</sup> This article explores the origins of Switzerland's special forces to answer the following question: Are there any similarities in the ways that small states and major powers created and developed their SOF? This analysis finds that, despite apparent differences between the SOF of major powers and those of a small state like Switzerland, there are common characteristics in their origins and development that decision makers should understand to avoid misapplying their forces.

Neutrality has been one of the basic tenets of Switzerland's security policy since 1815, and therefore Switzerland was not militarily involved in the two world wars of the twentieth century. Switzerland is not a member of any military alliance (e.g., NATO), it has not joined the European Union, and its armed forces are rooted in the conscription system.<sup>3</sup> These historical characteristics suggest that there might be differences between the origin and development of Swiss SOF and the SOF of other countries. For these reasons, the Swiss case offers a useful test of concept for the general historical characteristics of other equivalent forces, and suggests ways in which senior political and military leaders might address specific vulnerabilities that are inherent to SOF.

## The Origin and Development of SOF Since World War II

History suggests that four major characteristics have defined the creation and evolution of elite military units—later called special forces—in Europe and the United States: they are born from crisis; they need influential benefactors to survive and develop; they can be a target of envy and resentment from the other services; they are in frequent danger of being misunderstood and therefore misused.

Elite military units are often created in response to a crisis and tend to evolve soon after a crisis has passed. Although elite units have been part of the art of war since ancient times, World War II was the catalyst for their evolution into a broader phenomenon and their present institutional forms.<sup>4</sup> The armed forces of the Allied and Axis nations created many elite or special units to address shortcomings in their regular forces' capabilities, to regain the initiative in battle, and to support indigenous irregular forces.<sup>5</sup> The United States, for example, created Underwater Demolition Teams, the Marine Raiders, and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).<sup>6</sup> More recent examples include GSG 9, the elite German

Although elite units have been part of the art of war since ancient times, World War II was the catalyst for their evolution into a broader phenomenon.





A Palestinian terrorist of the Black September group stands on a balcony of the Olympic village after they kidnapped nine members of the Israeli Olympic team and killed two others on 5 September 1972, in Munich, Germany.

Some observers suggested that elite units were being romanticized and that special forces personnel were encouraged to be arrogant.

unit that was formed as a direct result of the so-called Munich Massacre in 1972, when a group of terrorists belonging to the Palestinian Black September Organization infiltrated the athletes' quarters during the Olympic Games and killed eleven Israeli athletes and coaches, as well as a German policeman.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the inability of Germany's military to evacuate German citizens from Rwanda during the Hutu uprising in 1994 led to the founding of the German *Kommando Spezialkräfte*.<sup>8</sup> These and many other historical examples illustrate the unfortunate fact that the development of SOF tends to be reactive, a result of urgent need or the consequence of deficiencies or failures in other kinds of forces, such as the police or regular army.

Special forces also need influential benefactors, both to establish them in the first place and to facilitate their further evolution. For example, German leader Adolph Hitler's support was decisive in the creation and deployment of General Kurt Student's *Fallschirmjäger* (elite paratroopers) during World War II.<sup>9</sup> Also during the war, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported and supervised the creation of the British Commandos and the Special Operations Executive. The British Long Range Desert Group (LRDG) became operational in North Africa only after Britain's commander in the Middle East, Field Marshal Archibald P. Wavell, gave a personal order to the headquarters of the British forces in Egypt empowering the LRDG commander to request, with the highest priority, whatever he required from any staff department.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt took a personal interest in the creation of the Marine Raiders and the OSS, while senior US military leaders sponsored other elite forces such as the Army's Rangers and the Navy's Sino-American Cooperative Organization.<sup>11</sup> There are two reasons why influential leaders played such important roles in these special forces' development: first, when existing tools are inadequate to respond to a crisis, leaders must consider alternative options; second, these special units need powerful allies to help them withstand competitive pressure from other services and personalities.

The status of SOF as elite forces can create a misperception of inequality, causing members of the regular forces to view them negatively. During and after World War II, many senior military commanders felt that the new special units were doing nothing that could not have been done by a well-trained conventional infantry.<sup>12</sup> Some observers suggested that such elite units were being romanticized to the detriment of regular units, and that special forces personnel were encouraged to be arrogant.<sup>13</sup> The attraction that this kind of unit exerts on performance-oriented people can also present a problem. As former LRDG commander Major-General David L. Owen noted, "it is only the normal reaction of any good commanding officer to resent having his best men attracted to such 'crackpot' outfits."<sup>14</sup> Not only do SOF attract the best individuals, but they also typically receive generous resourcing that often exceeds what the regular troops can expect in both quality and quantity.<sup>15</sup> What is more, the impression that SOF training and activities mock military discipline, hierarchy, and order can easily irritate the troops and commanders of regular units, as well as senior military leaders.<sup>16</sup> These differences can feed mistrust and rivalry, and prevent effective collaboration between the different units. The proximity of SOF to the national leadership is another frequent source of contention with regular forces.<sup>17</sup> SOF units' strong political reliability and the inherent political risks that come with their missions give SOF leadership a degree of access to the highest levels of the military and political hierarchies that regular forces rarely have. Throughout the

history of SOF development, these resentments, misunderstandings, and lack of acquaintance with the special forces and their missions have too often led to disastrous results.

The inappropriate use of elite units can have severe consequences—beyond the immediate loss of lives—at the operational and even strategic levels. For instance, units of an ad hoc British commando formation called “Layforce,” which deployed to Crete in May 1941, were engaged as regular infantry to face the German invasion force and, underequipped and overtasked, ultimately lost three-quarters of their 800 men. Even more devastating was Field Marshal Wavell’s decision to disband the Layforce because it was judged to be too costly, and because the Royal Navy was reluctant to support the kinds of risky amphibious landing operations the commandos required. This decision ended direct commando actions in the eastern Mediterranean for months.<sup>18</sup>

The ill-considered deployment of elite French units in the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 serves as another example of the misuse of commando forces. A number of airborne assault battalions and foreign legion infantry battalions, which were formed to carry out offensive missions, were tasked instead to conduct a World War I-style trench battle to defend the weak French position from the Viet Minh’s wave assaults. The disastrous French defeat at Dien Bien Phu severely weak-



Captured French soldiers, escorted by Vietnamese troops, walk to a prisoner-of-war camp in Dien Bien Phu, 1954.

ened the French position during negotiations over Indochina’s future, and gave the final blow to the French public’s support for the war to retain France’s Indochinese colonies.<sup>19</sup> The infamous debacle of Operation Eagle Claw on 24 April 1980, which aimed to rescue US diplomatic personnel being held captive at the US Embassy in Tehran, was a direct result of poor planning, lack of interservice cooperation, and a flawed command structure, among other factors.<sup>20</sup> The mission, involving US SOF supported by conventional forces, was aborted during the insertion phase because several of the necessary transport helicopters were damaged before they arrived at the staging point. Moreover, a lack of coordination during

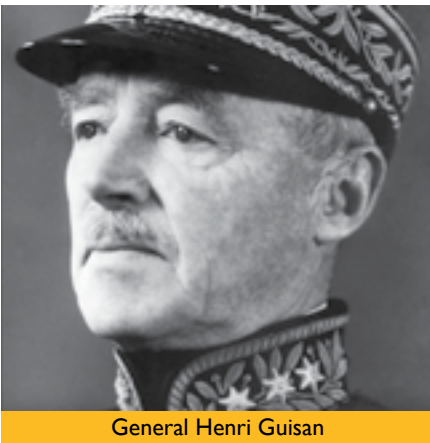
ground operations at the staging area caused casualties and the destruction of even more transport craft. This abject failure led not only to the loss of US personnel and prestige, but also to an official investigation that catalyzed the reorganization of the Department of Defense in general and US special operations in particular.<sup>21</sup>

A number of scholars have also written about how a lack of understanding of the operations and organization of SOF can negatively impact SOF organizations over the long term.<sup>22</sup> In *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces*, Susan Marquis describes the inability of military commanders and civilian decision makers to understand the proper use, organization, and needs of the newly formed SOF in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These misunderstandings had a unfavorable impact on the special units’ operations for the next two decades.<sup>23</sup> It was only with the creation of the US Special Operations Command in 1987 that military leaders were able to address these flaws.<sup>24</sup> These and further historical examples demonstrate that when senior political and military leaders are not well-informed about the needs of their SOF; do not understand the advantages, disadvantages, and risks that come with the deployment of these units; and ignore their unique qualities, the efficacy, or even the existence, of SOF units is put at risk.



To summarize, many SOF share four characteristics: they emerge from national crises; their creation is often dependent on influential supporters; they have access to resources that are largely unavailable to regular forces; and they are susceptible to misunderstanding and misuse. The question then arises: In countries where the military organization and the historical experiences are qualitatively and quantitatively different from the cases discussed above, do these characteristics remain the same? The history of the Swiss SOF, described in the following section, can help to answer this question.

## Origin and Development of the Swiss Special Operations Forces



General Henri Guisan

In 1942, when the Axis forces were achieving their greatest successes across Europe, a directive to demonstrate the resolve and ability of the Swiss Armed Forces to defend Swiss territory led to the creation of the first Swiss elite storm troops. That spring, while most of Europe languished under occupation by the fascist powers, the commander-in-chief of the Swiss Armed Forces, General Henri Guisan, ordered the Seventh Field Division to arrange a demonstration of its capabilities for both Allied and Axis military attachés. Responsibility for preparing the demonstration fell to a young captain, Matthias Brunner, who had distinguished himself in previous years by writing *Der Nahkampf* [Close Combat], a book on close combat techniques and tactics, and also by the “unconventional” techniques he used to train his infantry company.<sup>25</sup> To conduct the demonstration, Captain Brunner received more resources than were normal for an infantry company, and he was allowed to recruit volunteers from the entire Seventh Field Division. The demonstration’s orchestrated utilization of explosives, flamethrowers, and machine guns in simulated offensive actions, combined with artillery fire and close air support, enraptured the foreign officers.<sup>26</sup>

General Guisan, who was equally impressed by the performance, decided that same day to create a company of “infantry-pioneers,” similar to Brunner’s storm troops, in every infantry regiment. He only released his official order eight months later, however, after Nazi Germany had occupied France and begun to close a ring around Switzerland.<sup>27</sup> Although the Axis armies had not yet attacked Switzerland, General Guisan saw an urgent need to reinforce the Swiss people’s will to defend their territory and population to the bitter end. The tactics he had observed in other theaters of the war convinced him of the advantages of using elite troops. Although several officers had developed new concepts and had been training selected soldiers in special operations techniques since 1940, it was only the intervention and direct order of the commander-in-chief of the Swiss Armed Forces that made the formal creation of such units possible.

From the beginning, however, these new Swiss storm troop units were a source of division and misunderstanding at the highest political and military levels. Their original name, “pioneers,” was changed to “grenadiers,” because the signals corps’ senior officers did not want the “pioneer” name to be used by any troop other than their own. But the new name irritated the head of the Military Department, Federal Councilor Karl Kobelt. In a personal letter to General Guisan, Kobelt noted his concern that the name “grenadier” was used for existing elite units in Nazi Germany’s Wehrmacht. Forced to justify the choice, Guisan stressed the fact that the name “grenadier” had been chosen for its historical meaning, which went back to elite units of the Prussian, French, and Russian

The new Swiss storm troop units were a source of division and misunderstanding at the highest political and military levels.



imperial armies in the seventeenth century, rather than for any similarity to the German forces.

Immediately after the end of World War II, views on maintaining the grenadier units again diverged. There were several arguments against maintaining these elite units. First, many conventional force officers argued that these units were unnecessary because any well-trained infantryman could do the same missions; second, taking soldiers from the conventional units caused friction; and third, the creation of specific schools and training infrastructure for elite forces would drain already-thin resources from other service branches.<sup>28</sup> After much debate, General Guisan, Seventh Infantry Division commander Major General Hans Frick, and Major General Fritz Gubler, head of the pioneer troops, prevailed over their opponents' objections. The grenadiers began to be selected, trained, and equipped separately from the regular forces and centralized within their own infrastructure.

During the Cold War (1945–1991), the evolution of modern conflicts and the rise of the Soviet threat led to the further development of Swiss elite units. Although airborne commandos had demonstrated their value during the Second World War, divergent points of view within the Swiss Armed Forces at first delayed their adoption. Only with growing Soviet assertiveness in the 1960s and the personal support of the head of the Swiss Military Department, Federal Councillor Paul Chaudet, was this idea revived; it led to the creation of what became the first Swiss airborne elite unit, the *Fallschirm Grenadier Kompanie 17*.<sup>29</sup> If Switzerland were to be threatened by a hostile force, the primary roles of this unit would be long-range reconnaissance and sabotage actions behind enemy lines. In 1969, the new elite unit was officially subordinated to the Air Force and started its basic training. However, because the sabotage training was allegedly too time-consuming and the armed forces prioritized intelligence gathering, long-range reconnaissance became the unit's sole task beginning in 1976. Over the years, due to misperceptions about the special airborne unit's capabilities and tasks, its survival came increasingly into dispute. During this period, the Military National Defense Commission inspected the unit in an effort to judge whether it should continue, and it was only in 1980 that President of the Confederation Federal Council Georges-André Chevallaz, who was also head of the military department, decided definitively in favor of the *Fallschirm Grenadiers*.<sup>30</sup>

Despite several attempts to adapt the grenadiers to the modern battlefield, however, the storm-troop approach remained the formative concept of the grenadiers until the late 1990s. While the conventional armed forces went through various reforms and acquired new units, the elite units of the Swiss Armed Forces essentially stagnated until the beginning of the twenty-first century. This period was a step backward for the force, and arose in part from the lack of a clear doctrine and the weak support from parts of the senior military leadership.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, however, the changing strategic environment reinforced the need to develop additional capabilities and instigated the creation of new elite units. The territorial grenadiers, for example, trained for surgical *coup de main*-style operations on both civilian and military installations, while the military police grenadiers trained as military Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) units. Even so, the territorial grenadiers were increasingly perceived as rivals to the civilian police SWAT teams and were disbanded in the late 1990s, while the military

The changing strategic environment reinforced the need to develop additional capabilities and instigated the creation of new elite units.

police grenadiers' role was limited to close protection tasks. Finally, in 1999, the Swiss Federal Council published the *Sicherheitspolitische Bericht 2000* (Security Policy Report 2000—SIPOL B 2000), which established the doctrinal foundations for the evolution of the Swiss SOF and the first full-time professional elite units.<sup>32</sup>

The reform of the Swiss Armed Forces at the dawn of the twenty-first century represented a crucial point in the establishment of the current Swiss Special Forces Command. As early as 1999, a reform project titled Armed Forces XXI (A XXI) offered some officers of the grenadiers and paratroopers an opportunity to have their ideas for the reorganization of the grenadiers and the paratroopers adopted as an integral part of the armed forces' reform. Discussions between these officers and the A XXI project team's representatives, which were supported by senior military leaders, facilitated studies for reform of the existing Swiss elite units, improvements in their organizational structure, and the creation of a new full-time elite unit.<sup>33</sup> In 2004, the A XXI team recommended fundamental changes to the Swiss elite units. First, the infantry grenadier and territorial grenadier units were removed from the regular infantry regiments or battalions to which they were subordinated; the total number of grenadier units was reduced, and the remainder were organized in newly created grenadier battalions. Second, the grenadier battalions and the newly created permanent elite unit, the *Armee Aufklärungsdetachment 10* (AAD 10) were centralized within a new command, the *Grenadier Kommando 1* (Gren Kdo 1).<sup>34</sup> Third, the Gren Kdo 1 and the paratrooper command were merged to form the *Aufklärungs- und Grenadier Formationen der Armee* (AGFA—Army Reconnaissance and Grenadier Formations).<sup>35</sup>

In addition to military assistance and direct actions, the main roles of the AGFA units were intelligence gathering; the protection of Swiss nationals, troops, and property abroad; and the rescue and repatriation of persons from crisis situations abroad.<sup>36</sup> Simultaneously with the formation of the AAD 10, two other full-time elite units were created under the aegis of the military police: the *Militärpolizei Schutzdetachment*, whose task was to guard and protect government officials, and the *Sonderaufgabendetachment der Militärpolizei*, which was similar to the quasi-military police SWAT teams in the United States. Both of these units and their roles were merged in 2008 into the *Militärpolizei Spezialdetachment* (MP

Spez D).<sup>37</sup> The swift increase in the number of elite units, the restrictions imposed by senior military leadership on the resources available to them, and the overlapping tasks of the full-time professional units, however, left political leaders confused about the elite units' tasks, capabilities, responsibilities, and chain of command. The situation reached a climax in 2009, when the Swiss Parliament refused to authorize the deployment of Swiss elite units to support Operation Atalanta, the naval counter-piracy operation conducted by the European Union in the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean. The reasons for the negative vote were various and sometimes contradictory. Some politicians argued that there was no legal basis for the mission, while others cited what they believed was the units' lack of competence. Still others questioned the very need to maintain elite units, and several were simply against conducting any military operation abroad.<sup>38</sup> The discussions in the Swiss Parliament demonstrated the lack of knowledge that most politicians had about the skills and capabilities of the AAD 10.

Discussions in the Swiss Parliament demonstrated politicians' lack of knowledge about the skills and capabilities of the AAD 10.

In 2009, as a consequence of Parliament's refusal to support Operation Atalanta, the new defense minister ordered the defense department inspectorate to examine the AAD 10 organization and tasks, as well as its command and control structure.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the armed forces' senior leadership ordered the creation of a dedicated project team (TP 700) to investigate optimization measures for all the military elite units. In April 2010, the minister of defense, Federal Councilor Ulrich "Ueli" Maurer, ordered the creation of the *Kommando Spezialkräfte* (KSK, the Swiss Special Forces Command), based on the inspectorate's report and the work of the TP 700. This new command incorporated all the elite units of the different services (Army, Air Force and Military Police), and was positioned at the operational level, directly subordinate to the chief of the Armed Forces Joint Staff.<sup>40</sup> This decision did not have unanimous support, despite being ordered by the defense minister and supported by Chief of the Armed Forces Lieutenant General André Blattman. It created resentment in those organizations that felt deprived of their elite units and thought that the KSK was positioned too close to the military's senior leadership.

Emerging international security challenges in the first decade of the twenty-first century led the Swiss Federal Council to reassess the strategic environment. The resulting new national security strategy, the *Sicherheitspolitisches*

*Bericht 2010*, called for a new national defense strategy, the *Armee Bericht 2010*, which in turn launched the next wave of reform for the armed forces, the *Weiterentwicklung der Armee* (WEA).<sup>41</sup> The WEA was designed to increase the readiness of the armed forces, improve training and equipping, and strengthen regional anchoring—the flexibility and readiness of the military to support local civil authorities for disaster relief, security, and national defense.<sup>42</sup> Throughout the reform project’s development, internal and external military organizations at the Department of Defense level, along with some senior military leaders, questioned several fundamental elements of the Swiss SOF. Suggestions included reducing the length of time that operators would serve in SOF units; making the duration of basic training for SOF personnel the same as the training for regular troops; decreasing the overall number of SOF personnel; and subordinating the KSK to the Army. Most of these propositions reflected a persistent lack of understanding of the Swiss SOF’s organization and roles. Fortunately, senior political and military leaders, including Chief of the Armed Forces Blattman, President of the Swiss Officer Association Brigadier General Denis Froidevaux, and Swiss National Councilor Adrian Amstutz, played a significant role in supporting the Swiss SOF. In 2018, the Swiss Special Forces Command was confirmed as an independent service within the armed forces, alongside the Swiss Army and Air Force.<sup>43</sup>

The Swiss SOF’s origins and evolution support the hypothesis that elite units are often created or further developed during or after a crisis: in this case, World War II and the Cold War. While the failure to authorize participation in Operation Atalanta cannot be considered a crisis on the same level as war, it was the first time Swiss parliamentarians had to deal with the reality of full-time special forces. In the process, the very existence of the AAD 10 came into question. This lack of confidence in the force had profound repercussions for the roles and organization of the Swiss elite units, particularly the AAD 10, and was a catalyst for the creation of the Swiss KSK. The founding of the KSK and its eventual maturation into a coequal branch of the Swiss Armed Forces depended on influential benefactors who were able to defend the force against skeptics. From the SOF’s very beginning in World War II, several chiefs of the armed forces, defense ministers, senior politicians, and generals supported the commanders and officers who argued for the creation and development of elite units. Despite the support of such benefactors, however, the SOF units had to endure the misperceptions and negative assessments of some members of the senior military leadership who wanted to keep control of these elite units without understanding how properly to engage them. Furthermore, many senior officers, outraged at seeing resources diverted from the regular forces to the special units, tried to contain or even reduce the units’ capabilities and resources.

Lack of understanding about the value of Swiss elite units brought these units to the brink of extinction more than once. Since the creation of Switzerland’s full-time SOF, myopia regarding global threats led some to again question the need for special forces and the organization and resources linked to them. More recently, however, new emerging threats and the need for greater operational

Lack of understanding about the value of Swiss elite units brought these units to the brink of extinction more than once.



Brigadier General Denis Froidevaux



Chief of the Armed Forces André Blattman



National Councilor Adrian Amstutz

readiness have led the Armed Forces' leadership to approve a personnel increase for the AAD IO.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

The origins and evolution of both small and major power SOF show four similar critical vulnerabilities. First, SOF are often created or evolve during or after a moment of need. Second, SOF need influential benefactors to become established, evolve, and survive. Third, elite forces are often misperceived as being favored over regular forces, which can lead to resentment and negative attitudes. Fourth, leaders' lack of understanding about SOF can lead to significant organizational and operational failures. Although the Swiss Armed Forces have important distinguishing features, the origin and development of Swiss SOF exhibit these same four characteristics.

This analysis of how SOF develop and evolve—in particular, the four characteristics that are shown to be common to many special forces—should help senior leaders at different levels of government and the armed forces make decisions about their SOF. Political leaders who recognize the importance of SOF in today's military operations must also realize the fragility of these kinds of units. Failure to support them can lead to disastrous consequences for the entire military structure and, consequently, for national security.

The creation and development of such units should not take place only reactively, during times of crisis. Political authorities must supervise the needs of these units and incentivize their development during periods of relative calm, before they are needed. Conventional forces' military leaders should not perceive SOF as rivals in a zero-sum game, but should be educated to understand that SOF are a decisive force multiplier with skills that allow the conventional forces to optimize their operations. Sound cooperation and coordination enhance critical functionality for all of the organizations.

In the same way, SOF senior leaders must thoroughly understand the four characteristics that have historically defined SOF and the lessons to take from them. They must

not allow the development of their units to be ignored by political leaders. Otherwise, they will have to wait for an emergency situation to get the resources and support they need, and history shows that solutions created during a crisis are often not well thought through and are implemented at a high price. Furthermore, SOF senior leaders must try to develop relationships with influential governmental and military benefactors who can help their organization to reach its objectives. SOF leaders and personnel must try to limit unnecessary elitist behaviors that could negatively influence their relationship with external organizations and degrade relationships, such as failing to comply with the chain of command and ignoring the orders and rules of behavior that all other troops must observe. Finally, SOF leadership must be able to effectively share information with external partners while maintaining the appropriate level of confidentiality. A lack of understanding about SOF roles and missions on the part of its

partners can have devastating effects on SOF from both an organizational and an operational point of view.

This article sought to demonstrate that the four characteristics identified above are typical of the creation and evolution of many nations' SOF. It tested the robustness of the proposition by comparing it against the allegedly deviant case of neutral Switzerland, and determined that it held true there, as well. Future analyses can evaluate these characteristics by looking at other cases,

particularly SOF in other world regions. Further analyses can also operationalize the described characteristics to demonstrate their statistical significance and explore other characteristics that might be significant to the creation and evolution of special operations forces. ♦

**Conventional forces' military leaders should not perceive SOF as rivals in a zero-sum game, but should be educated to understand that SOF are a decisive force multiplier.**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## NOTES

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**A**FTER A LONG, TIRING FLIGHT FROM COLD AND FREEZING AMSTERDAM to hot and sweaty Baghdad, I simply needed a place to sleep.<sup>1</sup> Upon arriving at the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre, the first thing I saw was a swimming pool full of coalition soldiers playing water volleyball, screaming and yelling for the ball and for attention from their buddies. I dropped my bags and sat down in the shade near the pool for a moment to observe. It looked like these guys were having fun, but I also saw lots of miscommunication and misunderstanding during their game. I was reminded of a small canal full of croaking frogs back home in the Netherlands: each player was eager to get the others' attention by making as much noise as possible, but they did so with absolutely no plan or structure.

## Background

Using unprecedented violence, the ISIS terrorist organization conquered parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014. The disruptive consequences of its campaign spread into neighboring countries and to other parts of the world. The rapid growth of ISIS and associated organizations was stopped by military action in 2017 and 2018, but the group's extremist objectives and ideology still pose a direct threat to the region and cause instability at the borders of Europe. ISIS fighters from Western countries endanger the societies they now want to return to.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, when the events in this article took place, there was broad local, regional, and international support for plans to confront and exterminate ISIS.<sup>3</sup> In the short term, US strategy aimed both to halt the advance of ISIS and to support efforts by Iraqi and Kurdish forces and the moderate Syrian opposition to break the insurgents' military power.<sup>4</sup> An effective fight against ISIS's influence in the longer term will require far-reaching administrative and socioeconomic reforms, for which the new Iraqi government is particularly responsible. Iraq's influential neighbors—Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Syria—also have a role to play. These governments and relevant non-governmental actors must do whatever they can to cut off ISIS's financial, materiel, and personnel supply lines, and to reduce sectarian conflict in general. The international community, including the Netherlands, must continue to appeal to these countries for their cooperation.

## Advise and Assist Iraqi Special Forces

I was sent to Baghdad at the beginning of 2015 to work as a staff officer in the operational training cell (J37) of the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Iraq (CJSOTF-I), which was commanded by a US First Special Forces Group colonel. My mission was to guide SOF instructors from nine coalition countries and US instructors (including Navy SEALs, Army Operational Detachment Alpha [ODA] personnel, and civilian contractors and staff from the Department of State) in a program to build up the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Together, we took over responsibility for the training of the three Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) brigades from the ISF. These three brigades operate under the command structure of the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), which is connected to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MoD) but reports to the prime minister. CTS

I was reminded of a small canal full of croaking frogs back home.



had its own extensive training facility and academy next to the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre and the Baghdad International Airport. Our program also trained and educated a special unit called the Emergency Response Division (ERD) at various Ministry of Interior (MoI) compounds near the Baghdad airport. The ERD was technically a subunit of the MoI, but, like CTS, was functionally under the control of the Iraqi prime minister. US advisors were closely involved on every level in both the MoD and the MoI. At the time that we were working with it, the ERD had been reduced to one-third of its original size due to heavy fighting and tremendous losses against ISIS.

The Iraqi and US training staff, the other coalition instructors, and I worked together to develop the training and education programs in a pipeline structure for better effectiveness and efficiency (see figure 1). This included a selection process to identify and remove unsuitable applicants before the start of the initial commando course. After the Iraqi trainees had successfully completed the commando course, they were divided among the various ISOF battalions to receive operational training. Additionally, before they went off to fight against ISIS, they completed many other types of specialized training, including sniper, medic, demolition, mortar, driving, and forward air control courses, among others. My instructors and I noticed that even small adjustments in a class could make substantial differences in the operational environment. Just by handing out and teaching the use of a tourniquet in the medical lessons, for example, we reduced the death rate of wounded ISOF soldiers at the front. Another improvement we made was in the use of the refit course. In this course, ISOF units returning from the fight against ISIS received additional training and adjustments in their drills and skills, based on their experiences in combat. These refit courses were also valuable to us because they allowed us to evaluate our various courses and education topics and make necessary improvements.

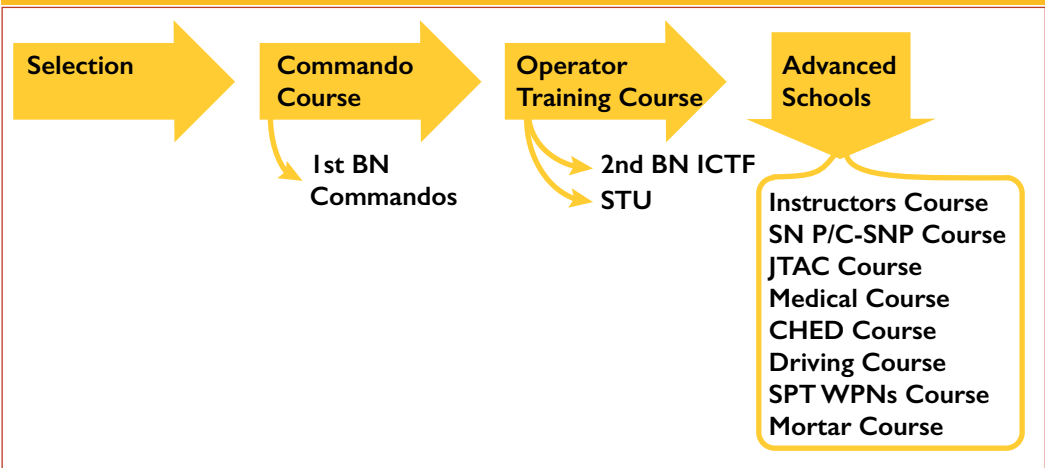
Every course in the training pipeline was managed by a coalition country under the US training umbrella. That country's personnel were responsible for the training syllabus and the training process itself. Other countries could support a course by supplying SOF instructors, as long as they followed the instructions and guidance given by the lead country under the supervision of J37. Only the lead country, however, was responsible for the result of its courses. US Navy SEALs, ODA personnel, and civilian contractors filled in the gaps in the pipeline for any courses with insufficient coalition instructors, for the refit courses, and

for the training of the ISOF operational Tier 1 unit, called the Special Task Unit (STU), which operated primarily as a counterterrorist team in the vicinity of Baghdad.

Every country brought its own sets of rules and regulations, which we called "national caveats," to the training program. Some countries refused to work with the ERD,

**My instructors and I noticed that even small adjustments in a class could make substantial differences in the operational environment.**

Figure 1: Training Pipeline for the Iraqi Special Forces





for example, because it had a track record of using extreme violence.<sup>5</sup> Many other countries' personnel, including those from the United States, could advise and assist ISOF but could not physically accompany its operators at the front. The distances from Baghdad to the area of operations made it difficult at times to coach the CTS and ERD units during their battles against ISIS. Good radio communications and the work of the US advisors stationed at the various ISF headquarters smoothed the process of command and control, but it could be a struggle to keep everybody informed and lined up.

## Coalition Partners

Having command over SOF training units from nine different countries can be a real challenge. After almost six months of balancing national caveats, cultural habits, rituals, characters, political agendas, restrictions, and personal egos, I had a better understanding of and respect for international organizations like the United Nations, NATO, and the European Union. Working in a multinational environment meant that we all had to have common goals. To make sure that all of the participating international partners understood these goals, I had to define a crystal-clear end-state, which meant negotiating until all participants were “on the same sheet of music”—that is, following the same plan—in compliance with their national caveats. If one partner had a different idea or another frame of reference, this could cause disruptions later on during the training process. My concern was that trainers would follow their own national command's directions instead of the ones we had developed together, which could result in variations in the quality of the end-product: the training. For example, two different countries' SOF teams in our program gave the same commando course according to the same scenario, but had completely different outcomes, because one group was primarily focused on the physical aspect of the training, while the other was more oriented toward theoretical learning. We also saw technical and tactical differences in how various nations' SOF interpreted a course and the training syllabus. Therefore, I considered it crucial to have all the participating international SOF trainers lined up and synchronized, and to have just one country take primary responsibility for a course.

Having command over SOF training units from nine different countries can be a real challenge.

A method I often used to synchronize the various countries and their course responsibilities was to set a clear and common focal point on the horizon: in other words, to have a well-defined goal or direction toward which the countries involved in that specific course would aim. That focal point typically would not change during the training, except when the CTS Academia director (an Iraqi major general) or the commander, CJSOTF-I, (a US brigadier general) came to us with new operational demands. This common focus created consistency and clarity in the training courses for the participating countries, and served, in military terms, as a “commander's intent.” Each country that took the lead for a specific course determined how to meet these objectives, but only after we had agreed together on the course's focal point.

The European SOF teams appreciated US guidance up to a point, but they also needed the freedom to improve, professionalize, develop, and be creative on their own. If you tell an experienced SOF team exactly what they have to do from A to Z, you will stifle their initiative and development. The guidance my group implemented allowed the various European SOF teams to “own” their missions within the US-Iraqi training campaign plan. Furthermore, because each course

had a clearly defined end state and its course curriculum was recorded in the training syllabus, it was easy for European and US SOF units to trade courses when necessary. If one country was going through a relief-in-place cycle, for example, and its personnel footprint in Baghdad was temporarily diminished, a different country's team could step in. Another example would be if more Iraqi students than usual took part in a particular course: then the coalition countries could help each other out by supplying extra instructors.

Often, a team I had “nudged” would then come up with its own ideas, which would, “by coincidence,” fit perfectly with the desired goal.

Once we had defined the focal point for each course, the US Ranger Handbook supplied consistency and clarity for the instructors and students across all twenty of our various training courses.<sup>6</sup> Still, there was plenty of room for initiative. Without this kind of incentive to excel, we would not have been able to find enough SOF instructors to deliver all the CTS and ERD courses in and around Baghdad. As I mentioned earlier, every country had its own standard operating procedures and habits for teaching and training other forces. But if a training team changed the focal point of a course without consulting me as the training manager, it would change the end-state for that cadre of students, which was not acceptable. Sometimes, I had to plant the seed of an idea that would help guide a particular country team in the direction necessary to properly develop its training course. Often, a team I had “nudged” would then come up with its own ideas, which would, “by coincidence,” fit perfectly with the desired goal. In other cases, getting a country team back on course simply required more of my energy: talking—and, more critically, listening—and drinking lots of coffee together. Some teams just wanted to tackle a problem on their own and needed only a person from the CJSOTF-I staff (me) to listen. I will not name and shame particular countries or persons, but I can say that I often felt more like a diplomat than a soldier when trying to solve problems between the US CJSOTF-I staff, ISOF headquarters, CTS Academia, ERD, nine coalition countries, the SEALs and Green Berets working for the US DoD and the Iraqi MoI, and, last but not least, the civilian contractors, who had a direct line past me to the Academia director.

Pick your battles, and you'll see that some of the problems you ignore will solve themselves without your interference.

Dealing with nine international SOF partners in and around the ISOF academy required constant mediation. The direct military approach of giving commands could work in this case, but it is sometimes counter-productive because it can stifle initiative. Bringing plenty of patience, along with the ability to let an issue between coalition and Iraqi partners rest without action for a little while, often worked better. On the one hand, for example, I have found many people from Southern European countries to be emotionally enthusiastic and voluble, especially when they want to make a point. On the other hand, people from Northern European countries are often too rational and can over-analyze an issue. Finding a happy medium and a valid consensus requires not only analytical skills but also a simple pragmatic approach—and lots of humor. Pick your battles, and you'll see that some of the problems you ignore will solve themselves without your interference.

An excellent method we used to integrate the various teams and better understand everyone's background was to play volleyball together. Because I spent very long hours sitting in the office and needed some additional physical exercise, I scheduled my own sport date with a different coalition partner each day: from doing CrossFit with instructors from the Southern European countries to running with Northern Europeans, to yoga with the Dutch and lifting heavy weights with the US Green Berets. This gave me the perfect opportunity to have informal

chats with all the chief international instructors and hear their ideas, beliefs, and motivations. I combined this schedule with morning physical training with the Iraqi commando students at the ISOF academy. These friendly discussions with both students and instructors gave me a better understanding of their interests and concerns, and improved my situational and cultural awareness.

## Cooperation

Working as a foreign staff member in a US military organization is always an exceptional experience. Coming from a European state with a much smaller military and having what I consider to be an open, curious mindset, I stepped into the US war machine. Sipping an extra-large Tim Hortons coffee while watching “Predator porn”—Predator drones hunting down targets 24/7—on big screens at the Joint Operations Cell (JOC) in Kandahar in 2007; or briefing the various US and coalition generals during a massive “How to Defeat ISIS” seminar in Kuwait in 2015 while surrounded by Pizza Hut and Burger King restaurants, is simultaneously surrealistic, fascinating, and frightening. It is certainly comfortable to be among the overwhelming military resources and crowds of people—military personnel, contractors, and DoS officials—living in huge camps with plenty of facilities. From the European point of view, however, these things are also very questionable. Do we seriously need US fast-food restaurants on base?<sup>7</sup> Is a swimming pool not a little overdone in an environment with water scarcity? What is the purpose of having two PXs on the base, where you can shop until you drop? Every Friday, we could choose to dine on extra-large tenderloin steaks and “all-you-can-eat” crab legs. Should we not worry about how much it costs to bring those crab legs to Iraq every Friday, just to ensure that personnel in landlocked locations like Baghdad and Kandahar can enjoy that American specialty called “Surf and Turf?” I immediately admit that I enjoyed these facilities and sumptuous dinners, but I felt guilty as well. The differences between living inside the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Centre and living outside those massive T-walls is the difference between day and night: overwhelming food and conveniences versus starvation and scarcity.

Despite these concerns, I found it fascinating to work with US and European SOF under one roof. First, we all had the same goal: halting the advance of ISIS by educating, motivating, and training ISOF soldiers and preparing them for war. This common goal forced us to work together in the CJSOTF-I. Using the standard operating procedures from the Ranger Handbook, we cooperated to set the baseline for the various ISOF courses. At the same time, every country was sprinkling some of its own national experiences and resources into its particular ISOF course, which made each course both more personal and more professional.

Second, all of the various European and US SOF instructors shared the “SOF mindset,” which sometimes made us feel almost like a family. This mindset helped us to understand each other and enabled us to learn from each other’s experiences, international backgrounds, and cultures. By putting instructors of several nationalities together to teach the same course, we created a cross-fertilization of experience and expertise, and by evaluating each other’s teaching techniques, we all learned from each other’s strengths and weaknesses. In the end, I believe we were able to get the best out of each other’s experiences, and the courses continued to develop and improve over time.

All of the various European and US SOF instructors shared the “SOF mindset,” which sometimes made us feel almost like a family.

Was everything about my job at CJSOTF-I a pleasant walk in the park? Of course not. The simple fact that we spoke many languages presented obstacles. The primary language was, of course, English, but there was still plenty of miscommunication. One wrong interpretation of an English word was enough to cause noise, confusion, and errors. Not all of the Europeans spoke English well, and not all of the US personnel spoke English without some kind of accent. Of course, as with any American-led military effort, there were a lot of acronyms and abbreviations that caused considerable confusion and delay. I learned to follow certain steps to avoid confusion. First, to better understand the language of the headquarters, it was important to demarcate the subject matter of the discussion. For example, it was important to know whether we were speaking about the US Department of Defense or the Department of State, because every branch has its specialized terminology and we non-Americans could be very quickly lost in the wide variety of jargon and abbreviations. Second, we all had to understand which terms were SOF-specific and which ones belonged to the conventional side of the military. Third, everyone had to try to use the correct abbreviations in each specific circumstance, because, as anyone who works in the military knows well, every setting, place, and circumstance has its own set of abbreviations. In an international environment, it would be helpful for all players to abandon their own various national jargons to prevent confusion and misunderstanding. One solution might be for everybody in the training program to use NATO abbreviations.

As anyone who works in the military knows well, every setting, place, and circumstance has its own set of abbreviations.

Another thing that was different was how the various staffs went about pleasing the boss. As I mentioned above, the working days were very long. Most Europeans in the CJSOTF-I started early because the time zone in Baghdad was not far off from the time at their military headquarters back home. They would leave the office when their work for the day was completed. However, the US staff in CJSOTF-I usually worked according to the US Eastern time zone (seven hours earlier than Baghdad), because of the need to communicate with US Special Operations Command, which is based in Tampa, Florida. The Americans therefore started later than the Europeans did and didn't finish until late into the night. But I noticed that even when their work was completed, none of the US CJSOTF-I staff would leave his desk before the boss did. I never understood why. When I finally asked about this phenomenon, other staff members told me that it was normal to wait until the boss was finished for the night, in case he needed to issue any final guidance for the night shift.

## Lessons Learned

I'd like to offer some suggestions for working in a coalition. First, all of us should try to respect the traditions, cultural habits, and national caveats of each national partner and use them as strengths instead of seeing them as weaknesses. In the same vein, it is not helpful to try to change other people's mind by showing them that their method is wrong and that there is only one correct way of doing something. Every nationality has its own experiences and lessons learned to offer in the training theater. Thus, the more we are accepting of the thoughts of others, the more we can all learn and be inspired by their wisdom.

Second, everyone must have patience. Coalitions are not built in a day, and coalition organizations should give participating country contingents the time to develop their ideas into plans. This will enable them to truly contribute to



the combined effort, whether it is through operations or through the kind of education and training programs that I led. Because most Western coalitions operate in English, it will take time for everyone to get used to all the strange and funny accents of the non-native as well as the native speakers. For the same reason, we should all be careful about our use of abbreviations, beloved military acronyms, slang, and technical jargon. We need to watch out for the “Death by PowerPoint” approach to planning and briefing, speak slowly when we give a brief, and try to use humor during the long working days to keep the atmosphere as light and enjoyable as possible. All coalition members must accept that some countries have a different schedule and daily rhythm by which they operate, and that getting upset by those differences will only waste energy.

Third, make sure that you have one clear and consistent set of goals for all the stakeholders participating in the mission, be it training or operations. For example, I standardized the long-term objectives for all of the training courses by adapting operating procedures from the Ranger Handbook and defining a clear end state—what I call the focal point on the horizon. Doing this helped create achievable expectations and understandable boundaries for the participating country contingents, within which they could then develop the courses in their own way. This took place under the oversight of both CJSOTF-I and its superior headquarters, Special Operations Joint Task Force-Iraq, and in direct consultation with the ISOF training command.

Finally, we all need to see an international deployment with multiple coalition partners as a way to learn about other national SOF and their specific cultures and, perhaps more vitally, to learn about ourselves. By listening, being respectful, and having an open mind, I created an opportunity to fill my backpack with lots of new experiences and insights. During my time as the operational training officer, I had the privilege to brief many US general officers and politicians, ambassadors from various countries, and other international visitors. I thought it was a smart move for my US colonel to let me brief these delegations, because it showed the high degree of international cooperation within the CJSOTF-I. Additionally, because I speak four languages, I was also able to clarify some semantics and dynamics between English and those languages. This made some of the international visitors much more comfortable. In particular, one of the visitors I briefed was the then-Speaker of the US House of Representatives, John Boehner. When he and his political delegation asked me how it was to guide nine various SOF units within one common task, I told him one needs to listen carefully, be very diplomatic, and negotiate a lot. He laughed out loud and said, “Yes, I know exactly what you’re talking about! It’s just playing politics and you need to keep all the frogs in the boil, right?” I think Mr. Boehner was exactly right: this is the essence of my story and my experience. ◆

“It’s just playing politics and you need to keep all the frogs in the boil, right?”

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**MAJ Jonas** is a member of the Dutch Special Forces.

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## NOTES

- 1 These are the personal experiences of a Dutch staff officer who served in the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Iraq (CJSOTF-I) in Baghdad from January to June 2015.
- 2 “Islamic State Proves Greater Draw for U.S.-Born Recruits Than al Qaeda,” RAND, 18 December 2018: <https://www.rand.org/news/press/2018/12/18.html> ; Rik Coolsaet and Thomas Renard, “The Homecoming of Foreign Fighters in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium: Policies and Challenges,” International Centre for Counter-Terrorism—The Hague, 11 April 2018: <https://icct.nl/publication/the-homecoming-of-foreign-fighters-in-the-netherlands-germany-and-belgium-policies-and-challenges/>
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- 4 Brian Katulis, Hardin Lang, and Vikram Singh, “Defeating ISIS: An Integrated Strategy to Advance Middle East Stability,” Center for American Progress, 10 September 2014: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2014/09/10/96739/defeating-isis-an-integrated-strategy-to-advance-middle-east-stability/>
- 5 James Gordon Meek, Haider Newmani, Brian Ross, and Rhonda Schwartz, “US Ignores Evidence of Atrocities by Blacklisted Iraqi Military Unit,” ABC News, 31 May 2017: <https://abcnews.go.com/International/us-ignores-evidence-atrocities-blacklisted-iraqi-military-unit/story?id=47745913>
- 6 Several editions of the Ranger Handbook can be found online. See, for example, *US Army Ranger Handbook* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2012): <https://www.amazon.com/U-S-Army-Ranger-Handbook-Survival/dp/161608877X> ; and *Ranger Handbook*, TC 3-21.76 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 26 April 2017): <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/tc3-21-76.pdf>
- 7 Former coalition commander General Stanley McChrystal banned fast-food restaurants and many shops from US bases, but his successor quickly reinstated them. Michael Gisick, “Fast Food Making Comeback on U.S. Bases in Afghanistan,” Stars and Stripes, 9 September 2010: <https://www.stripes.com/news/fast-food-making-comeback-on-u-s-bases-in-afghanistan-1.117636>



## THE CTAP INTERVIEW

### Todd Greentree, University of New Mexico; Changing Character of War Centre, Oxford University

*Interviewed by Dr. Craig Whiteside,  
US Naval War College, Monterey,  
California*

**T**HIS INTERVIEW IS TAKEN FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE COMBATING Terrorism Archive Project (CTAP).<sup>1</sup> On 30 November 2018, Dr. Todd Greentree delivered a lecture to students and faculty at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, titled, “Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth: The Enduring Consequences of US Support for the Afghan Mujahedeen during the Cold War.” Afterward, he spoke with Dr. Craig Whiteside of the US Naval War College in Monterey, California, about his research.<sup>2</sup>

**CRAIG WHITESIDE:** How did the US strategy of helping the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan come about after the Soviet invasion in 1979?

**TODD GREENTREE:** First, I’d like to offer a correction. The Soviet Union did not invade Afghanistan in December 1979. The Soviets had become entangled in what they termed “creeping intervention” following a Communist revolution that overthrew Afghanistan’s monarchy in April 1978. They believed they were acting defensively to replace an allied regime that had become extremely radical with one that was slightly less bloody-minded. Their plan was to stabilize the country and withdraw in a matter of months. Significantly, Soviet military commanders, the ambassador in Kabul, and several key members of the Politburo foresaw disaster and opposed the intervention.

The architect of the US response was Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Jimmy Carter’s national security advisor. By characterizing the Soviets as military aggressors bent on achieving an age-old Russian dream of securing access to the Indian Ocean, Brzezinski intentionally misused history, exaggerated the Soviet threat to regional stability and Persian Gulf oil, and set the stage for a revival of US military strength, which had been in decline followed the defeat in Vietnam. President Carter went along, describing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as “the greatest threat to world peace since World War II”<sup>3</sup> and securing initial domestic and international support for sanctions that ranged from a grain embargo to a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Carter was facing reelection in 1980, and his idealistic foreign policy had increasingly come to be seen as a failure. US-Soviet relations were at a nadir not seen since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: détente had virtually collapsed and the Soviets were benefitting from advances in the Third World from Vietnam to Angola, Ethiopia, and Nicaragua. Making matters worse, the Middle East had become an “arc of crisis,” capped when Islamic revolutionaries in Iran took the staff of the US Embassy hostage on 4 November 1979.

For Brzezinski, the son of a Polish diplomat whose family had suffered at the hands of both the Nazis and the Soviets, the strategy of arming the Mujahedeen was an opportunity to impose costs—to “bleed the Soviets,” as he liked to put it—delivering them their own Vietnam-style quagmire. There was no broader political objective.

By characterizing the Soviets as military aggressors bent on securing access to the Indian Ocean, Zbigniew Brzezinski intentionally misused history.





Charlie Wilson

The decision to sponsor the Mujahedeen as an offensive instrument against the Soviet Union was a commitment to open-ended, protracted war.

**WHITESIDE:** What were the unforeseen, enduring consequences of the US policy to work toward the defeat of the Soviets in Afghanistan?

**GREENTREE:** Without suggesting that US leaders should have been clairvoyant, four decisions initially taken during the Carter administration, and expanded into “Charlie Wilson’s War” under Ronald Reagan, had consequences that endure today.<sup>4</sup> First, the decision to channel US assistance to the Afghan resistance through Pakistan was a new phase in a complex, duplicitous, and largely transactional bilateral relationship. Similar dynamics continue today. Even though Pakistan received over \$20 billion in US military and economic assistance in exchange for supporting the Mujahedeen, it was never truly an ally. Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq’s dedication to Islamism and his enmity toward India meant that US and Pakistani interests were fundamentally misaligned.

Second, the United States suspended its non-proliferation policy for Pakistan. This included national security waivers of sanctions and the sidelining of investigations into the smuggling of nuclear components. It was during the 1980s that Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons and

A.Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan’s nuclear program, began proliferating to Iran, Libya, and North Korea.

Third, to support the Mujahedeen, the United States coordinated with Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and, most important, Saudi Arabia. The Saudis matched the US covert action program dollar-for-dollar, an amount that reached \$650 million in 1987. Less well known, but with an even greater impact, was a parallel Saudi program that sponsored Arabs who went to fight jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Among the generation of “Afghan Arabs” were Osama bin Laden and ISIS founder Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. That same program also established a supporting network of mosques and madrassas in Pakistan with the full cooperation of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI). This network still exists to this day. Motivated by the desire to eliminate jihad from Saudi Arabia following the violent and humiliating November 1979 seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and to compete with the new Islamic revolution in Iran, the Royal House of Saud and its Wahhabi allies launched a wave of religious conservatism.

Fourth, the decision to sponsor the Mujahedeen as an offensive instrument against the Soviet Union was a commitment to open-ended, protracted war. This commitment was primarily punitive and something less than a fully developed strategy, in that military means took precedence over political ends. Although the United States declared that its aims were Soviet withdrawal and an independent and neutral Afghanistan, its indirect support for the Islamic insurgency



actually increased the Soviets' determination and impeded the UN's efforts to secure withdrawal, which it had begun at the Soviets' request in 1982.

**WHITESIDE:** What was the thought process, if any, in disengagement from Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal?

**GREENTREE:** After the last Soviet troops were out by February 1989, US investment in war termination did not match the prior decade's dedication to indirect war-fighting. Such was the bad faith that the parties to the UN agreement—the governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the US and USSR acting as guarantors—had never met face-to-face prior to the signing ceremony. The Mujahedeen did not participate at all, and the US covert action program continued in collaboration with the ISI. There was a widespread expectation that Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah's government would dissolve as soon as his Soviet patrons departed. However, in a direct parallel with Vietnam, Najibullah was able to fend off the Mujahedeen for nearly three years, until the Soviet Union itself collapsed in 1991. Although a US Special Representative labored to unite the Afghan resistance, the Pakistanis had intentionally fostered competition among seven different parties and channeled the bulk of assistance to the most extreme among them. By the time these parties fell into an anarchical civil war for possession of Kabul, the United States had largely lost interest in Afghanistan. The Taliban arose with ISI sponsorship to seize power in 1996, and brought about a rough form of order with their Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

**WHITESIDE:** What are the lessons of the US reengagement with Afghanistan after 9-11?

**GREENTREE:** The principal post-2001 lessons for the United States, along with its NATO and other coalition partners, can be unpacked historically. In the first place, from the perspective of the Afghans, the ongoing foreign intervention there today is not the continuation of a 17-year war, but of 40 years of warfare and disorder. If, as Fred Iklé said, the most important thing about a war is how it ends, the failure to secure a political solution at the time of the Soviet withdrawal was a first-order error.<sup>5</sup> A second error lay in confusing the hunt for al Qaeda to avenge 9-11 and prevent further global terrorist attacks with going to war against the Taliban. After overthrowing the Islamic Emirate and hosting the Bonn Conference that installed Hamid Karzai as president of the new Afghan republic (in December 2001), the United States and its coalition partners proceeded to take the war over rather than listen to Afghanistan's new leaders. While Karzai and others welcomed the international presence and supported counterterrorist operations, they wanted to reincorporate the defeated Taliban, in accordance with the traditional Afghan way of

From the perspective of the Afghans, the ongoing foreign intervention is not the continuation of a 17-year war, but of 40 years of warfare and disorder.

Hamid Karzai



If current US efforts to negotiate with the Taliban eventually bear fruit, the war may end, but it is unlikely to bring peace.

war. The US decision violated the widely-quoted observation by T.E. Lawrence (titled Article 15 in his writings): “It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.”<sup>6</sup> Rather than engaging in an enormously expensive and unsustainable mission as accidental counterinsurgents, the US should have prioritized the current Advise and Assist mission from the beginning. The third error lay in attempting to transform Afghanistan into a Western-style nation state. Although it brought Afghans many benefits, this wildly ambitious, poorly managed, and under-supported enterprise stood little chance of success, especially because it pursued an unrealistic timeline and failed to establish basic order as the first priority.

**WHITESIDE:** How did the failure to end the war with the Taliban in 2002 impact the extremists of various stripes operating in Afghanistan today, including “Islamic State–Khorasan province,” the Haqqani network, and the Taliban?

**GREENTREE:** However unforeseeable the consequences for us today may have been in 1980, the underlying folly lay in enabling the weaponization of Islam in the first place. The problem has metastasized and is all the harder to manage, much less resolve, with no end in sight within Afghanistan, in the region, or globally. In this sense, Osama bin Laden was prescient beyond his own imaginings. The strategic idea that jihad against the Soviets could be turned against the United States and the West continues to inspire Islamic extremists, not only across the Arab world, but also among select Uzbeks, Uighurs, Chechens, Africans, and Filipinos, as well as sympathizers in Europe and North America. Pakistan rides its own Taliban tiger, but persists in its dubious and long-standing strategy of “strategic depth” by supporting extremists to keep Afghanistan weak and to offset India. If current US efforts to negotiate with the Taliban eventually bear fruit, the war may end, but it is unlikely to bring peace. An agreement may ease withdrawal, but rather than signifying success, the notion of giving Islamists a share of power in the Afghan government is likely not a long-term US interest. There are many reasons for this, but it follows from the idea that it is the loser, not the winner, who decides when a war is really over. ♦

## NOTES

- 1 The Combating Terrorism Archive Project (CTAP) aims to collect and archive knowledge on strategy, operations, and tactics used by military and other security personnel from around the world in the twenty-first century fight against global terrorism. Collectively, the individual interviews that CTAP conducts constitute an oral history archive of knowledge and experience in counterterrorism for the benefit of the CT community now and in the future.
- 2 This interview was edited for length and clarity. Every effort was made to ensure that the meaning and intention of the participants were not altered in any way. The ideas and opinions of all participants are theirs alone and do not represent the official positions of the US Naval Postgraduate School, the US Department of Defense, the US government, or any other official entity.
- 3 “U.S. Would Fight USSR Over Iran,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 8 January 1980.
- 4 “Charlie Wilson’s War” is a reference to a movie by that name starring Tom Hanks as US Congressman Charlie Wilson. *Charlie Wilson’s War*, directed by Mike Nichols (Paramount: 2007).
- 5 Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
- 6 T. E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” *The Arab Bulletin* (20 August 1917): [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The\\_27\\_Articles\\_of\\_T.E.\\_Lawrence](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_27_Articles_of_T.E._Lawrence)

## Ethics for Ethics' Sake

George Lober

I'VE BEEN HAUNTED RECENTLY BY ONE SCENE IN THE 2018 FILM *Bohemian Rhapsody*.<sup>1</sup> In it, a young Farrokh (Freddie) Bulsara announces, during a dinner with family and friends at his parents' modest home, that he has legally changed his surname to Mercury. Everyone at the table is stunned. In the argument that follows, Freddie's father rebukes Freddie's rock star ambitions with one of the old man's favorite sayings, a Zoroastrian precept that one should live a life in the practice of "good words, good thoughts, and good deeds." To which Freddie dismissively replies, "And how's that worked out for you?"

The question is rhetorical. In Freddie's mind, the precept's advice hasn't worked out for his father at all. Instead, Freddie's reply is intended as a rejection of the father's pious nature, his modest achievements, the family's humble home, and the moral principles that have guided the father's life. Freddie, as the film makes clear, wants more, and after betraying the love of his fiancée, the friendship of his band mates, and the loyalty of his agent, he achieves it, including eventually a mansion in which each of his cats has its own spacious room. However, embedded within Freddie's retort is a subtext: the expectation that the effort required to live an ethical life should be met at some point with tangible benefit or reward in *this* life. Otherwise, what's the point?

It's that expectation that concerns me. It regularly appeared like a ghost among the discussions with students in my classes. The students, of course, had anecdotes—variations on a theme—of the subpar serviceman or servicewoman who cleverly cultivated the favor of superiors or gamed the system into promotion after promotion over more qualified and deserving peers. Worse, there were the stories of unethical, less than discreet commanders who managed, nonetheless, to be regarded as heroes within the community. If those individuals managed to succeed and prosper by being deceitful and manipulative, why should one even consider a less rewarding, more principled path?

Unfortunately, it's a question without an easy-button answer. A philosophical deep-dive into the question requires more academic oxygen than this column can carry. A short answer runs the risk of sounding corny and preachy while still barely skimming the surface of the question. My first thought, at middle depth, is that both the causal correlation and expectation are misplaced. Let me explain.

As far as I know, a life founded on ethical principles is not a guideline to career and financial success, any more than a life based on unethical principles is a siren call to ruin and destitution. I wish Life worked that way, because it certainly would make being ethical easier, but I'm pretty sure it doesn't. For example, a commonly accepted tenet of existentialism states that life is absurd, which, among other things, suggests there aren't that many direct correlations between what happens—the premature death of a lover, the loss of a devout parent, a scoundrel's rise to glory, etc.—and the virtue, or lack thereof, of the individuals

There were stories of unethical commanders who managed to be regarded as heroes.



involved.<sup>2</sup> It's a tenet I'm not entirely comfortable with, but I recognize that rational explanations for some events may not exist, and, therefore, I need to keep blame in check. To go back to the case in point, I'm pretty sure Freddie's father's humble social standing wasn't because his "good words, good thoughts, and good deeds" caused him to fail at making money. And I'm pretty confident that a slacker's undeserved promotion is more the fault of the promotion system than it is the failure of a more honest peer to "sycophant up."

Similarly misguided, I think, is the expectation that the investment in an ethical life should at some point reap a material reward in this life. I don't think Life works that way, either. As Kenneth Feinberg wrote, "I now feel it's a mistake to plan too far ahead, to assume that life will conform to my expectations. Life is fickle and unpredictable."<sup>3</sup> In Feinberg's case, as Special Master of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund, he witnessed the capriciousness with which Life unfolds, regardless of one's ethical character:

... life and death can turn on the most innocuous events—requesting a second cup of coffee at a local diner, a ten-minute delay that miraculously prevents you from being trapped in your office in the World Trade Center; accompanying your child to school one day, which prevents you from being at your desk in the Pentagon when the plane hits; surviving the destruction at the World Trade Center by sheer luck, while your fellow rescue workers, standing next to you, become part of the fatality count.<sup>4</sup>

I believe we can acknowledge our own moral autonomy. We can think for ourselves.

It's this randomness and absence of any guaranteed tangible reward for an ethical life that's the rub. As Jean-Philippe Deranty writes, "Whilst we crave for sense and harmony, the world has nothing to offer but chaos and a random play of blind forces. All our efforts to impose order and sense upon a world that can ultimately accommodate neither are therefore doomed to fail."<sup>5</sup> It's that effort, I believe, to impose some order and sense, and thus justify the demands of a principled life, that led to the frustration and cynicism expressed by my students when they witnessed an unprincipled peer appearing to profit.

So, the question becomes, if there is no correlation between choosing to live ethically and subsequently reaping material or career success, what is one to do?

First, I believe we can acknowledge our own moral autonomy. We can think for ourselves. Autonomy, as John Christman puts it, is "an idea that is generally understood to refer to the capacity to be one's own person, to live one's life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces."<sup>6</sup> In other words, we can look to the strength of our own character and draw conclusions irrespective of the





cultural, social, or institutional forces trying to shape our values. By extension, moral autonomy then means relying on that same strength of character to select and impose a set of moral or ethical principles upon ourselves—to make, as Christman asserts, “value judgments generally, the most fundamental of which is the determination of what is *morally* valuable.”<sup>7</sup> Moral autonomy offers each of us the opportunity to determine for ourselves the ethical principles to follow. Sadly, it also implies a risk. Whenever, out of envy or ambition, we exchange our own well-reasoned ethical principles for the values of a less ethical individual or system, we surrender our moral autonomy; we buy into the pre-fab values of the dirtbag and manipulator, and abandon the constant work of discovering, examining, and reinforcing an ethical framework for our own lives.

Second, after acknowledging our moral autonomy, we can choose. We can understand that the world, in its often-inexplicable randomness, offers no guarantees of reward or punishment, and we can nevertheless make an existential choice each day to pursue a life guided by ethical and moral principles. Choosing such a life is not easy. Standing for those principles is a daily test. The deceptive and self-serving among us may well prosper; the deserving may go unrecognized. Consider, for example, a dinner party conversation I had recently. An older woman seated next to me asked what I did before I retired. I answered that I taught a course in critical thinking and ethical decision making. This quickly led to her sharing a family history of military and government service and how she had worked extensively for both the government and a successful corporation. In each of those sectors—military, government, private business—she admitted she had encountered ethical dilemmas, temptations, and breaches in ethical behavior. She then grew quiet and looked away. A moment later, she turned back and said softly, “Being ethical is hard.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “it is.” ♦

She grew quiet and looked away. A moment later, she turned back and said softly, “Being ethical is hard.” “Yes,” I agreed, “it is.”

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**George Lober** retired as a senior lecturer from the Defense Analysis Department of the US Naval Postgraduate School in 2016.

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## NOTES

- 1 *Bohemian Rhapsody*, directed by Bradley Cooper (Santa Monica, Calif.: GK Films, 2018).
- 2 Ronald Aronson, “Albert Camus,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2017): <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/camus/>
- 3 Kenneth R. Feinberg, *What Is Life Worth?: The Unprecedented Effort to Compensate the Victims of September 11th* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 171–172, Kindle edition.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 171.
- 5 Jean-Philippe Deranty, “Existentialist Aesthetics,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2019): <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/aesthetics-existentialist/>
- 6 John Christman, “Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2018): <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/autonomy-moral/>
- 7 *Ibid.*

## THE WRITTEN WORD

Reviewed by LTC (GS) Ole Stephan,  
German Army

### Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Elite Special Forces



by Lawrence Paterson

Annapolis, Maryland:  
Naval Institute Press,  
2018

Hardcover: \$37.70

336 pages

*Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Elite Special Forces* provides a comprehensive view of this unique World War II German special forces unit.<sup>1</sup> Author and military historian Lawrence Paterson succeeds in demystifying the history of this unit in a well-structured manner, and provides fascinating detail about the unit's key operations.

Paterson begins the story of the Brandenburgers by highlighting the characters who were responsible for creating this unusual and profoundly successful band of men. He traces the history of the unit back to its roots in East Africa during World War I, specifically to the guerrilla campaign under the command of German Army Lieutenant Colonel Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, known as the "Lion of Africa." One of Lettow-Vorbeck's subordinates was a young sergeant named Theodor von Hippel. Inspired by the example of Lettow-Vorbeck, Hippel reenlisted in the *Wehrmacht* (the German armed forces during World War II) in 1935, where he advocated for the creation of a guerrilla-style unit similar to the one in which he had served under Lettow-Vorbeck. He proposed a small, elite formation of men trained in demolition and small-arms combat and fluent in foreign languages, who would conduct covert attacks behind enemy lines.

The *Wehrmacht* initially rejected this unconventional idea, but in 1939, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the *Abwehr* (intelligence service), ordered Hippel to form such a company. Its task would be to carry out special missions during the wars that Adolph Hitler was preparing for, including sabotage and surprise strikes.<sup>2</sup> The unit, primarily recruited from volunteers, was code-named *Baulehr Kompanie z.b.V. 800* (Special Purpose Training and Construction Training Company). Its first base was in the city of Brandenburg-on-the-Havel, which gave the unit its nickname: the Brandenburgers. The large numbers of both volunteers and handpicked soldiers who joined the unit made it necessary to enlarge the company into a battalion, which was being prepared to take part in the impending offensives into France, Belgium, and Holland.

Paterson recounts the contributions of the Brandenburgers to German military campaigns during the Second World War, using historical benchmarks such as the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union. The first months of fighting in the USSR cost the unit heavy casualties. Not all of these casualties were inflicted by the Red Army, however: some Brandenburgers who were operating covertly in Soviet uniforms were mistakenly killed by their fellow German soldiers. Paterson highlights the special nature of both the Brandenburgers and their operations in his description of their unit's remarkable exploits behind Soviet lines in 1942, when Brandenburg personnel penetrated farther into enemy territory than any other German unit during the war. Driving captured Red Army trucks and wearing NKVD (Russian secret police) uniforms, they seized the entire Transcaucasian city of Maikop and its vital oilfields. Because of both their heavy losses and their achievements, the unit was reorganized, re-equipped, and enlarged into a regiment in 1940 and was further expanded to become the Special Purpose Division Brandenburg in 1943.

The unit's roles and missions expanded to include deployments beyond the battle zones of Germany's conventional ground forces. The Brandenburgers operated across North Africa, where they carried out clandestine raids against Allied supply lines in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya. They also conducted operations in Syria, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan with the so-called Arab Brigade, which was created as an element of the Brandenburg Regiment. The unit performed many successful operations, such as reconnaissance and sabotage operations, at the rear of the Soviet army and against the militaries of countries that were opposed to the Third Reich.

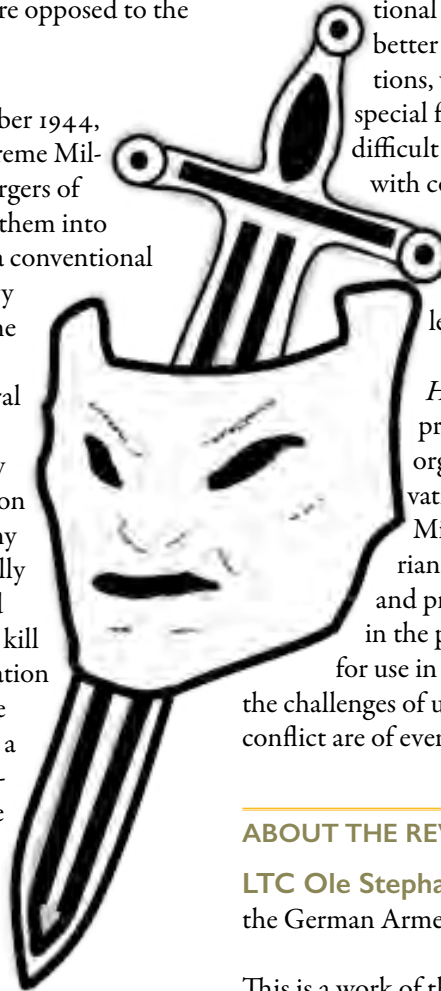
Despite their successes, however, in October 1944, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Supreme Military Command) relieved the Brandenburgers of all their specialist roles and incorporated them into the regular *Wehrmacht* order of battle as a conventional *Panzergrenadierdivision* (armored infantry division). This sudden fall from grace came because the Brandenburgers were closely linked to the *Abwehr* and its chief, Admiral Canaris. When the Nazi leadership came to doubt the *Abwehr's* loyalty to Germany and its Führer, the intelligence organization suffered a decline in support and lost many of its responsibilities. The Führer personally cashiered Canaris, who was later executed for being part of the failed July 20 plot to kill Hitler. The erosion of the *Abwehr's* reputation was also driven by competition within the Third Reich's leadership. The author does a good job of explaining this complex situation so that the reader can understand the transformation of the Brandenburgers from a prized special force into a regular part of the army.

*Hitler's Brandenburgers* rises above previous histories of this unit, such as Franz Kurowski's romanticized *The Brandenburgers: Global Mission*, which often encumber the reader with minutiae and random information.<sup>3</sup> Kurowski overlooks the atrocities of the Nazi era and portrays the Brandenburgers as “merely

soldiers” who just followed orders. In contrast, Paterson directly addresses the war crimes committed by some of the fanatic Nazis who served with the Brandenburgers, and so provides a much more balanced account of their history.

Overall, Paterson provides a compelling history of one of the modern world's first special operations units. Knowing the story of the Brandenburgers, their clandestine character, and the ways in which they conducted unconventional and guerrilla warfare can give readers a better understanding of these types of operations, which are presently being conducted by special forces worldwide. In the same way, the difficult relationships the Brandenburgers had with competing military and civilian intelligence services and the risks they faced due to overlapping responsibilities with other branches are a familiar challenge to modern special operations units.

*Hitler's Brandenburgers* is a valuable comprehensive history of the establishment, organization, transformation, and deactivation of this pioneering elite German unit. Military professionals, analysts, and historians may find that the tactics, techniques, and procedures that the Brandenburgers used in the previous century are worth considering for use in today's operational environments, where the challenges of unconventional warfare and hybrid conflict are of ever-increasing concern. ♦



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#### ABOUT THE REVIEWER

**LTC Ole Stephan** is an active duty general staff officer in the German Armed Forces.

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#### NOTES

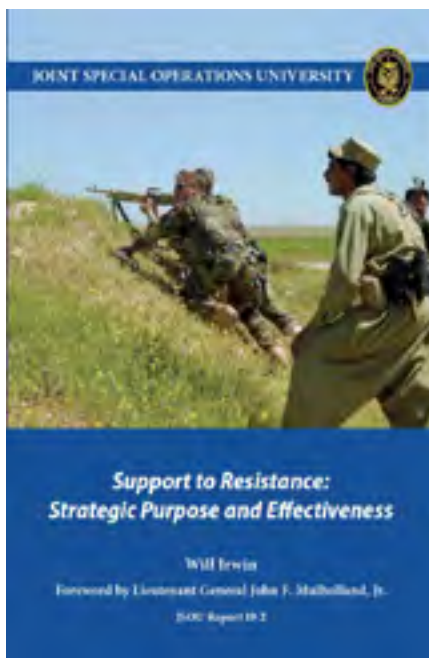
- 1 Lawrence Paterson, *Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Elite Special Forces* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2018).
- 2 Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, the event which most historians consider to be the beginning of World War II.

- 3 Franz Kurowski, *The Brandenburgers: Global Mission* (Winnipeg, Man., Canada: J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing, 1997)



## JSOU PUBLICATIONS

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### **Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness** by Will Irwin, with foreword by Lieutenant General John F. Mulholland, Jr.

This monograph is the first in a planned series of three volumes that will provide Special Operations Forces with an in-depth study of resistance movements. Mr. Will Irwin provides a wealth of case studies focused on the United States government's support to resistance movements. For each of his case studies, the author summarizes in a clear, concise manner the duration of U.S. support, the political environments or conditions, the type of operation, the purpose or objective of U.S. support, and the ultimate outcome: success, partial success, failure, or an inconclusive outcome. Unfolding world events are indicative of the need for SOF to maintain and enhance traditional unconventional warfare skills, but those skills must be assessed in the context of modern resistance movement dynamics. This work will serve as a benchmark reference on resistance movements for the benefit of the special operations community and its civilian leadership.



### **Political Strategy in Unconventional Warfare: Opportunities Lost in Eastern Syria and Preparing for the Future** by Carole A. O'Leary and Nicholas A. Heras

Framed by more than three decades of anthropological research experience working in Syria and surrounding Middle Eastern countries, and experience working with both U.S. development and military entities, Dr. O'Leary and Mr. Heras offer a sociocultural and political analysis valuable for deployed SOF. They contend that the political strategy necessary for sustainable strategic effect in the unconventional warfare component of the counterterrorism operation against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was subordinated to the operational-level imperative to cultivate a viable proxy force. The authors offer SOF a way to conceptualize strategic political analysis for UW efforts using Syria as a recent case study, but also provide a glimmer of hope for consolidating the gains made there in support of national policy.



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